

**Lloyd  
“Butch”  
Keaser**

**Etched  
In  
Stone**

**Wrestling  
for a  
Race,  
Community  
and More**

**By Mike Finn**







AWAKENED  
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# Etched in Stone: Lloyd “Butch” Keaser Wrestling for a Race, Community & More



**The Hall of Famer, who overcame segregation and became the first black wrestler to win a World championship before inspiring others both on and off the mat**

Stories have to be told or they die. And when they die so does that which defines their significance. “Etched in Stone” is a series of stories about wrestling’s legends that will take you inside the lives of some of the greatest wrestlers in history as they share never before told stories about their tribulations and triumphs. Competitors, coaches, teammates, and those who knew these athletes best will also weigh in with their own unique perspectives.

Wrestling is arguably the toughest sport in the world. When you finish this series, it will no longer be debatable, it will be Etched in Stone.

As you climb the ladder with those that reached the pinnacle in the sport, you find unparalleled athleticism, discipline and commitment. “Etched in Stone” is a series about those wrestlers, who by being inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame as Distinguished Members, have separated themselves from the mere champions of the sport.

Since 1928, over 25,000 wrestlers have qualified for the NCAA wrestling tournament and more than 700 have won a single title. Only 196 have received the honor of being inducted into this exclusive fraternity.

What separates this series from others is the stories are being told by wrestlers about wrestlers and each includes a storybook with pictures and more insight.

Don’t miss a single episode as we go deep inside the careers of these iconic wrestlers and share their story with you.

## **Credits:**

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Written by Mike Finn

Layout by Mike Finn

Photos courtesy of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame and Lloyd Keaser.

## **About the Author**

Mike Finn, 66, has written primarily about the sport of wrestling since 2003, when he became editor of WIN (Wrestling Insider Newsmagazine), a national wrestling publication located in Newton, Iowa. Finn grew up in Waterloo, Iowa, also the hometown of Dan Gable, where he was introduced to wrestling. A 1978 graduate in journalism from the University of Iowa, Finn also served as a sports information director at Memphis State and later became the editor of Voice of the Hawkeyes magazine.

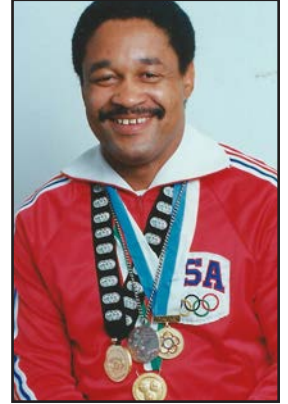
# Introduction

**O**n March 20, 2021, five college wrestlers — Penn State's Roman Bravo-Young, Carter Starocci and Aaron Brooks, as well as David Carr of Iowa State and Gable Steveson of Minnesota — set an NCAA Championships record for the most individual championships by African-American wrestlers.

This was the latest moment that has seen many great black wrestlers excel on both the college and international wrestling mats in recent years, especially Jordan Burroughs, the two-time NCAA champ from Nebraska, who has gone on to win four World Championships and an Olympic gold medal in 2012.

There have been many other black wrestlers who made history for the United States before Burroughs, including Kenny Monday, who became the first black wrestler from any country to win an Olympic gold medal in 1988. Monday's feat was duplicated four years later by Kevin Jackson.

"I first became aware of (Keaser) after winning my first World Championship in 2011," Burroughs said. "USA Wrestling commemorated my title by putting my framed photo up on the wall of Olympic and World champions. I began to trace the wall looking for other black champions and saw Lloyd, and started to ask about him. It was then that I realized that he was our first World Champion, and all of his great accomplishments in the sport. Whether he knew it or not at the time, he blazed the trail for black wrestlers in America forever."



But neither Monday nor Jackson were the only African-American wrestlers to accomplish a "first" for their country. Some of those pioneers have been forgotten, including the likes of:

- Harold Henson, who became the first black wrestler to compete in the NCAA tournament (in 1949 for San Diego State)
- Simon Roberts, who became the first black wrestler to win an NCAA championship (in 1957 for Iowa)

Another is Lloyd "Butch" Keaser, who became the first African-American to win a World Championship in 1973 and later became the first to earn an Olympic medal in 1976 when he left Montreal with a silver medal.

And while Keaser was following in the footsteps of Bobby Douglas, the first black American to claim a World wrestling medal with a silver in 1966 who later became a Hall of Fame coach at Arizona State and Iowa State, most USA wrestling fans have forgotten the exploits of Keaser.

