

Building on Success

Former Most Outstanding Wrestlers continue to impress and achieve

By J.R. Ogden, Cedar Rapids, *Iowa Gazette*

Winning a national title is the primary goal for every wrestler at the NCAA Division I Wrestling Championships.

A select few, however, have their sights set a bit higher - winning an NCAA title and the Most Outstanding Wrestler Award.

The award, voted on by coaches, has been handed out since 1932, when Indiana's Edwin Belshaw won the 134-pound NCAA title and was named the best of the best. The list of past winners is impressive.

There is Cael Sanderson of Iowa State, the only four-time Most Outstanding Wrestler (1999-2002) and a four-time unbeaten NCAA champion. There's Pat Smith of Oklahoma State, the only other four-time national champ and the 1994 award winner. There's John Smith, Pat's older brother and the coach at reigning NCAA champion Oklahoma State.

There are legendary figures like William Koll, the first two-time Most Outstanding Wrestler out of the University of Northern Iowa (1947-48); Dan Hodge, a two-time winner (1956-57) from Oklahoma who was an unbeaten three-time national champ; and Dan Gable, the 1969 winner from Iowa State who went on to win Olympic gold and coach the University of Iowa to 15 national titles.

There's Larry Owings of Washington (1970), the only man to beat Gable in high school or college.

Many former Most Outstanding Wrestlers are coaching today: Lehigh's Greg Strobel (1973, Oregon State), Iowa's Jim Zalesky (1984, Iowa), Wisconsin's Barry Davis (1985, Iowa), Oklahoma State's John Smith (1987, Oklahoma State) and Virginia Tech's Tom Brands (1992, Iowa).

Tom's brother, Terry, the 1993 Most Outstanding Wrestler, works for USA Wrestling, coaching the national freestyle team.

Many, many others are assistant coaches.

Even one of the referees working this weekend's tournament is a past winner. Chuck Yagla won the award at Iowa after winning the 1976 150-pound title.

Others parlayed their outstanding wrestling careers into other areas. Stanley Henson, a three-time national champion

and the 1937 Most Outstanding Wrestler from Oklahoma State, became one of the leading surgeons in the United States.

Wade Schalles, the 1972 winner from Clarion, coached for a short time, then hit it big in the import furniture business. He later worked for the Amateur Athletic Union and now works for an Internet broadcasting company.

Bruce Kinseth, the 1979 winner from Iowa, joined the family business after college and now runs Kinseth Hospitality Corp., which owns 33 hotels and 14 franchise restaurants.

"Once you've wrestled there's not much that life can do to you that's a surprise," Schalles said.

Here is a look at five former Most Outstanding Wrestlers - one who became a

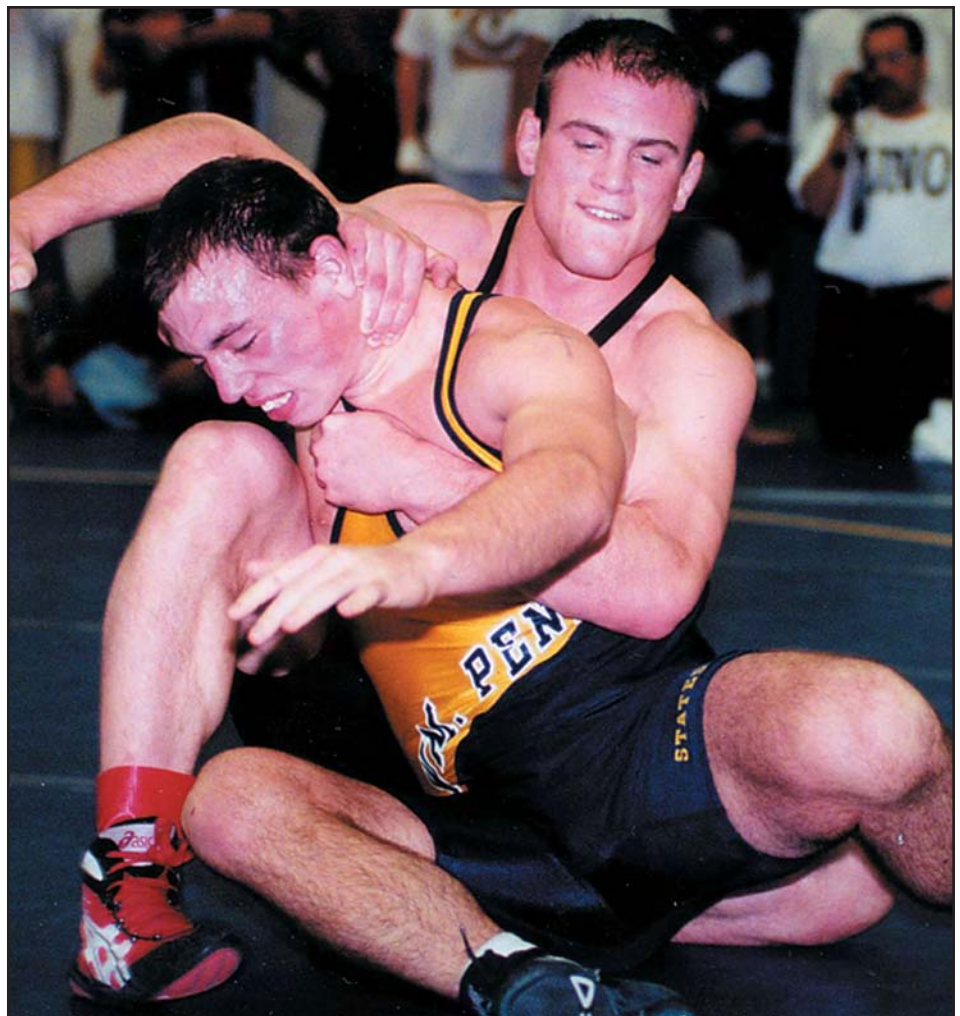
professional wrestler, two businessmen, a head coach and an assistant deciding whether to continue to compete or lead a program:

