



# PHOTOGRAPHER-OF-THE-YEAR AWARD

## MIKE SMITH

Humboldt, South Dakota

**M**ike Smith was introduced to photography in the mid 1970s when a high school friend purchased a Nikkormat FT2 SLR camera. It wasn't long before Mike purchased his own and began experimenting with different subject matter and the capabilities of the camera. As a student at South Dakota State University from 1977-1981 in Electrical Engineering, he took numerous photo journalism classes that allowed access to the developing labs where he could process black and white film. During this time Mike began shooting concert photos for a local promoter that included the bands Harry Chapin, Head East, Charlie Daniels, Black Oak Arkansas, Bachman Turner Overdrive, and The Outlaws.

After leaving college in 1982, Mike chose to take a full time job as the golf course superintendent for Central Valley Golf Club in Hartford, SD after running a golf course in Colman, SD for the past two summers. He decided he liked the outdoor type work the golf course offered as compared to the inside work of an Electrical Engineer. Photography was put on the back burner as he worked summers at the golf course and different part-time jobs in the winter.

In 1985 Mike met his wife, Deborah, and started their family when Chris was born in 1989 and Ryan in 1991. Out came the cameras to take photos of the kids and also the golf course he was building at Hartford as they were expanding to 18 holes. By now Mike had switched to all Canon bodies and lens.

Chris and Ryan began wrestling in AAU in the mid 90s and Mike could be found matside quietly taking photos of the boys and also the other youth wrestlers they were getting to know at all the tournaments. He would take dou-



*Mike Smith  
Humboldt, SD*

ble prints and give the other wrestlers a copy of the photos he had taken. In 2002 Mike was approached by a gentleman who had several local papers and was looking for someone to shoot sports photos for him. He agreed to shoot all the local high school sports as it fit very well with the summer work of the golf course. Digital equipment was now up and coming and Mike invested in the top of the line Canon equipment. His youngest son Cory was born in 1997 and is now involved in youth wrestling with Mike matside shooting the action.

Mike's favorite sport to shoot is still wrestling. He wanted a way to promote the sport and the athletes that worked so hard to better themselves. With so many leftover images from the sporting events, Mike decided to start a website. The website is called MatShots and wrestling as its main theme. After beginning to post more and more images on MatShots, he eventually set it up so pho-

tos could be purchased for private use. To help promote wrestling he began giving wrestling images to high school wrestling banquet slideshows, wrestling clubs for programs and promotions, wrestling camp brochures, college sports information sites, and wrestling magazines like *Wrestling USA Magazine*. Now Mike has had the opportunity to take photos at major wrestling events that include NAIA National Championships, NCAA Division II National Championships and the World Team Trials.

When not at the golf course or shooting an event, Mike can usually be found at his acreage where his family raises fresh produce in the summer months. They also sell bare root and potted trees and have a small greenhouse operation for flowers and bedding plants. As someone who loves to watch things grow, he keeps that mentality when watching athletes and athletic programs develop and mature.

Mike continues to stay active in his local youth wrestling program and volunteers to help local wrestling events. "The greatest reward to come out of the wrestling photography is the friendships that have evolved with the athletes, parents, fans, coaches, referees, and volunteers." As everyone who follows wrestling knows there is nothing better than reliving the matches that shape a wrestler's career. Mike feels fortunate that occasionally one of his photos is part of that memory.

Thanks to all the wrestling athletes who have provided the incredible action and excitement that is the subject of his photos. Without their hard work, dedication, and sacrifice the greatest sport of all, wrestling, would not be what it is today.

