

WRESTLING RUNS DEEP

Why does a college need a wrestling team? What is the benefit of people scrubbing one another around on a mat that gets disinfected before and after each practice? Is it some kind of cult? Just another archaic sport that refuses to enter the modern world?

Look at any wrestling team. From appearances they are hard to figure out. You cannot tell the winners from the losers. The sweet faced kid with the bright smile is too nice. The kid with the chiseled muscles must be a winner each time out. The skinny kid with the droopy hair probably gets pinned regularly.

Except wrestling is not about height, weight, or strength. It's not about quickness, vertical jump, or conventional coordination. Sweet Face has a dark side. The Body is always hurt. And the Droopy Kid rules the mat. It doesn't add up in the traditional sense.

Why keep wrestling at all? Don't other sports do enough to contribute to athletics' well being? We see professional sports on television. The NFL plays smash mouth football. NBA players jump through the roof. Major League baseball players go long ball. We see sports from the couch. Why keep a sport as far from primetime as wrestling? What real good does it accomplish?

The answer is wrestling provides a test for athletes with more heart than they know what to do with. It's that simple. While some excel in other sports, most find wrestling all consuming. They run the miles, log hours in the weight room, and watch their diet to have a chance to put the best seven minutes of their lives on the line every time they step on the mat. Wrestling people know about those six minutes. Some have had years of six and seven minute matches and thought enough of it to pass the experience along to others.

Many institutions of higher learning think enough of the wrestling experience to field teams. The University of Oregon dropped wrestling, but not the University of Pennsylvania. USC may not have a team, but Harvard does. UW may not wrestle, but Columbia does. So does Brown, Princeton, and Cornell.

Of the Ivy League schools that make up the Ancient Eight, six have varsity wrestling. Yale and Dartmouth field club teams. These are the role model institutions of American higher education. And they all wrestle. Is there anyone who doesn't respect the name value of those schools? What is the connection they have that is missing in our region? Is Stanford, the Harvard of the West coast, foolish for not driving the sport from their campus?

Portland State does not have the history of UO or OSU, but it has had a national champion wrestling program. It may have begun as a diploma mill for WWII veterans on G.I. Bill money, but it has grown into a university ranked among the "Best in the West" by The Princeton Review. By adding Urban Studies, Black Studies, and upgrading the engineering department, Portland State has earned further mention as a "College With a Conscience."

Why keep wrestling on the PSU campus? Is it more than a sport pursued by antediluvian athletes seeking wreaths and medals? Is it more than a chance at the big city lights of football and basketball? If it is, why not make Portland State University a refuge for athletes with too much heart.

Wrestlers aren't the biggest, or the strongest, but they are the fiercest competitors. They follow a heritage handed down through the bedrock of western civilization. They are the toughest people you'll probably never know because their sport isn't as celebrated here as it is in elite colleges. The lessons of wrestling are hard and enduring, and so are wrestling people. They are the sort you look for in a pinch because they don't know how to give up.

Portland State has the same characteristics. It has come up the hard way and wrestling is the last 'hard way' sport. They deserve each other.

Show some heart.

Keep Viking Wrestling.

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