AWN Welcomes Letters

It's really nothing new, but we of the editorial staff would welcome letters and comments (good or bad) to our office. We are starting to get more and more each week and we think this is a good way for you out there to express your opinion about the world of Amateur Wrestling. We'll publish letters we feel are worthwhile for the good of the sport and amateur wrestling community.

We will find an answer to any questions you may have about rules, schedules, records, wrestling trivia, history, or any other question you may have on your mind. We will only print letters that are signed — if you don't feel strong enough about your comments to sign your name, we're not interested.

To the editors:

All serious students of wrestling are aware of the gradual movement of college wrestling to freestyle. While reasons, such as spectator interest, are sometimes advanced as justification, the primary underlying rationale is the belief that these changes will inexorably improve our position in international wrestling.

It is difficult to quarrel with this contention. Yet, it also appears that high school and especially collegiate wrestling has lost a good deal as a result. For one thing, the philosophy underlying collegiate wrestling has all but passed from that of control and "catch as catch can (folkstyle)" to simply exposing an opponent back to the mat (so-called "freestyle").

The recent introduction of the "catch as catch can" rule in point. It is, relatively speaking, easy to turn an opponent who is moving (and thereby exposing himself) on the bottom that college wrestlers in close matches often adopt the strictly offensive posture so typical of freestyle. When is the last time you can remember seeing a wrestler elevating an opponent into "the back door" or otherwise squirming his way into a position of control? Or, while this was going on the crowd screaming "takedown!" or "out of bounds"? ("Happy Holec, Mike Natvig, etc. It's a good thing you're not wrestling today.)

Today, it only the glamour of the Olympics to generate the same level of interest as used to be common at many citadels of wrestling. How many freestyle tournaments have you attended, outside of world class competitions, that were as well attended as popularly following mailing list "folkstyle" tournaments. Indeed, even here, one might wonder whether the gradual decline in spectator interest we have wit...
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nessed at many colleges over the past few years, in part, is a result of the aforementioned rules changes.

As important as the above concerns are, recent rules changes have had another effect, which to my mind, is far more serous; that those benned as a sport for all boys, no matter how small or how large. Over the years, we have seen all kinds of wrestling champions in every weight class ranging from short and stocky, from quick and clever to tough and gutsy — and everything in between.

Today, one sometimes almost gets the feeling that a wrestler has little chance of reaching the top without overwhelming strength and a style that leaves little room for variation. Just how interesting is it to watch two wrestlers stand toe to toe pummeling for position? Better two sumo wrestlers from Japan. Can anyone imagine a Dave Auble or Frank Bettucci or Ron Gray being effective under such conditions? Having observed these changes over many years, I cannot help but think that we hurt the sport when we arbitrarily limit, by means of the rules we set, the techniques and variations of boys who can achieve real success at the sport.

The very nature of freestyle wrestling, with its emphasis on throws and the like, also is a good deal more dangerous. For a sport that is fighting for continued support at high schools, and especially across this land, we can ill afford to forget this fact. Unless action to reduce injuries is taken soon, don’t be surprised to see collegiate wrestling continuing to go the way of collegiate boxing. How many of you remember the excellent boxing teams supported by such powerhouses as Syracuse and Michigan State?

Does this mean we should give up on freestyle wrestling and the Olympics? Of course not. But it does suggest that a different approach in the long run may be more profitable. American wrestlers sent by far the best in the world at controlled folkstyle. Rather than changing our own style to accommodate others, let us take every opportunity to introduce them to ours. Can anyone honestly say that Sombo “wrestling,” for example, is any more defensible than our own “folkstyle” as a candidate for a new style of international wrestling?

With the 1984 Olympics being held in Los Angeles, should some thought be given to introducing the world to the best folkstyle wrestling? Who knows, they may just begin to see in it what we have for so many years.

As for freestyle Greco Roman and the rest there is little reason to believe that anything worse of the number of competitors at an international level is small in comparison to the numbers of collegiate wrestlers, which turn in microscopic compared to high school participation.

As one who achieved his greatest success in freestyle (I won the National freestyle championship at 147½ in 1955 along with the outstanding stacks award after a good but not distinguished record at Michigan, I can still recall vividly the invigorating effect of changing over from grueling, mu-

tually interactive nine minute collegiate matches to the more relaxed, unidimensional “folkstyle” freestyle matches in those days were 15 minutes long). It was (and is) to be blunt, a style, with its throws, predictable offensives and defenses, better suited to mature men more interested in sharpening and testing their skills than in the physically more demanding but nonetheless less dangerous sport that collegiate wrestling then was.

Let’s hope that members of the wrestling rules committee will give serious consideration to the above in their committee meetings. Let us hope too that the decision for the “folkstyle” wrestling at the Los Angeles Olympics — if nothing else but to exhibit our finest for the world to see.

Joe Scandura, Ph.D.

To the Editors:

Please steer clear of the Cold War.
I was surprised that you chose to include a very inflammatory article in your most recent edition of Amateur Wrestling News (Jan. 16 article on Russian Alexander Medved).

It is counter productive to reinforce the notion that “our system” is good and that the Communist is evil. Why reinforce a simplistic notion of political reality?

As the American wrestler meets the Russian wrestler in Los Angeles, Cold War issues will not be resolved. The wrestlers will be competing for the “right reasons.” They will give each other the benefit of the doubt.

When you publish cold war garbage in your paper, you are teaching American wrestlers to compete for the wrong reasons.

Please steer clear of the Cold War.

Albin Wozniak
Brookeville, Md.

To the Editor:

The article in the January 30 titled “Easterners Remember Richard Di Battista” was one of the best informative articles that I read. It was a fine tribute to a very talented champion.

However, there are a couple of points that I feel need to be corrected, not to detract from Di Battista’s fine record but to give credit to another great champion.

The author, Peter Kravitz, stated “only three other wrestlers have completed their collegiate career unbeaten.” He further states, “Still none of these greats went through their entire collegiate careers like Di Battista.”

Mr. Kravitz falls to mention Oklahoma State’s David “Buddy” Arndt, a distinguished member of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame.

Buddy Arndt was never defeated during a career that included three years Jr. High, three years at Tulsa Central High School, and three varsity years at Oklahoma State University (then known as Oklahoma A & M) where he won three NCAA Championships in 1941, 1942, and 1946. Buddy was the only wrestler to win NCAA titles both before and after World War II.

Mr. Kravitz was also incorrect when he stated that the Big 6 and Big 10 held a stranglehold on the NCAA. OSU was not a member of either the Big 6 or Big 10 but was the dominate