

Wrestling Is Innate

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The Greeks most renowned wrestler was Milo of Kroton, a man unequaled, seemingly unbeatable. Probably one of the most valuable but often overlooked values that wrestling teaches is that of humility---the art of being humble. Hubris as the Greeks called it.

Milo of Kroton, perhaps bored with his inability to find a worthy adversary, began to show his strength to the people of Greece in rather sideshow like exhibitions. Holding his arms out in a cross, and challenging men to force his arms to his sides. Palming weighty rocks, much like our basketball friends do with their feather-light ball.

Milo of Kroton's hubris got the better of him in a forest the story goes. He stumbled upon large tree with a "V" in the trunk chest high off the ground. With no one around but himself to impress, Milo attempted to pry the "V" apart, but the trees desire to remain intact got the best of the famed Kroton, snapping back and trapping his hands. No one knows how long he lived before succumbing to the wild beasts. Humility was his last lesson.

In 1960 American Doug Blubaugh triumphed by winning an Olympic Gold medal. It must have been a glorious feeling for him. Years of dedication and perseverance went into the victory that brought with it the title of Olympic Champion. The spectacular backdrop for the tournament

was the ancient Roman Coliseum.

There, thousands of years ago, combat was king. Unfortunately, the Roman society lost perspective, blood lust superseded honor. At one point as many as one thousand elephants were slaughtered in a frenzy of sacrifice on a single day for the Roman citizens.

When the contests first began honor and fair play was paramount. But as the empire expanded and reached into modern England, Germany, Turkey, Russia, and northern Africa, people became fodder for spectacle. In its truest form of sport wrestling was apart of the greatest period of peace in ancient times the Pax Romana.

Entangled in the massive history of the Roman civilization springs forth Christianity. The New Testament houses a series of letters of defiance to the Romans from early Christians. The Romans hell-bent on dismantling their faith through blood shed persecuted the early Christians.

One such verse reads, "we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us."

The persecuted soul that wrote these words and steadfastly fought for his faith gathered courage from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the genesis-our beginning-God challenged man. Again not to a foot race and not to a random activity that a bounce of the ball determines the victor, the challenge, of course, was wrestling.

