

Handout #6 Wrestling Champions

Bruce Baumgartner

Walk down Main Street in any town except his own, and he goes virtually unrecognized. His face doesn't stare down from billboards, his voice doesn't endorse deodorant or diet plans. High schoolers don't rush out to buy his footwear or his latest rap album.

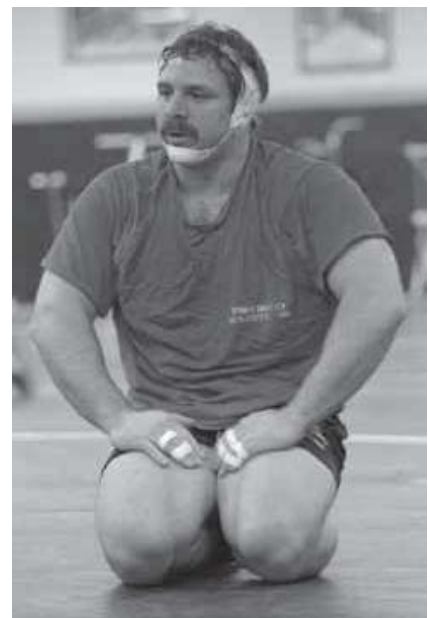
But on any street in Teheran or Istanbul, he is greeted by crowds of the admiring, the respectful, even the awestruck. Thousands of miles from his semi-rural Pennsylvania farmhouse, he is as applauded as Michael Jordan or Ken Griffey Jr. are back home.



Even though many don't recognize his face, Bruce Baumgartner is one of the great Olympic athletes of all time.

He is only the fifth American to win a medal in four Olympics, joining a group that includes discus thrower Al Oerter, weight lifter Norbert Schemansky, equestrian competitor Michael Plumb and Francis Conn Findlay, who medaled in rowing and yachting. Baumgartner's thirteen Olympic or world championships sets a record for any wrestler. Honored earlier with the Sullivan Award as the nation's top amateur athlete, Baumgartner was the first wrestler picked to carry the U.S. flag at the Olympic Games in Atlanta. It's the highest accolade an Olympic athlete can receive from his teammates.

It is interesting that as a wrestler, Bruce must literally pay a price for competing in a sport that may be the world's oldest but, except during Olympic years, is among the least-watched. "Of all the sports I know, wrestling probably is the most amateur - or, in other words, the poorest," said Baumgartner, who must double as Edinboro University's wrestling coach to support his wife, Linda, and their two young sons. "But I can't do a whole lot about it, and I don't worry about it. Me, I don't really want to be noticed everywhere I go. You get enough recognition from the real sports fans to let you know you've been recognized, but yet you're not a Michael Jordan or a Garth Brooks."



As he talks, the 6-foot-2, 286-pound Baumgartner tackles a chicken sandwich that, like most of his opponents, offers little resistance. Four bites, maybe five, and it's gone, consumed by a man whose huge hands are the size of an outfielder's glove. His arms would do justice to a Dallas Cowboys lineman, and his legs possess the strength of a distance runner.

His knees now, after nearly 20 years of pounding on a rubberized mat, ache a little and a shoulder required surgery recently. But in an arena where muscular bulk is more important than sleekness, he is remarkably well-preserved for one who has been wrestling for so long.

“The competition is getting better internationally and nationally, but, training wise, I work out with 23- and 24-year-old guys, and I can train just as hard as they do,” he said. “I have to train smarter, now, and I get tired faster. I have to get more rest and eat better. But I’m probably stronger.”

He has maintained such a high performance level so late into his career partially because he was a late bloomer. He placed only third in his final high school tournament, and it wasn’t until his senior season at Indiana State that he burst onto the collegiate scene by winning 44 consecutive matches and an NCAA title.

At age 35, he is even stronger than when he won his first Olympic gold medal in 1984, the year of the

Soviet boycott. He is stronger, too, than he was in Barcelona in 1992, a year after he supposedly had become too old, too heavy and too distracted to compete with the big boys.

Even then, Baumgartner wasn’t inundated with interview requests. Some viewed his 1984 Olympic gold medal as more luck than anything else; one that may not have occurred if the Communist bloc had competed.

