

Facts on the 10th Annual Wrestling USA/Cliff Keen Dream Team Classic Dual Meet

By Jerry Winterton

Some facts of the Dream Team Line-up:

- Three 4x State Champs, Two 3x State Champs, 31 Total State Championships among the 14 wrestlers, average GPA of 3.4.
- Colleges these wrestlers will attend: Minnesota, Oklahoma State, Lehigh, Iowa State, Cornell, Wisconsin, Virginia, Ohio State, Harvard, Boise State, Arizona State, and Virginia Tech.
- Eight #1 Nationally ranked wrestlers
- Three #2 Nationally ranked wrestlers
- Three #3 Nationally ranked wrestlers

The Kicker:

At first, I was thrilled to be considered for the position of Dream Team Coach. My initial thoughts were that all I had to do was show up, sit in the corner with each champion's coach, and just watch the Dream Team run over the New Jersey

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team. It wasn't long before I realized it was going to be a tough match, with the kicker being that 8-10 of the New Jersey wrestlers were also nationally ranked. My assistant coach Tom Barry and I made sure that the Dream Team realized that this was a formidable opponent and that each wrestler had to be on his best match to assure we could avoid the upset. Dan Calhoun of Williamstown High School and the other New Jersey coaches also could feel the possibility of an upset if things went favorably with calls, upsets, momentum, etc. They did a great job preparing the New Jersey Team. It's a tough assignment wrestling a line-up in which in every weight class your wrestler is outranked by a #1,#2 or #33 nationally ranked wrestler! Looking back at the matches and scores you can tell with the number of close bouts the outcome could've been different. I was just happy that it didn't happen on my brief watch. I didn't have anything to do with it. The kids as I will point out over and over in this article were just unbelievable people, but I knew if we lost or even had a very tight

score that my name would be next to it and that would be a bad thing. I would say it's a no win situation, but there is nothing further from the truth. The memories from that weekend will always be at the very top of my professional life. Win or lose, those kids made quite an impression on me – one I will never forget.

The Wrestlers:

a) First Meeting:

In our first meeting Friday March 31, 2006, while laying out the drill practice our attention was drawn to two wrestlers Mark Kist and Adam Hall. Kist was eager to get started, and Hall was acknowledging each instruction and detail that I was conveying. All were paying attention to this "nobody coach" from North Carolina. Though they didn't know me they were going to work for us. I was impressed.

Drill:

b) Practice:

We then began a series of drilling, just rolling around working top and bottom to



get good and loose. As we went into drilling on our feet, I was again taken back by how smoothly the wrestlers went right from one thing to the next with constant motion. It was nice to walk around saying "nice job" instead of having to stop every couple of minutes to correct them on the finer points. All were drilling hard and soon in a big sweat. Coaches, take your top two drill wrestlers, multiple that by seven, and subtract your JV's equals a fun practice. We rotated partners every 5-10 minutes so the guys could get to know each other and be able to pick up new moves and techniques.

Scrimmage:

Of course, I wasn't going to have national champions going at each other the day before a match of such stature; so, we broke into groups for some semi-live drilling. Now, I found my chance to jump into a group with Kellon Balum of PA, JP O'Conner of NY, Adam Hall of Idaho, Mack Lewnes of Maryland, and Lance Palmer of St. Edwards, Ohio. I noticed a lot of the same set-ups and techniques on their feet, but the difference at this level in the crispness and explosiveness was evident. I gave an extra squeeze on a Russian to Lance Palmer or Hall and said "that's old man's strength." Then I asked them to please not have a nationals finals flashback or something as I was truly at their mercy. I really enjoyed their positive attitudes and

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the seriousness of their work ethics. They worked hard and had fun doing it. Practice was soon over and the weigh-ins went off without a hitch. The guys went home with their host families; next up was the banquet.

The Banquet of Champions:

The banquet was a first class event put on by The South Jersey Wrestling Club with *Wrestling USA Magazine* and Cliff Keen there as supporting partners. The wrestlers, parents, coaches and supporters were well fed and given uniforms and extras for the event.

Saturday AM – The Grand Tour:

The coaches, parents and combatants were given a grand tour of the sights of nearby Philadelphia. In addition to the interesting and memorable sights, the tour provided a chance to further bond before the big meet that evening.