Dan Hodge Oklahoma

One of the greatest wrestlers in NCAA history, Dan Hodge was never taken down in three years and never beaten, going 46-0 with 36 career pins.

To this day, he is the only wrestler to grace the cover of *Sports Illustrated* and is the only man to win national titles in

Iowa State's Cael Sanderson was a four-time Most Outstanding Wrestler, and a gold medal winner at the 2004 Olympics, (right).



wrestling and boxing.

"It meant very much to me," the 73-year Hodge said from his home in Perry, Oklahoma. "It was a tremendous honor."

Hodge said he was surprised when he won the award as a junior because the honor, prior to his win, generally went to wrestlers in the lighter weights. Hodge wrestled at 175 as a junior and 177 as a senior. Don Nichols of Michigan, the 175-pound champ in 1940, was the only upper weight wrestler to win the award before Hodge.

"It showed they gave it to the people who excelled in wrestling, in pinning," said Hodge, who has an annual award named after him. The Dan Hodge Trophy, much like the Heisman Trophy in football, is given to the nation's most dominant wrestler each year by *Wrestling International Newsmagazine*.

As a junior, Hodge pinned all but one of his opponents and pinned his way through the Big 8, NCAA and national freestyle and Greco-Roman tournaments.

"I wasn't happy with a win, I had to have a pin," Hodge said. "On the mat, I'm not nice."

After college, Hodge joined the Naval Reserve and fought in the Korean War. He later worked as a "mud engineer" with an

oil company before turning to boxing.

He considered taking a shot at the 1960 Olympics, but decided a career in professional wrestling was more lucrative. He was the world junior heavyweight champion for more than 13 years.

"Thank God I had wrestling to turn to," Hodge said, "otherwise I'd have been in reform school.

"It's a blessing."

Hodge said he still loves working with and talking to young wrestlers and tells them what made him so successful.

"Believe in yourself, work hard," he said he tells young wrestlers. "You couldn't out-work me. Everybody would run four miles in Perry. I would run nine."

Wade Schalles Clarion

Wade Schalles had one goal in every tournament he ever entered: win his weight class, win the most pins award and be named Most Outstanding Wrestler.

"I wasn't focused on if I was going to win or not," he said.

Schalles is one of the best pinners in NCAA history. He pinned six world champions, nine NCAA champions and 15 total national champions during his career.

He was named the best middleweight of

the 20th century by *Amateur Wrestling News*, and *Sports Illustrated* called him "the most exciting wrestler to step foot on a wrestling mat."

"I would wrestle that way," Schalles said of his goal to not only win, but to dominate and win all the awards possible.

"You come into a match with a completely different perspective."

Schalles won 154 matches in college, 106 by pin. He also won two NCAA titles.

Like Hodge, Schalles has an award named after him. The Schalles PA Pinner Award, presented by *Pennsylvania Wrestling Newsmagazine*, is presented to the Pennsylvania state qualifier with the highest pin percentage.

Winning the Most Outstanding Wrestler Award in 1972 was a dream come true. He, of course, pinned his way to the NCAA title.

After graduation, Schalles coached for eight years, then started an import furniture business. He eventually operated four stores, but sold the business and moved his family to Orlando, Florida.

He and his wife, Deb, "got tired of sitting around and doing nothing" and went into private coaching, then spent nine years with the AAU, where he was assistant to the president.

He now is executive vice president for MSBN, an Internet broadcasting company based outside Houston, running the company's East Coast office in Orlando.

He said wrestling has taught him many valuable lessons, most notably goal setting and discipline.

"It's the same rules, the same game," Schalles said. "You lower your head and charge.

"Wrestling has a tendency to knock you down from time to time. How high do you land when you hit?"

