

**T**he toughest part of my wrestling career wasn't making weight - it was making a movie. The four years I spent working on "PINNED" tested my perseverance, challenged my will and, sometimes, threatened my sanity.

It started as a conversation with my brother, Patrick, then about to start his junior year in film school at Ohio University. He said he would like to make a documentary.

I told him the time was right for a wrestling documentary. Having spent 26 years of my life competing, coaching and covering the sport, I thought it would be interesting to chronicle the dedication and determination of today's scholastic wrestlers. Besides, "Vision Quest" is so old it includes a cameo by a then up-and-coming Madonna. America was ready for a new wrestling movie, and Patrick and I were the guys to make it.

We attended different high schools in the Cleveland suburb of Lakewood. I am a proud graduate of Lakewood High, the public school. My alma mater won Ohio's scholastic team title in 1948 (Go, Rangers!), but it hadn't won an individual crown since 1959. Going 50 years without a champion made Lakewood High a natural underdog.

Patrick went to nearby St. Edward



# How I Got **"PINNED"**

By Mike Norman

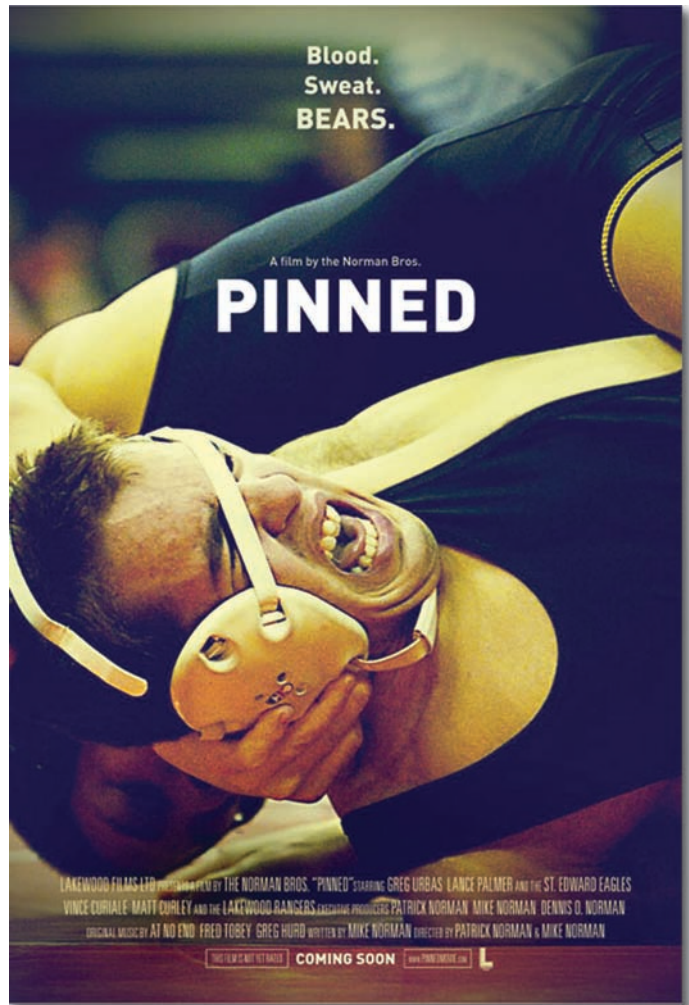


Augsburg-Wartburg Dual - 174 lbs. Zach Molitor (Augsburg) looking for back points on Dylan Azinger (Wartburg). Molitor major decided Azinger 11-2. Photo by Johnnie Johnson.

High, a private, Catholic, all-boys school. If Lakewood High was David, St. Ed was Goliath. The Eagles had dominated the state wrestling tournament in Ohio for most of the last 30 years. St. Ed had 10 national titles already and has since added an 11th. It is little wonder that the Rangers' middling program has struggled to grow in the shadow of the Eagles' empire.

The wrestlers we chose to focus on personified their programs. For the Rangers, we had Matt Curley, an unorthodox scrambler who placed eighth in the state at 125 pounds in his junior year. I was Matt's coach when he started wrestling in seventh grade, quickly showing great balance and natural strength. Despite missing most of that seventh-grade year with a broken hand, Matt qualified for the junior high state tournament the next year. He was a natural.

For St. Ed, we followed Lance Palmer, a three-time state champion who had pinned every opponent at the sectional, district and state tournament levels in his junior year. That included Matt Curley, in both the sectional and district finals. Lance had a polished, aggressive style that featured a half-nelson bordering on brutal. He had spent his childhood lifting weights and traveling the country wrestling. He was a prodigy.



I won't spoil the ending, but I will tell you that documentary filmmaking doesn't cater to a script. We set out to follow two young men striving for a goal shared by countless others across the country, guys who snap on headgear in November, hoping to have their hand raised as a champion at season's end.

Matt and Lance remain central, but other characters came into focus. Our interviews ranged from old wrestlers reminiscing about takedowns in the 1940s to 4-year-olds with medals hanging nearly to the ground. Former Ohio State All-American linebacker and first round NFL draft pick Tom Cousineau broke down Lakewood and St. Edward

high schools, and he should know: His father was the wrestling coach at Lakewood while Cousineau was competing at St. Edward.

Then, there are the wrestling bears. I didn't know there were wrestling bears, or that Lance's father, Dwayne, owned them, but they are in there.

The bear wrestling is interesting, but what I think makes "PINNED" a must-see is its compelling depiction of the sport's complex contradictions. Fathers give their sons no option other than to be champions. Mothers fret helplessly as their sons cut weight. Some wrestlers face competition for a precious varsity spot each day, while others go weeks without

serious challenge in the room or a match.

It's the sweetness of victory and the bitterness of defeat. Opportunity versus destiny.

It is wrestling.

If you appreciate this timeless sport, whether as competitor, coach, parent or fan, you will want to get "PINNED."

"Pinned" premiered this year at the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival in Missoula, Montana. It was selected for feature screening at the Cleveland International Film Festival in late March and is submitted for entry at several other festivals. Go to [www.pinnedmovie.com](http://www.pinnedmovie.com) for more details.



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