


2004 Man-of-the-Year Award
 MAGAZINE

Kent Bailo Ortonville, Michigan

Kent Bailo, 53, of Ortonville, Michigan, has been named Wrestling USA "Man-of-the-Year" for 2004.

Bailo emerged on the national scene in 1997 when he decided to start the first girls wrestling state championship in Michigan. One hundred and sixteen high school girls attended that first state championships event. Then in 1998, Bailo decided it was time for a Girls High School Wrestling National Championship. He mailed information to over 9,500 high schools nationwide, that sponsor wrestling, which produced an initial field of 272 girl wrestlers from 38 states.

How appropriate that Bailo receive this honor in 2004 - the very year that women's wrestling makes its Olympic debut at the Summer Games in Athens, Greece this August. He is likely more responsible than anyone for the growth of female wrestling in the United States.

Why did he take an interest in female wrestling? When asked, he replied, "It just seemed like the right thing to do." As a referee, he'd see girls wrestling at the high school and middle school level, and all felt isolated and were not aware that there were many other female wrestlers around Michigan doing the same thing. Bailo thought if they all came together, they would have a much better chance of winning matches and experiencing the joy of wrestling that only winning can bring.

The United States Girls Wrestling Association was formed in 1998 by Bailo and the numbers at the USGWA Nationals grew every year. The 2003



National Championships had 604 entries, as the tournament continues to live up to its billing as "THE LARGEST GIRLS' WRESTLING TOURNAMENT IN THE WORLD." Middle schoolers and elementary schoolers, were added in 2000, and collegiate women freestyle and folkstyle events were added in 2002. The USGWA has held state championships events in 35 states.

As a referee, Bailo started refereeing in the fall of 1968, just after graduating from high school. He refereed his first Michigan High School Athletic State Finals in 1975 at age 24. He has since refereed the state finals 11 times, and adds refereeing seven NCAA Division III

National Championships to his resume. Years ago, in 1971, Bailo refereed the freestyle AAU National Championships in Toledo, Ohio.

Kent Bailo, the coach, has coached at five different high schools, mostly while working his regular job at General Motors Corporation in Pontiac, Michigan. His most successful stint was six years at Rochester Adams High School, where his teams produced six league championships while compiling a record of 165-18-1. After 11 seasons as a head coach his record stands at 251-65-2. He is currently the Head Coach at Brandon High School in Ortonville, Michigan. Bailo stepped up to take this job after being out of coaching for 18 years. He also served as a Graduate Assistant Coach at Eastern Michigan University for two seasons.

Bailo has a Bachelors degree from Eastern Michigan University with eleven majors and minors (social studies, history, geography, physical education, psychology, sociology, economics, area studies of Africa, African-American studies, political science, and criminology). He has a Masters degree in Secondary School Administration and a Specialist Degree in the same subject from EMU.

Bailo has been married to his wife, Cynthia, for 21 years and he has three children, Brent (30), Laura (28), and Brian (26). Brent referees college and high school wrestling with his dad. And, no, Laura never wrestled - she was a stat girl in high school.