There was no such talk in Barcelona after Baumgartner, who had finished only seventh in the 1991 world championships, eliminated a former Olympic and world champion in the morning and another former Olympic

and world champion in a memorable afternoon. It was a singular accomplishment that earned him another Olympic gold medal, one that separated him from the merely good and transformed him into one of wrestling’s all-time greats.

Two more world championships followed, and a 15-year unbeaten streak against American wrestlers continued. Now, there is little more to achieve. Many wrestlers thrive on anger, passion, intensity, even turmoil, but not Baumgartner. He is as calm as a Hawaiian breeze; a man who can never recall getting angry in nearly 20 years of competition.

“A lot of the strategy is letting a guy beat himself,” Baumgartner said. “You push hard, you take the advantage and the shots, but let that guy make the mistake. Most of the people know I’m not going to

1996 Olympic Bronze Medalist
1992, 1984 Olympic Champion
1997 World Cup Champion
1988 Olympic Silver Medalist
1995 World Champion (3rd Title)
9 World Medals (most ever)
13 World Cup Medals (most ever)
4 Pan Am Medals (most ever)
3 Goodwill Games (most ever)
15 US National Titles (most ever)
NCAA Champion
Jr. National Champion
USA Wrestling Athlete of the Year
Amateur Wrestling News Man of the Year
1995 Sullivan Award Winner
UNBEATEN IN U.S.A. IN 16 YEARS
13 World and Olympic Medals (more medals than any wrestler in the world)

heavy
boy

Even

then

gold

that

had

not

competed.

make a mistake. That comes from years of experience.” Baumgartner, a four-time Olympian, two-time Olympic gold medalist and three-time world champion at 286 pounds, was picked in a vote of all U.S. team captains in Atlanta to carry the U.S. flag in the 1998 Olympic opening ceremonies.

Dan Gable

Dan Gable was born Oct. 25, 1948 in Waterloo. He received his B.S. degree from Iowa State in 1971.

Gable led the U.S. freestyle wrestling charge at two Olympic Games. In the 1972 Games, he won a gold medal in the 70 kg weight class. In 1984, he coached the U.S. freestyle team that won seven out of a possible ten gold medals. Gable was so dominant a wrestler that between 1963 and 1973, he posted a record of 299 wins, six losses and three draws. He won his first 117 college matches, an NCAA record, before suffering his only defeat in the NCAA finals his senior year. He won three state titles at Waterloo West High School and two NCAA titles at Iowa State. He was a three-time all-American and three-time Big Eight champion.



Incredibly, on his way to the Olympic gold medal in 1972, he did not allow an opponent to score a point in six matches.

After his own wrestling career, Dan Gable moved on to coach at the University of Iowa.

There he won the Big Ten title every year since he took over (19 times). He captured nine consecutive (1978-86) NCAA championships and has posted an unbelievable 323-20-5 dual record. That winning percentage is 93.5%.

Gable coached many United States teams in international freestyle competition and coached the Americans in the World Cup. He is a two-time Olympic head coach (1980 and 1984). The '84 Olympic team, which featured four of his University of Iowa Hawkeyes, won seven gold medals. He was an assistant freestyle coach at the 1988 Olympics.



Gable coached the U.S. team to a bronze medal at the 1986 Goodwill Games and has led several all-star teams to Europe and the Soviet Union. He was an assistant on the 1989 World Team which competed in Switzerland.

Dan Gable's sphere of coaching influence has left an indelible impression on the wrestling world. He has been given several coaching honors for his outstanding coaching. These honors include 1977 NCAA Rookie Coach of the Year, 1978 & 1983 NCAA Coach of the Year, 1993 & 1995 Big Ten coach of the Year, 1996 Big Ten Co-Coach of the Year.

Incredibly, 27 former Hawkeye lettermen under Dan Gable currently hold coaching positions at the high school or collegiate level.

Gable was named to the U.S.A. Wrestling Hall of Fame in 1980 and to the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame in 1985. He was named the nation's outstanding wrestler by the AAU in 1970 and the U.S. Wrestling Federation in 1971. He was the Amateur Wrestling News Man of the Year in 1970. He and his wife, Kathy, have four daughters: Jennifer, Annie, Molly and Mackenzie.

