

The Joy of Helping Others Succeed



By Olympic Champion Ben Peterson

Repeatedly I have been asked about the memories I have of the day I won the Olympic gold medal in 1972 in Munich Germany. People want to know what my thoughts and feelings were.

I recall a definite amount of relief that the long push of training, discipline and focus was over. The goal had been reached. There was great elation along with some disbelief. Yes, I had dreamt of this, longed for this and trained specifically for this, but there had been so many hurdles to jump it was hard to believe that the goal had been reached. I recall a certain numbness that it was more than could be taken in all at once. For days, even weeks, afterwards, it would slowly sink in that I had received the coveted Olympic Gold Medal.

There was thought of others doing very well also. My brother, John, received a silver medal after many saying he would embarrass the US, that he was too young and inexperienced. Some even said the try-out system should be changed to a "coach-chosen" format, because "we didn't have the best men in some weights." I guess that idea was silenced for a while. Super heavyweight Chris Taylor was getting a bronze and Rick Sanders secured a silver. After two Olympics without Olympic Wrestling Golds the US had now won three. Wayne Wells fought through three-nine-minute matches the last day to get his gold. Dan Gable embarrassed all of his opponents scoring over 100 points while they failed to even score once.

My memories of that day include a lot of reaction to Dan Gable's winning of a gold medal. After defeating opponents by 20 and 30 points (No technical falls were called then) and by pins, Dan gained a victory against the Soviet by a score of 3-0. As the match drew to a close a few of us decided to

carry him off the mat. We were elated for Dan and knew how hard he had worked and how much he desired this victory. With only a few American fans there, we sensed few would understand or even care. We sensed the extraordinary task he had accomplished in such a dominant way. Our actions were on the spur of the moment and probably a bit embarrassing to Dan, but came from a desire to thank and honor him. As we carried Dan off the mat he repeatedly asked us to put him down. He kept saying he had come to win and he had done that. So we should just put him down. He was so matter-of-fact about his win. There was probably some relief that the gold medal was finally his. But I recall him expressing little if any emotion.

However, afterward, with just a few of us around, as Dan contemplated the medal success of 2 farm boys from northern Wisconsin, which he had helped immeasurably, he choked back the emotion. I treasure that memory. Dan Gable enjoyed seeing those he helped win. Yes, he enjoyed winning the Olympic Gold himself, but as a teammate with emotion he showed us that he enjoyed others doing the same.

As wrestlers we can get so focused on ourselves and our own training that we forget others. Philippians 2:4 says, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." In this verse the apostle Paul urges us to be concerned for others. In the next few verses Paul shows how this is a most Christ-like characteristic.

I remind you that some of your greatest joys will be watching others succeed. As you work, think and train for your team, determine to help others succeed. Today, as a coach and camp director, I am constantly motivated with the thought of helping others succeed. I want them to enjoy the success. It brings me great joy to see that.

As you anticipate another season of wrestling, whether as a wrestler, coach, parent, fan, or friend I urge you to help others along to succeed as well. It will bring great joy to you and them.

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Tyler Blair (Fresno City College) looks to escape the grip of #1 ranked Jayson Collard (Santa Rosa Junior College). Blair won the match 5 - 4 in the semi-finals. Photo by John Sachs.