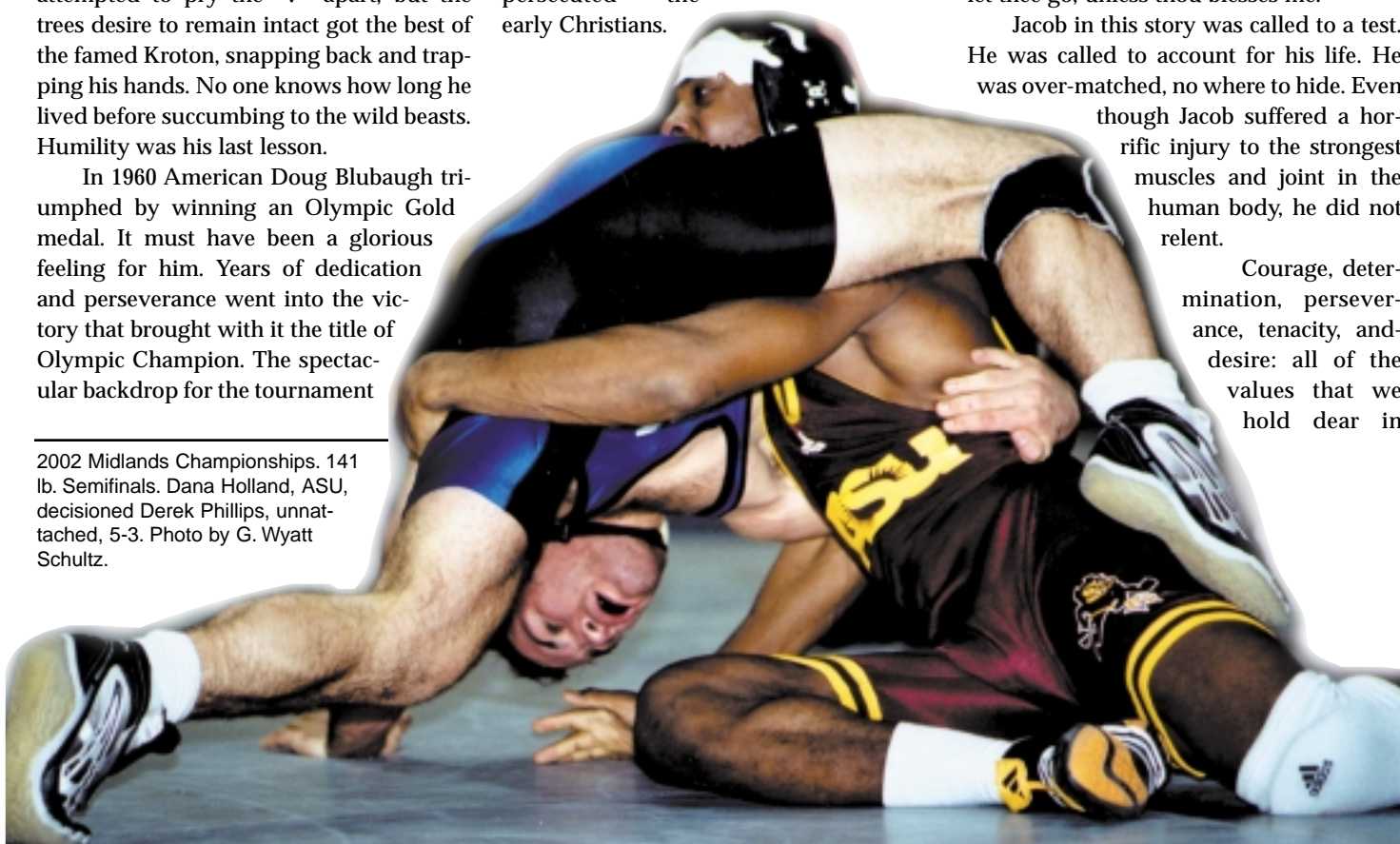
"Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against Jacob he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled the angel.

And the angel said, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." And Jacob said, "I will not let thee go, unless thou blesses me."

Jacob in this story was called to a test. He was called to account for his life. He was over-matched, no where to hide. Even though Jacob suffered a horrific injury to the strongest muscles and joint in the human body, he did not relent.

Courage, determination, perseverance, tenacity, and-desire: all of the values that we hold dear in

2002 Midlands Championships. 141 lb. Semifinals. Dana Holland, ASU, decisioned Derek Phillips, unattached, 5-3. Photo by G. Wyatt Schultz.



today's society were present there for Jacob. He hung on and as the sun rose on his struggle with the angel. Jacob though bloodied and bowed stayed strong.

He was asked his name "Jacob", he replied.

The Creator's response to him was that "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

The root of Christian society's very name comes from a story of wrestling.

The Egyptians in hieroglyphs and the Japanese with their ancient folk form of wrestling called sumo honored the instinct of wrestling, as did countless other cultures with their own unique "folkstyle" of wrestling. And as the centuries past into millennium and the human race slipped into the dark ages and was resurrected in the Renaissance, wrestling remained.

When the balance of power shifted from Europe and to the Americas the colonists readied to defeat the imperial powers of England. The forefathers relied on their instincts and again not by accident a wrestler was chosen first President of the fledgling nation. George Washington was fit to lead with his prowess honed in youthful exploits of wrestling.

Nearly a century later a rail-splitter took the oath as a Commander in Chief. Abraham Lincoln, who succeeded only by failing, running many times for elected office only to lose came forward to lead a nation in trouble. This Midwest farm boy though lanky was known throughout Illinois for his wrestling skills.

When he rode to Washington D.C., knowing that the nation was ready to disintegrate over the questions of slavery and states rights, surely he longed for the simpler days where one opponent stood across from him to challenge his stature.

The nation may not have elected him because he was a wrestler, but surely the innate quality of wrestling resonated in his voice to the citizens of America.