Bruce Kinseth Iowa

A typical Iowa wrestler in the late 1970s, Bruce Kinseth had domination on his mind at the 1970 national tournament. He succeeded, pinning all of his competitors.

"I, obviously, had it as a dream," he said of winning the Most Outstanding Wrestler Award. "You have to be very fortunate."

Or simply pin all of your challengers.

Kinseth had a school record 23 pins that year - one that still stands today - pinned all four opponents at the Big Ten championships before decking all five at the NCAA championships

"I did hope to dominate," said Kinseth, an NCAA runner-up as a junior. "I was very happy to win, extremely excited to win the award."

Kinseth, who still lives and works outside Iowa City in North Liberty, has a booming business, one he learned from his



father in their hometown of Decorah, Iowa.

The company not only owns and operates hotels and restaurants, it also restores old hotels and builds new ones.

His hard work in the Iowa wrestling room has paid off in the business world.

"I had to work very hard," he said. "I wasn't the most talented wrestler."

"I was kind of a product of the Iowa culture."

That culture also made a person very confident, something Kinseth said he lacked before working with Gable.

"I developed a lot of self-confidence through wrestling and winning," he said.

Of course, that attitude to dominate also comes in handy when negotiating contracts or even dealing with employees.

"You have to be fairly aggressive to be successful," he said.

Jim Zalesky Iowa

Kinseth actually played a role in Jim Zalesky's desire to win the Most Outstanding Wrestler Award.

A freshman, Zalesky and another wrestler visited Kinseth's home in Decorah, where the Most Outstanding Wrestler Award was proudly displayed.

"I was just looking at that and thought 'I want to win one of those some day,'" Zalesky said. "That was always one of my

goals."

Zalesky, who grew up in the shadow of Iowa City in the small town of Shueyville, went on to capture three NCAA titles for Gable and the Hawkeyes, winning his last 89 matches.

He won the award his senior season, after his 89th consecutive win.

"I don't know if that was my best national tournament," he confessed. "Winning it three times probably helped me" as did the long win streak, he added.

"It's just a neat award to get," he said.

Zalesky said wrestling has taught him many lessons as he coached the Hawkeyes for nine years after taking over for Gable. He has coached 10 NCAA champions, 45 All-Americans and 20 Big Ten titlists.

His teams won NCAA titles in 1998, '99 and 2000 and he was named national coach of the year in 1998 and '99.

"You gotta draw on that experience to help you out as a coach," he said, adding it's important for a coach to have been in "their shoes sometime."

While Zalesky has experienced some great moments as a wrestler and coach at Iowa, he's also seen the other side. Iowa hasn't won an NCAA title since 2000.

"You'll have ups and downs and you have to get up from your downs," he said.

Jim is the new head coach at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon.

Cael Sanderson Iowa State

Sanderson, 25, is arguably the greatest wrestler in college history. No other wrestler has gone undefeated for four straight years. No one has won four Most Outstanding Wrestler Awards.

He went 159-0 at Iowa State, winning three NCAA titles at 184 pounds and his final crown at 197. He won three Dan Hodge Awards and his run of perfection was called the second greatest achievement in collegiate history by *Sports Illustrated*.

He was on the front of the Wheaties box.

But for the former Cyclone wrestler, winning the Most Outstanding Wrestler award was "just something that happened."

"You definitely want to wrestle the best of the year, obviously," he added. "But it's something you have no control over."

"You appreciate the honor ... it was pretty cool."

After college, Sanderson went on to win a gold medal at the 2004 Olympics and now is back at his alma-mater as the new head coach. He was an associate head coach under veteran coach Bobby Douglas. He was also an assistant coach in 2004-05 and special assistant to the athletics department for two years before that.

He hopes to some day be a head coach.

"That's the plan," he said. "I have a great mentor. I'm looking forward to a career in coaching."

That wasn't always the case for Sanderson. An art major, he didn't think coaching was going to be in his future during his competitive days at Iowa State.

"I wasn't 100 percent sure what I wanted to do," he said. "All the way up to just after the Olympics."

But, like many before him, the appeal of the sport, and the lessons he learned as a youth in Heber City, Utah - where he won four state titles with his father as his coach and as a collegian in Ames, drew him back to the mat.

"I love the sport, I love wrestling," he said. "I love competing."

"There's no better way (to feed that desire) than to be a coach, work with kids and help them reach their goals."

He simply wants to give back to the sport what has been given to him.

"I've had some great people spend a lot of time with me," he said.

Sanderson isn't sure what the future holds, whether it's becoming a head coach sooner than later or taking a shot at the 2008 Olympics and attempting to win a second gold medal.

"It's in the back of my mind," he said. "But right now, I'm definitely focused on the guys in the room."

"I couldn't be a coach (while training). Personally, I couldn't do both ... one of the two is going to suffer." 