

Call Me Coach

By Steve Wolfe



On a wrestling trip to Anchorage, we wrestled East High School, a school of about 4,000 students. They had a returning state heavyweight champion who eventually won the state championship later that year. To that point he had not lost a match in two years.

This young man looked like he could win Mr. Universe. His black body rippled with muscles. When he took his shirt off, a bulging six-pack of abdominals rippled with every movement. His arms were the size of most men's legs. For warm-up, he would leap up and grab the support on the basketball backboard, drop one hand and do one-handed chin-ups. This incredible hulk had the ironic name of Carver Lamb. If I were him I'd have changed my name, but everyone knew who he was and no one wanted to wrestle Carver Lamb. At least no one but Will.

We didn't have a heavyweight and for some reason East didn't have a 190-pounder Will's weight. So I asked Will, "Do you want to wrestle Carver?"

His cowboy grin split his face from ear to ear, "Yah." I figured that meant yes, so I entered him as a heavyweight.

The crowd just roared when Will and Carver were announced. And well they should have. Two gladiators had stepped

on the mat. A. Carver with a typical "boxer sneer" on his face, an Atlas in black; Will, still grinning, a bit smaller, but every bit a Hercules, face to face.

The whistle blew and the brawl began. And brawl it was, but neither wrestler could gain the advantage. Sweat rolled off their bodies as each muscled, pushed and threw the other around the mat, but neither wrestler could gain the advantage. With 10 seconds left, Carver locked his hands around Will in an illegal technical violation, giving Will one point. The match ended. Will had done what no other wrestler in Alaska had done for the last two years, he had beat Carver Lamb.

Carver shook hands at the end of the match like a gentleman, then retreated to the locker room where with head, fists and feet he broke, bent and destroyed several lockers before someone stopped him. Will had shown who was the toughest kid in the state, but Will did find something tougher than him on the way back home that day - a moose.

Chapter 22

In Alaska, moose are quite frequently seen on the road system during winter months. The roads are cleared of the deep snow, making travel much easier for the moose, as well as for the cars. Unfortunately, both large objects (moose and cars) often meet with devastating results for the cars and sometimes for their drivers. Of course, the collisions don't do much good for the moose either. More than 500 moose are killed per year on the Alaska

highway system. The state of Alaska keeps track of the road kills and posts signs in various places on the highways, tallying the number of moose killed each year.

On the road back to Homer that particular wrestling trip, we came upon the scene of one of those tragic accidents. A car had clipped the back legs of a cow moose who was lying on the ditch bank, suffering, in pain, apparently unable to move. We stopped to see if there was anything we could do to help. The fellow who had hit her had not been hurt, but didn't know what to do with the injured moose. I informed the man, apparently who was new to Alaska, that he should call the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. They would come right out and take care of the moose, in this instance probably kill it to put it out of its misery, and then butcher it to be given to a charity. He decided to drive to the next gas station and make the call.

In the meantime, the wrestlers had all piled out of the van. The groans and pitiful sounds that were coming from the moose tore at all of their heartstrings, even Will's. Will went to the back of the van and dug out a five-foot pipe. Heaven knows why it was there, but for some reason it was. It was about two inches in diameter and its sides were of solid quarter-inch steel.

"Coach, I'm gonna put that poor cow out of its misery. It ain't right the poor thing should suffer like that," Will said and stepped down the bank with his five-foot pipe. Now, back in those days, teachers were not so concerned with lawsuits and not letting kids do anything dangerous as we are now. Also, I knew that this was not really any different situation than Will faced every day out on his Alaska bush ranch, so I didn't say anything when Will strode toward the head of the moaning moose.

With the practiced swing of someone who had split a lot of firewood using all the force of his Herculean strength, Will connected that steel pipe to the top of the moose's skull. The pipe and Will's arms quivered with the impact. The woods rang with the sound of steel hitting bone. To Will's and our surprise the cow moose jumped up, shook her head and charged Will. All of us scurried like scared rabbits around and into the van, Will not a half-second behind us. After a couple lunges, the cow again fell and slid down the bank.

"I must not have hit her square," Will finally drawled. "Think I'll try again."

Editor's Note: "Call Me Coach" by Steve Wolfe can be ordered at Amazon.com or by phone 1-888-498-9542.

South Carolina - J. C. Oddo (Eastside) works for back points against Jon Silverberg (North Myrtle Beach) in Oddo's 10-1 victory at 189 lbs. Oddo is a 3x State Champion, Junior Nationals All-American, Fargo All-American and a senior captain of 3x state champs Eastside. Photo by Mark Buford.