The Meet:

Plenty of tight matches! The New Jersey Team, packed with talent, proved to be a determined bunch of guys led by Coach Dan Calhoun and his coaches. Fortunately, we took their momentum away early in a close bout at 103. Next number one nationally ranked seniors Mark Kist and Ben Ashmore won convincingly. Our run was cut short by New Jersey's first four-time state champ Mike Grey and a very tough Will Livingston who each won at 125 and 130 respectively and helped the New Jersey crowd and bench back into it. The USA

Team USA 37, New Jersey 12

103–John Satika (Kerwinville, PA) dec. Anthony Lebbad (Hopewell Valley), 4-2;

112–Mark Kist (Eagle Grove, IA) maj. dec. Ryan Fullam (Emerson-Park Ridge), 15-2;

119–Ben Ashmore (Greenville, TX) pinned Mike Bastante (Passaic Valley), 1:07;

125–Mike Grey (Delbarton) dec. Mike Thorn (Albertville, MN), 9-3;

130–Will Livingston (Kittatinny) dec. Mike Rappo (Council Rock, PA), 11-8;

135–Kellon Ballum (Herndon, PA) dec. Dave Greenwald (St. Mary's), 6-5;

140–Lance Palmer (Columbia Station, OH) dec. Daryl Cocuzzo (River Dell), 3-0;

145–J.P. O'Connor (Oxford, NY) dec. Travis Blasco (Blair), 8-6;

152–Mark Kist dec. Frank Perelli (Delbarton), 9-3;

152–Adam Hall (Bonners Ferry, ID) dec. Darrion Caldwell (Rahway), 6-4 (OT);

160–Mark Lewnes (Baltimore, MD) dec. Alex Caruso (Watchung Hills), 7-2;

171–David Craig (Brandon, FL) dec. Pat Hogan (Cranford), 7-2;

189–Trevor Bravold (River Falls, WI) dec. Keith Dobish (Lodi), 5-0

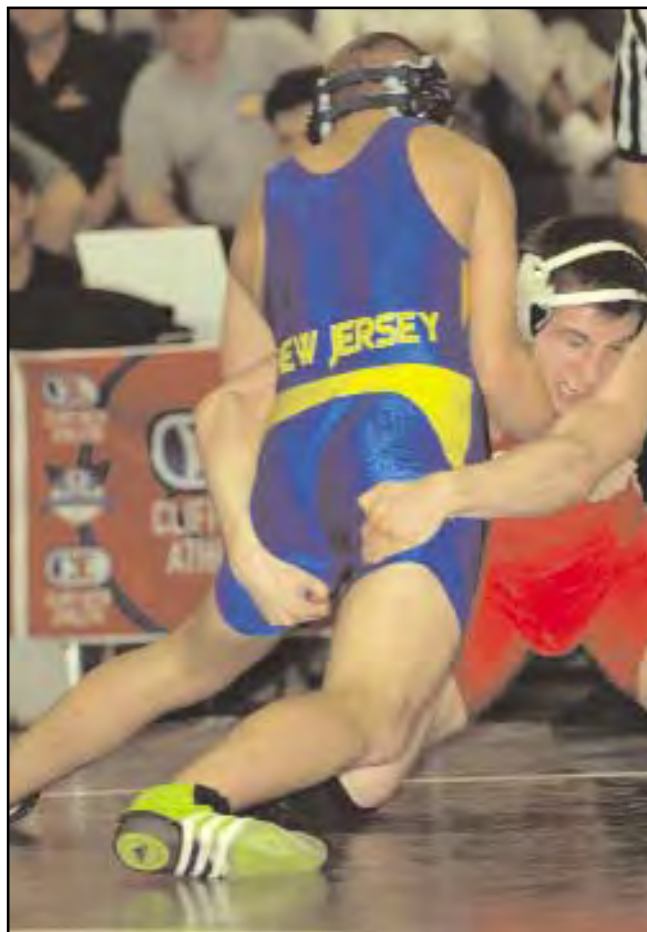
215–Bryan Fill (Hasbrouck Heights-/Woodbridge) pinned Joe Nord (Waconia, MN), 4:28;