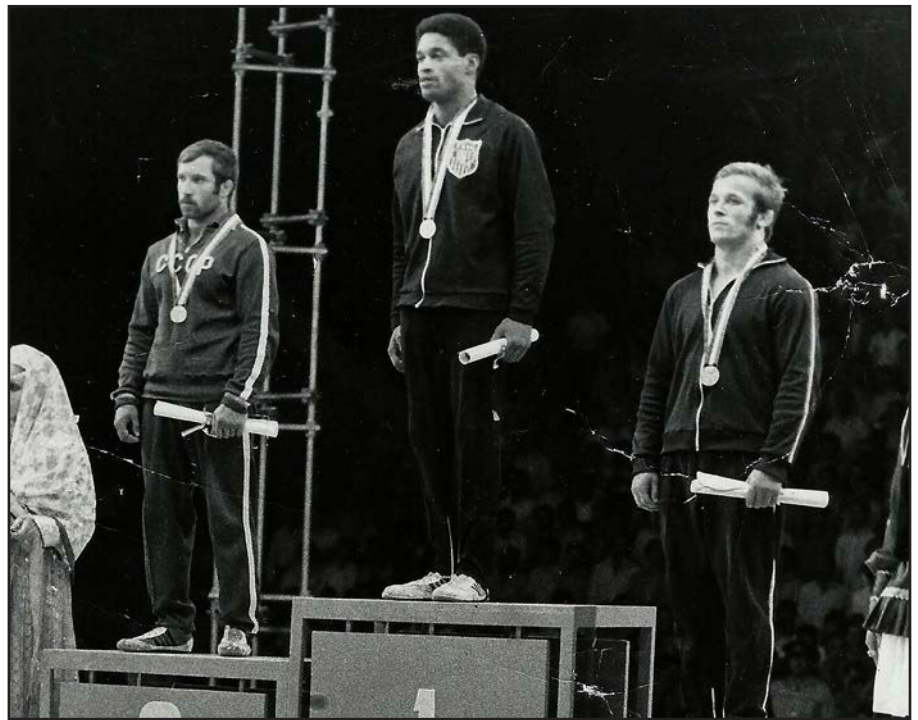
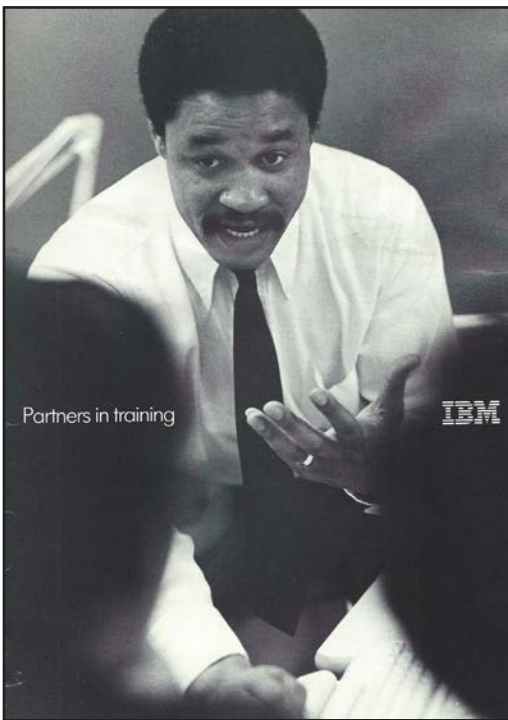
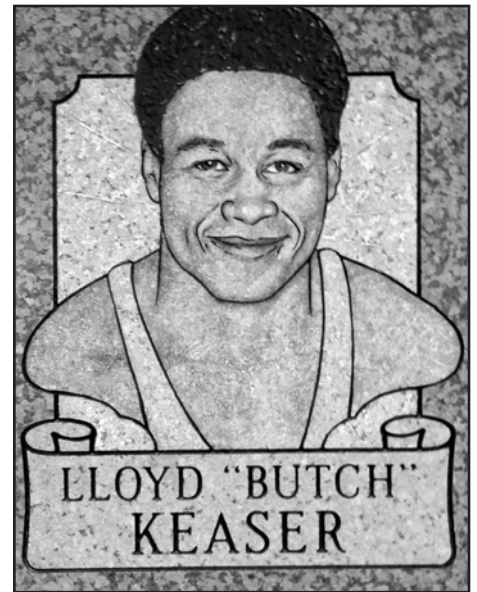
Yes, at the time, he was honored for his historical accomplishment as a finalist for the Sullivan Award — presented by the Amateur Athletic Union to the nation's top amateur athlete in all sports — and was named Man of the Year by Amateur Wrestling News in 1973. But he was not inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame until 1996.

Lloyd "Butch" Keaser was more than just a wrestler. He was someone who overcame poverty and segregation growing up in Maryland before he excelled on the mat for the Naval Academy and Team USA ... becoming a favorite to both friends and foes alike.

