



Wrestling USA

1998 Wrestling Man Of

Jim Giunta began his love of wrestling in a small town in Western Pennsylvania. At age 15 he joined the Burrell High School team where he wrestled in the 85 lb. weight class.

"Weighing only 85 lbs. and being vertically challenged I really didn't have many options. Only the wrestling coach Bob Jones, had any interest in me. Football and basketball were out of the question." Jim was never really an outstanding high school athlete, but finished his senior year as the teams co-captain at 112 lbs. His season finished at 17-3 after moving on through sectionals but being defeated in the finals at regionals. Jim began wrestling at Penn State (New Ken) in 1971. At 118 lbs. he placed 3rd his freshman year and first as a sophomore in the Commonwealth State Championships.

Although Coach Bob Darby encouraged Jim to move up and wrestle at the Penn State main campus, he transferred to Texas A&M University in 1973 to study marine biology.

"I was really surprised and disappointed when I got there and found out that they did not have collegiate wrestling in Texas. I thought every school had wrestling. What kind of back woods place was this anyway." A&M did have an old mat, and Jim found a club advisor in Bill Koehler who was working on his masters at A&M but had wrestled at Millersville in Pennsylvania. Jim immediately became the club president and the team began to grow. "I recruited anyone who could say the word wrestling. In Texas that's a pretty good indicator since they all said 'Rasslin' and thought that it only happened at the local rodeo with steers." In that first year the A&M club competed with Oklahoma University's JV, Louisiana State University, Drake, SW Louisiana, and LeTourneau at the varsity level and about 8 other Texas club programs.

The Southwest Conference Championships held at Richland College in Dallas drew 14 club programs and over 130

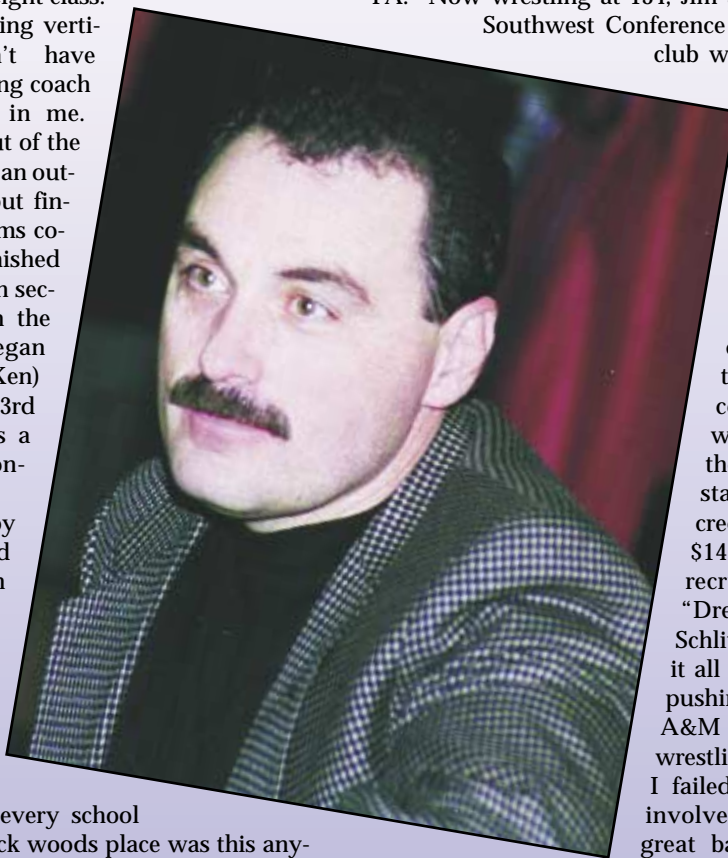
wrestlers. Most had little college experience and Jim easily pinned his way to the 126 lb. championship. In 1974 Jim became a player/coach when Koehler graduated and moved back to PA. Now wrestling at 134, Jim and the Aggies captured the Southwest Conference title. "I loved the way the club was growing, we had become

pretty darn good for a non-scholarship team."

Jim continued to coach the team as he pursued his masters degree in 1977, and began to recruit out of state wrestlers to the club. "I established a scholarship trust, and the team cleaned the baseball stadium to fund it. I found that if I could give out of state wrestlers just \$100 a semester they would qualify for Texas in-state tuition, then only \$8 a credit hour, (out of state was like \$140 hr.) He recruited 9 top recruits in '77, including then "Dream Team" member Billy Schlitler of Duncan, OK. "In 1978 it all fell apart for me. I had been pushing pretty hard to force the A&M athletic department to take wrestling NCAA. As young as I was I failed to understand the politics involved, and after getting some great backing from many alumni, local businesses and the university

president I went public with the fact that the Athletic Director Grant Taft was doing everything in his power to squash our program. Needless to say I was not asked to return the next year for the instructor's position I had been promised."

In 1978 Jim took the head coaching job at Richardson High School. In his 7 year career at Richardson his teams placed in the top ten at state 4 times. His efforts produced 7 state champions and 26 all state wrestlers. His overall dual match record was an impressive 84-9. "I always worked hard to build a strong, deep, overall program at Richardson, but we never could win the big one." Even though Jim had been able to



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