HWT–Kenny Lester (Oviedo, FL) dec. Jim Powers (Blair), 3-1





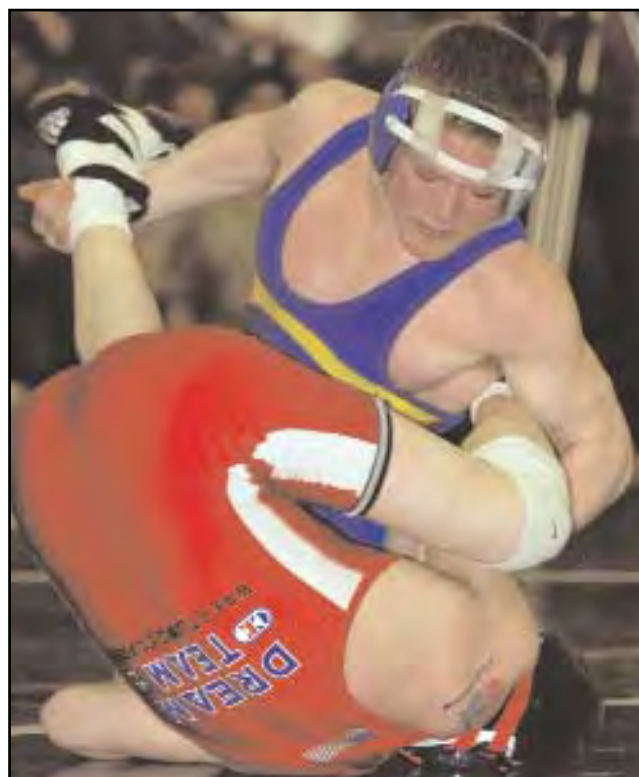
Dream Team members visiting the Battleship New Jersey. Photo by G. Wyatt Schultz.



145 lbs. J. P. O'Connor (Oxford, NY) dec. Travis Blasco (Blair), 8-6. Photo by G. Wyatt Schultz.



152 lbs. Adam Hall (Bonners Ferry, ID) dec. Darrion Caldwell (Rahway), 6-2. Photo by G. Wyatt Schultz.



130 lbs. Will Livingston (Kittatinny) dec. Mike Rappo (Council Rock, PA), 11-8. Photo by G. Wyatt Schultz.



125 lbs. Mike Grey (Delbarton) dec. Mike Thorn (Albertville, MN), 9-3. Photo by G. Wyatt Schultz.

team then went on to win each match until the 215 pound bout; during this stretch we won many, many close bouts.

A Champions Heart:

It's hard to put a measure on the heart of a wrestler – more so than any other sport I think. The difference in the tight matches is a champion's heart. This is taking nothing away from all of the very tough performances put in that night by New Jersey wrestlers. I think they believed, did all they could to keep some matches close, were in shape, and yes, very talented. But there is a reason for a wrestler to be the best in the nation in his weight class. He doesn't get there without heart, a willingness to fight for every point and the drive to never give up when there's a chance. Several guys showed character and heart in their matches. The two who come to mind right off are Lance Palmer who was up in the air, on his head, fighting off one foot, all in a one full minute scramble (at least it seemed like a full minute or more) before either stalemating or winning the takedown. I know this discouraged his opponent, and Lance went on to win. The other was Adam Hall's match with number two nationally ranked Darrion Caldwell who is headed to North Carolina State, my Alma Mater. What a match! Hall was just persistent and refused to be denied despite a super effort by a very talented Caldwell who came to wrestle. All of the wrestlers of both teams put on quite a show. There was full action on this night, packed with many scrambles; a more exciting dual meet would be very hard to find.

My very brief impression of each individual wrestler:

John Sutika – last minute substitute who was a gamer and pulled out a great win to get it going despite not being at 100%.

Mark Kist – a true competitor who doesn't judge himself on the outcome but on his preparation for the outcome. A true lover of the sport.

Ben Ashmore – intense. Focused. A pinner.

Mike Thorn – Talented, tough, a winner. Nice gator :) Tough opponent.

Mike Rupp – Another last minute substitute that gave one heck of an effort. Pennsylvania kids are so tough.

Kellan Balum – non stop action. All over you like a bad day that keeps getting worse. No breaks when you wrestle this guy.

Lance Palmer – Nice guy, happy, 'til it's time to wrestle. Has the on-off switch from well,...he can turn it on and be all business when it's time. A great competitor.