He also became an inspiration to family and friends for his service in the Marines before he worked as a successful business leader for IBM. He also stayed involved in his former childhood community as a coach and mentor and today, his former elementary school, where he still helps others, is called the Lloyd Keaser Community Center.

May this story of Keaser remind people how much he inspired others, including many today, and keep his legend "Etched in Stone."





# Lloyd “Butch” Keaser, Etched in Stone

## Part I – Friends and family call him “Butch”

One reason some may have forgotten Lloyd “Butch” Keaser is that some don’t know what to call him, even those who remember there was a man with such a nickname who did something no black wrestler had ever accomplished on the international stage.

“Once, an old high school classmate came up to me and asked, ‘Are you Butch?’ He then said, ‘Didn’t your brother win a World championship?’ I said, ‘I am Lloyd,’ ” recalled Keaser, who was 23 years old when he ruled the 68-kilogram weight class in freestyle wrestling at the 1973 World Championships in Tehran, Iran.

Depending on one’s age and relationship to Keaser, this current 71-year-old resident of Ashburn, Virginia, is still called “Butch” and “Lloyd.”

“The majority of people know me as Lloyd,” said Keaser, who was born February 9, 1950, at Baltimore University Hospital. “The people I grew up with and who are in the same age group know me as Butch. The people who have known me over a longer time know me as Butch.”

Keaser said his mother, Almedia, came up with the nickname.

“She saw the name ‘Butch’ as a strong individual,” said Keaser, the first of seven children born to Almedia and Lloyd Keaser, who made their first home in Pumphrey, Maryland, now an unincorporated community located three miles south of Baltimore.



Lloyd Keaser, born in 1950, was given the nickname “Butch” by his mother.



Butch (bottom left) was the first of seven children born to his parents Lloyd and Almedia Keaser. They are pictured with his two siblings, Deborah and Michael.

“While I was named after my father, he did not want me to have the same middle name because he did not want me to have the same pressure of living up to him,” said Keaser, who remembers his father as a smart man without much of a formal education.

“He had a great reputation in the community and was an extremely bright guy with an almost photographic memory,” Butch said. “His father got ill and because he was the oldest male, he had to leave school in eighth grade to take care of his family. He went out and worked with the railroad.”

Sadly, Butch’s father died two months before he won the Worlds in 1973. But the elder Keaser did so much in the two decades of his son’s life that Butch still calls his father his greatest role model.

“He was more of an extrovert,” recalled Butch. “He could do magic. He had jokes. He could play music. He was a sax player. Some guys, who were classically trained, would come down to the house and jam with him at times.”

Butch also recalled that his father, who was born in Baltimore before also growing up in Pumphrey, worked as a truck driver while also doing supplemental jobs around the area. He was also an athlete, known for his work ethic and words; skills that later helped Butch in his life.



“(My dad) was really a motivational speaker, but he didn’t do it as a living,” Butch said. “A lot of things that got me through early life and whatever I still use today were different flavors of what you hear from the motivational talks he gave. That’s why quite a few people would come down to spend time with him as adults, when they were trying to work through problems or trying to get through certain parts of life.”

Butch’s mother, who passed away in 2003, grew up as one of 11 children in North Carolina, before migrating to the north.

“She was small in stature, probably about 5-2,” recalled Butch. “She was a stickler for us behaving properly. She was strong religious-wise. We lived our lives according to the Bible and my dad would quote the Bible pretty well. I remember her as a supreme caregiver. Not a huggy-kissy type of person, but I felt loved to death.

“She was a pretty serious woman, an extreme introvert, but loved kids and family. She and my father were opposite in many ways, but the one common thread was a love of family. Many of my friends would say they wished my parents were their parents.”

## A “Rich” Family

Butch recalls Pumphrey then as “made up of small farms migrating to suburbs. There were quite a few people who weren’t really farmers, but they had a plot of land, like a half-acre, where they would raise chickens and pigs.”

Growing up in a one-room, kerosene-burning “summer” house without any running water, Butch remembers his mother providing three meals a day and accomplishing so much with so little; so much that he still has a hard time figuring out how she raised his family.

“I always remember taking a bath, my mom cooking or doing laundry,” he recalled. “I wondered, ‘How did she get all of that water?’

“Our neighbors next door had a well and we as little kids would help cart water they shared. That enabled us to take baths and we would be so proud to come back with buckets full of water. It was a full-time job just feeding us, clothing us, bathing us.”

Butch remembers the poverty.

