



2004 Official-of-the-Year Award

 MAGAZINE

Merle A. Tournay

Pennsylvania

Merle A. Tournay is most worthy to be honored as *Wrestling USA Magazine's* "2004 National Official of the Year." Not only does Mr. Tournay have an in-depth understanding of how to interpret the rules, but he also possesses a genuine love for high school and collegiate wrestling.

Last year, Merle Tournay received three letters from the NCAA. They were invitations to officiate nationals in all three divisions. That included the very prestigious Division I National Wrestling Championships in Kansas City last season. In fact, he officiated one of the finals matches as a first-year Division I official. What an accomplishment!

Let's now take an abbreviated look at Mr. Tournay's associations with the sport of wrestling.

As a mat sport competitor, Merle Tournay wrestled for Fort Cherry (PA) High School and West Liberty State College under the tutelage of legendary Coach Vince Monseau. While wrestling for the "Hilltoppers," Tournay won two West Virginia Conference Championships as a junior and senior.

Upon graduation from college, Tournay began teaching and coaching at Brooke High School (WV). During his 12-year tenure as the school's mat mentor, Merle Tournay was named the "1980 West Virginia AAA Coach of the Year." This came upon the heels of his Brooke "Bruin" wrestlers capturing the 1980 West Virginia AAA State Championship. Tournay then moved back to Pennsylvania and began coaching at Montour High School.

Merle Tournay initiated his officiating career in the early '80s and never looked back. I can remember watching Merle officiate his first year and commenting to my wife, "Merle Tournay will be the best official in the tri-state area in five years. I underestimated his refereeing abilities; it took much less time.



Tournay now officiates both high school and collegiate competitions in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. The following are just a few of Merle Tournay's officiating credits.

At the scholastic level, Tournay first refereed in the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference (OVAC) Wrestling Tournament, the largest conference mat competition in the nation. In fact, Merle Tournay was honored as the "2002 OVAC Wrestling Official of the Year" - and he did not even work the tournament. That is how much conference coaches respect him as a referee. And this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Over the last two decades, Tournay has officiated such prestigious scholastic events as the West Virginia State Championships, six National High School Open Tournaments, six National High School Seniors Tourneys, and the National High School Dual Meet Championships.

In the college arena, Merle Tournay has overseen dual meets for such schools as Cleveland State, West Liberty State College, Clarion (PA) University, Lehigh

University, and the University of Pittsburgh.

On the collegiate tournament scene, Tournay has often refereed the West Liberty State College Invitational, the West Virginia University Open, numerous EWL and Division II National Qualifying Tournaments, and three NCAA Division II National Championships.

As previously mentioned, Merle A. Tournay was invited to the NCAA Division I National Championships in 2003. Knowing Tournay's subtle understanding and abilities regarding the art and science of refereeing, it will be far from his last appearance at the event.

There is one more interesting tidbit of trivia regarding Merle Tournay's lifelong association to wrestling. His initials are "M.A.T." That doesn't surprise me at all; he was an outstanding wrestler, coach, and now official.

Merle Tournay and his lovely wife Dee Dee reside in McKees Rocks, PA. They have three children: Zachary (20), Danielle (16), and Lucas (12).