JP O'Conner – New York Up state from sec-

tion 4. Coach Barry and I are sections 9 and 3. Upstate was represented. JP is another pleasure to coach, great technique and toughness that goes with it, add in a 4.0, Harvard and a pre-med student. Well, what else do you want?

Adam Hall – The coach, the captain, the natural, the leader. Energy-plus, makes me tired watching him. He rallied the troops and got them going, Lance, Mack, Trevor and the others got them going. U-S-A, U-S-A, U-S-A!!!

Mack Lewnes – Another smart guy, 4.0 going to Cornell. 'Nough said. Great drilling wrestler, technique smarts and tough. Cornell's getting a great one.

David Craig – Serious, cracked some smiles on battleship tour, Wyatt, the Iowan photographer, said. Strong, tough. Never beaten in high school.

Trevor Brandvold – Big, generous. Physical wrestler as all good big guys are, but can take a shot too, one of the Senior National Champions.

Joe Nord – Misfortunate outcome of a very tight competitive match. Handled it like a champion. Before the meet I had said, "You are all champions, you've won and lost; you know how to act in both respects." Joe had the toughest circumstances of all of the Dream Team members, but he handled it in a unbelievable champion's way. He made sure not to bring attention to himself. He knew he felt bad but he didn't have to display poor sportsmanship to prove it.

Kenny Lester – I learned the Lester Leap. Lester the Jester also taught me a little breaking, and his best line for all wrestlers to learn from was, "I don't get nervous I get excited to show what I can do against the best."

The perfect wrestler...

As a wrestling coach you are always saying, "He's tough but doesn't apply himself, or he doesn't have confidence, lacks the athletic abilities, speed, strength, etc." Think of your very best wrestler, and you can always find something he could do better.

I've since thought about all the qualities these guys brought to the table and what it would be like to pull the very best from each one. I guess the truth is, when I think about these guys in the future and this experience we had together I'll recall their smiling, their focus, their determination and their leadership. None fearing defeat, each continuously preparing for success.

Accolades:

My many treasures from the trip include the meeting of the outstanding people with *USA Wrestling Magazine*, Cliff Keen, The South Jersey Wrestling Club and the admin-

istration of Williamstown High School. The athletic director treated us like we were celebrities. Wyatt Schultz, the Iowan with the camera, and the scoop on the latest from his home state. Of course Dan Calhoun and the Jersey Coaching staff and their help and conversations were invaluable. The many parents who helped put up the kids, scuffle the coaches and wrestlers to and from the venue. Many volunteers made this a special event for all.

My other accolades include: The huckleberry treats from Idaho, the traded t-shirts of Brandvold and Palmer, and the Dream Team apparel from Cliff Keen. My top memory was a Dream Team Singlet signed by all of the USA wrestlers to be hung in our Cary High wrestling room.

The contrast of my HS team with this team:

It was interesting to see that the best in the country were confident but not cocky – simply a great bunch of young men. This may be a unique group as I have no other experience to pull from (My first Dream Team!), but these kids were happy and hard working. A very respectful bunch of wrestlers. Far from the cocky, self-absorbed, pre-madonnas I expected. One parent I spoke to said, "These kids are above all of that. They know how to win, to lose and to behave." It's safe to say that coaches typically deal with wrestlers who are always walking one line or the other – be it grades, attitudes, giving respect, displaying poor sportsmanship, handling their weight, etc. All these things can take their toll on a coach over a season, and over a coach's career. These kids were so refreshing to coach. I've coached a bunch of great kids, just not all at the same time like this. Granted, it was only 2-3 days, but it was enough time to see a wrestler's character. I truly was brightened about America's best.

NCAAs:

I have attended the last ten NCAA tournaments and will continue with particular interest as I follow these great young men as they chase their goals in wrestling. I've been fortunate to have 4-5 of my former wrestlers compete in that tournament; although none of this group is from North Carolina, I'm hoping they know that my section of 8-10 coaches who travel from North Carolina each year will be pulling for them.

Editor's Note: Jerry Winterton's most recent record at the end of the season was 505-33. He ended up with 138 individual tournament wins by winning the Regionals (16 straight) and State (13 counting dual states 5, and tourney 8) tournaments this season.