"The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just."

Lincoln's choice was inevitable the nation would go to war against itself.

Men who idled away the hours between battles with a sport that honored their innate instincts fought the bloody Civil War that tore at the cornerstones of our nation. It wasn't uncommon for wrestling matches to be a part of the long days, even to the point that as truces

between the north and the south came and went, matches between the blue and the gray were sometimes arranged.

Famed soldiers like William Muldoon lived well past the Civil War. In fact Muldoon engineered the transformation of bare-knuckled boxing into respectability, becoming the first boxing commissioner of the United States. Without wrestling even boxing wouldn't be where it is today. Names like Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney might have been lost had it not been a fan of combat sports like Muldoon, a wrestler in his youth and during the war. Muldoon lived a full life, fighting in and surviving America's Civil War, and then growing a sport like boxing before succumbing in 1933 at 88 years of age.

Time moved steadily forward, a great nation was built and then saved. As times changed so must the structure of the society if it is to remain great. The United States next step was to build the bridge from an agrarian culture to that of an industrial leader.

The nation turned to a leader fond of saying "speak softly and carry a big stick." Theodore Roosevelt, once the commander of the "Rough-Riders" was elected president. Roosevelt a former wrestler himself,

even brought wrestling to the White House with him, staging matches in the ball rooms, making sure one of America's most famed men, World (Real) Wrestling Champion Frank Gotch from Humboldt, Iowa, was a special guest to the White House. Fans of true wrestling often look at the turn of the century as the glory days for real wrestling. Gotch was a celebrity extraordinaire, being as recognized as the most famed actor Charlie Chaplin.

One can't be struck to see how often the innate instinct of wrestling was nourished in our nation's leaders. But if you look deeply at their words it really is very easy to see. Could anyone but a wrestler like Theodore Roosevelt have uttered these words?

"It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who,

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at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

In our most difficult times, we've selected wrestlers as our leaders. Washington, Lincoln, and Roosevelt were not isolated incidences. Throw in Zachary Taylor and William Howard Taft too.

When the Republican Revolution as it was deemed began to falter and Newt Gingrich was no longer viable. The Republican caucus selected a new leader a wrestler and coach, named Dennis Hastert. Senators like Lincoln Chafee, Chuck Hagel, and the recently deceased Paul Wellstone have cited their days as wrestlers as powerful life-altering forces that made a difference for them. Literally dozens of American leaders have competitive wrestling in their background. Frank Carlucci, former Secretary of Defense joins George W. Bush's Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld with a heavy dose of memories in wrestling.

When America took on Saddam Hussein's rogue country in 1991 America's resolve was ratcheted and buoyed by "Stormin Normin". Norman Schwartzkopf, former West Point wrestler, guided

America to victory in Desert Storm.

There success wasn't accident; their place in history has been earned. And, wrestling's innate stature advances well beyond that of wars and politics. American society has had many successful actors who have also learned the values of wrestling: Kirk Douglas, Tom Cruise, Billy Baldwin and Robin Williams. On the lighter side guys like John Belushi and Chris Farley were wrestlers as well. Even the last two White House Press Secretary's Arie Fleischer and George Stephanopolous were wrestlers. Astronauts like Michael Collins from the Apollo 11 mission recognize the value of wrestling.

Figures from other sports also counted wrestling as one of their great pursuits. The most famous of these crossover athletes would probably be Jim Thorpe, but don't forge jockeys Pat Day and Bill Shoemaker, or Sugar Ray Leonard or the countless gridiron players in the NFL or even baseball star Brett Butler.

My favorite NFL star is a man who never even played college ball, Stephen Neal. Instead he was an NCAA Champion in wrestling; next he won a World Title in amateur wrestling. When he was finished with amateur wrestling he stepped right

into the pro-ranks and within one year he was starting for the defending Super Bowl Champion New England Patriots.

Wrestlers have conquered politics, war, sports and the business world. Business leaders such Scott Beck, creator of Boston Market, Jeff Levitetz owns a billion dollar company called Purity Wholesale Grocers, the CEO of Golman Sachs, Steve Friedman and the CEO of Charles Schwab know the sport of wrestling.