Lloyd Keaser

Former Navy and Brooklyn Park High School wrestling great Lloyd Keaser was inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame. But for a certain coach and a great career at the US Naval Academy, it almost never happened.

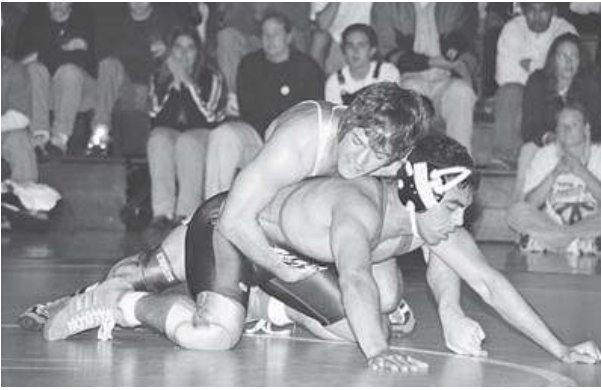


Lloyd "Butch" Keaser almost never made it to the Naval Academy. Butch Keaser wanted to be a United States Marine. From the time he was a small kid, growing up in Pumphrey Maryland, that was his dream. The path seemed simple enough, get through high school and enlist. He wrestled in high school because it gave him something to do. He soon grew to be a high school star. He was a two-time All-District high school wrestler who caught the eye of Navy wrestling coach Ed Peery.

"It was evident early on how good Butch (Lloyd's nickname) was going to be." said Peery. "He had the character, work ethic, and natural ability to be a great wrestler."

When invited to attend the Naval Academy he was overjoyed. "The Academy was a perfect place for me," said Keaser, "I had always planned on entering the military and a chance to receive a free education and continue to wrestle close to home was ideal."

Peery's evaluations turned out to be right on the money as Keaser won three straight Eastern Intercollegiate Wrestling Association titles at 167 for Navy from 1970 to '72 and twice was named All-American. A broken hand his senior year kept him from a national championship. Despite limited action that season, he finished his college career with a record of 54-6-1. In 1972, he was awarded the Naval Academy Sword given to the Academy's outstanding varsity athlete. His .893 career winning percentage still ranks as one of Navy's all-time best.



After graduating from the Academy, Keaser's wrestling career took off. While on active duty in the Marine Corps he won national AAU titles in 1973 and '76, won a bronze and a silver medal in the Tbilisi Tournament in the Soviet Union in '73 and '74 respectively, won gold medals in both the World Cup and World Championships in '73, prompting him to be named wrestling's Man of the Year, won the World Military Games (CISM) in '74, won the Pan-Am games in '75 and took home the silver medal at the 1976 Olympics.

Butch's Olympic experience is an important lesson for many. Through the preliminary matches he was doing so well it looked like he could win it all. In an unusual twist, Keaser did not need to win his final match to take home the gold medal. He had clinched a medal and, through a complicated point system, did not even need to win the final match to take the gold. He would face Pavel Pinigin in the final match. Keaser needed to keep within eight points to earn the gold medal. Unfortunately, he was misinformed on how close he needed to stay and still take home gold. When the final match had ended, Keaser left the mat thinking he had just won the Olympic gold. It was not until moments later that he was informed of the actual results. "I knew something was different that day," he said. "In other matches, I was nervous-calm, but that day, I was nervous-nervous. I wanted to be the aggressor in the match, I didn't want to go in and try to protect something I didn't have, but on the other hand, I knew I could lose and still win the gold medal." "That still knaws at me today," said Keaser. "I have no one to blame but myself. I went out on the mat with a different strategy. It was not Butch Keaser out there. I was wrestling not to lose."

The 1976 Olympics taught Butch Keaser a lot about competition and a lot about life. When giving advice, he still recalls that final match. "I will tell people in any situation, in sports or in life, to be successful, you must always do what got you there. You will not have the opportunity to succeed if you try to change."



Keaser returned to Navy as an assistant coach from '75 through '77 and is currently a systems engineer for IBM corporation in Baltimore, Maryland where he has worked since 1985.

