There are many dads who have been great examples for the wrestling community. I have observed another one for several years from a distance and have always been impressed with his coaching success. How can you not be impressed? As a head coach he has won 17 Wisconsin team titles. He coached his team to 12 titles in the last 13 years. Lewie Benitz graduated from the University of Wisconsin Stout two years before I entered that school so I had an extra motivation for observing his career. But as impressive as his coaching stats are, the thing that impresses me more is to watch him coach with his sons. He and his son Scott have been co-head coaches at Wisconsin Rapids for the last five years and have won five team state championships together! His son Shane has also been a part of the Raiders coaching staff for eight years.

2007 Minnesota Hastings Raider Duals - Matt Borgerding (Prior Lake, MN) working on a deep half on Dan Schiferl (Stoughton, WI). Borgerding would get a second period fall. Photo by Chris Falteisek.

I have often heard one of my wrestling mentors, Dan Gable, say that our primary job as fathers is to help our children to become contributing members of our society. Lewie Benitz and his wife Joyce have done that. They have three children and nine grandchildren. Like many coaches wives, Joyce. rarely misses a wrestling event. Their oldest son Scott teaches and has been a co-head coach with Lewie for the last 5 years and will take over as head coach next season. Shane runs a business and is on the coaching staff. Their daughter, Vicki, whose husband wrestled in high school and college, runs the "business" of raising five children. Lewie is thankful for how the sport of wrestling has helped in the parenting process. In a recent conversation he expressed a fondness for the great memories looking back on the years of coaching his two boys through high school.

We talked briefly at the state tournament in February. Our 189-pound wrestler had lost a heart breaking overtime match in the semifinals.

As the boys, we each were coaching, were getting ready for their wrestleback matches, I asked Lewie if he had any secrets on helping wrestlers after a devastating loss. The timing of my question could not have been worse. His 103 pound wrestler, who was wrestling with an injury since the regional tournament, had lost a one point match in the semis and had just finished with a heart breaking 2 point loss in the wrestlebacks. Just as a dad hurts for his own son, so Lewie's heart was aching for his wrestler who was feeling the harsh pain of defeat. Graciously, he indicated to me that he would love to share his thoughts on that subject at a later time.

That time came in our phone conversation. He told me that he has always tried to coach the wrestlers as if they were his own sons. When his son, Scott, suffered a devastating loss at the state tournament as a senior, Lewie spent some quiet moments together with his boy under the bleachers as someones malt came dripping down on their faces. At that time the individual state tournament took place in the building we affectionately call "the barn." Lewie said, "in those moments you do not need to give instruction, you just spend quiet time together."

Talking with Coach Benitz and Mark Churella gives you a good reminder that there are no secrets to success. It all comes down to hard work and practicing common sense principles. When I asked Lewie for advice on dealing with fathers who find it difficult to balance coaching and being a dad, his response was to share an example of a state champion's dad. Lewie had to sit down with that dad earlier in the son's high school years and ask, "Do you trust us to be the coaches of your son? There can only be two coaches in the corner." This dad responded positively to that direct communication between coach and dad. Lewie said that as long as we know we are on the same page, we will have less misunderstandings between us. That just takes good communication between coaches and parents. Lewie uses those communication skills as he works as a coach for the Wisconsin School Boy national dual team. He and one of his wrestling grandsons get to spend some special time together.

After 41 years of coaching at Wisconsin Rapids, Coach Benitz is stepping down as head coach. But not much will change. Lewie will still be there working with his sons. I am sure the tradition of tough wrestlers coming out of the Wisconsin Rapids High School wrestling room will continue. Scott will be handing down the same values to his own sons and wrestlers that he learned from his dad, and the fond memories will continue.

**Ben and his brother John now run Camp of Champs Wrestling Camps. Contact them at: Camp of Champs, PO Box 222, Watertown, WI 53094; Phone: 800-505-5099; E-mail: info@campofchamps.org; Web: www.campofchamps.org.*