The professions that wrestlers master are so varied it is astounding.

Geraldo Rivera, Andy Rooney, Jay Leno, and even Tony Danza: the names are familiar to us but what should not be overlooked is that these people and many more like them proudly call themselves wrestlers.

Literary genius is hardly the thought the narrow-minded would have about wrestlers. But they are there as well. Authors like Ken Kesey of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and John Irving of Cider House Rules and the World According to Garp cite wrestling as a part of their success.

Listen to John Irving's words and you will understand his affinity to the sport of wrestling:

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"I feel more a part of the wrestling community than I feel I belong to the community of arts and letters. Why? Because wrestling requires even more dedication than writing; because wrestling represents the most difficult and rewarding objective I have ever dedicated myself to; because wrestling and wrestling coaches are among the most disciplined and self-sacrificing people I have ever known."

As recently as a few weeks ago, snipers in Maryland frayed America's nerves. At times like these, we keep track of our nation through television reports and newspaper accounts to look for comfort. During this trying time our comfort came from a strong sheriff named Charles Moose, a former wrestler from North Carolina.

Wrestling is innate it is a part of all us; however, only the luckiest truly get to know it.

Mankind has traveled thousands of years, a long journey that started with a few simple steps. The drive that moved us forward throughout time has often been the innate instinct of wrestling. The grandeur of wrestling is limited by the

term sport, but born within this sport are the vary values that have determined greatness throughout our society and throughout history.

Who wouldn't want their children to know the deeper meanings of values like commitment, perseverance, dedication, determination, desire, courage, tenacity, confidence, sacrifices, and self-discipline?

Russ Hellickson, Head Coach of Ohio State, addressed a group of people gathered together to remember the passing of another wrestling program at the college level. In profound eloquence he summed things up best in his speech, "I am wrestling do not weep for me." All of these values can be found in different places in our society, but wrestling contains them all.

This sport is complete because its essence is true. It is not a concoction of the human imagination. Rather, wrestling is a reflection of the human spirit. While others sports seem to be setting new records with fan popularity. It is really the tortoise and the hare all over again. Wrestling, a strong and steady train continues moving forward. While some of these sports at best have a hundred years under their belt

wrestling ambles along with more than four thousand years and still counting.

As we look to the past, it is fitting that we also look to the future. Certainly more wrestlers, using the values honed on wrestling mats, will work their way to success. But as we look for the next wrestler to step out of anonymity and fill our tight-knit community with pride, know that the world's most renowned inventor counts himself as a wrestler as well.


A man named Dean Kamen, working out of Manchester, New Hampshire, has recently gained attention for his inventions that are aimed at improving the human condition. His most recognizable invention is called the Segway, a two wheeled people mover that he believes will relieve congestion on crowded urban streets decreasing pollution and moving us away from the internal combustion engine.

Kamen states without hesitation and without a sense of cliché in his voice when he says, "there is nothing more noble than to make the world a better place."

This wrestler is already turning heads through scientific communities. His next big step is an invention based off a concept called the Sterling engine. In the poorest of places in the world people, mostly women, spend up to five hours a day searching for a gallon of safe drinking water and then carrying it miles back to their homes and huts. If they don't find it or mistakenly bring home contaminated water, the next day they could be burying their children. Dean Kamen proudly states that his invention is on the verge of making a mighty contribution to the 10 billion people that inhabit this planet. His modification of the Sterling engine can produce purified potable water and even generate electricity as a by product. Ingenuity pours from Kamen as he enthusiastically says, "we can do this!"

The first step of civilization was the battle for security, for safety, and unfortunately, in much of the world that struggle has not been won. But yet as we step to the future and continue on the path, the innate instinct of wrestling will guide us.

To me, the thought is comforting. Every person born to this earth has within them the desire to wrestle. It is imprinted on their very soul; it is innate. From that innate instinct greatness flourishes and the human condition is bettered.


America needs wrestling: Now, More Than Ever. 

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