“Oh yes, I felt it as a child,” said Butch, who found ways to share money with his parents, including when he would send home part of his monthly allowance earned while attending the Naval Academy. Today, he shares those childhood stories, especially to children who may still feel the want his family once felt. “I was the oldest and so much of my siblings’ clothing were hand-me-downs. I remember I had shoes that wore out pretty quickly. I would later tell people that I would walk about with flapping shoes.

“The diet was a poor person’s diet: carbs, fats; not a lot of fresh vegetables. The vegetables that we had, collard greens, which were not that nutritional but prevalent in the southern black community.

“Meats were chicken and poor cuts of pork. I loved ham, but we did not have it often because it was on the expensive side. The cereals that we had were puffed wheat and puffed rice. I’d dream of having cornflakes.



**This drawing by Lloyd signified the times that he would take risks in his young life, including climbing out on a branch of cherry tree near Pumphrey, Maryland.**

“I used to dream about the day I could open a refrigerator or cupboards and find name-brand stuff, not necessarily to eat it but simply see it there. Today’s teachers will say, ‘we are so glad you say that because we have a lot of kids come to school hungry.’”

Despite these difficulties, Butch has fond memories of his siblings, especially his brother, Michael, who was born 10 months after him, and his sister Deborah, who was two years younger.

Because of their closeness in ages, Butch and Michael were practically inseparable and even today are each other’s best friends.

“People thought we were twins,” recalled Butch, who admitted they would get in trouble at times. “We probably interacted too much when there was supposed to be no talking and all that kind of stuff.”

And because they shared a bed for their first 18 years, Michael still has memories of an athletic Butch, who found ways of getting out of bed.

“We used to have a bed that was low to the ground until my mother found out if we were in the higher bed, we wouldn’t get off,” he recalled. “But Butch figured out how to get down and go ahead and do the things he wanted to do. My mother would come in the room, and he’d shimmy back up in the bed. I was amazed how he did that. But he’s always been one of the people to figure out how to go ahead and do things to make it happen.”

Michael was also aware of how little the family had, but said his parents instilled an “if there’s a will, there’s a way” philosophy in their children.

“They shared verses that were biblical and instilled in us, so that we would always hold each other accountable to those things and always do the best that you can do,” he recalled. “And if we didn’t get the result we wanted, the next question was, did we do our best? And if we didn’t, how can we do better the next day?”

“I watched Butch use those same principles, time and time, again, for many types of things and I would follow him.”

## Play Days

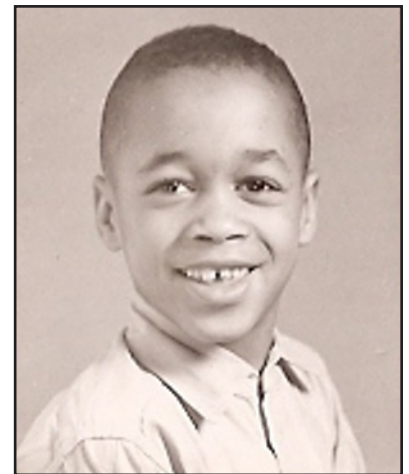
Athletics also played a big part in the “Keaser Boys” as they were known in childhood.

“My dad always said he wanted us to have a healthy mind and one way to do that was to have it encased in a healthy body that was fit,” Butch recalled. “He would actually have us experience all different kinds of sports. But he did a little bit of boxing. So we did boxing, some gymnastic moves, push-ups, and copied (professional) wrestling on TV.”

Most of the time Butch would wrestle with Michael. Sometimes he used his sister Deborah as a substitute ... until it got a little too rough.

“My sister would be my partner a few times over the years,” Butch said. “One time my dad came home and her feet had gone through a smashed window. I was doing a throw thing when she went flying and bounced over the couch into the window. Blood was squirting out of her shoulder. My dad had to stop the bleeding and said, ‘Don’t touch your sister anymore.’ That was the last time I did that, but she was my buddy.”

“As a young child I wanted to do everything my brothers did,” Deborah said. “I often looked to them for guidance and followed their lead. It was two of them so that meant that they knew twice as much. They normally were always protective of me. My Dad would say to them, ‘Always look out for your Sisters.’”



Lloyd “Butch” Keaser, 1957



“Dad cherished his family,” added Deborah. “He would say, ‘Some people drive big fancy cars. Some people build big fancy houses. I’m going to build a family.’ Even as a child, I recognized I was a part of something special.”

Butch said the neighborhood was a typical one where kids played typical children’s games. But he said they eventually moved to another home, where a former sand pit had filled with water, where people would swim. Butch was not one of them.

“We watched, as kids, people pulling probably close to a dozen people out of the water, who were dead,” he recalled. “Just seeing the grotesque look at the faces and stuff. I didn’t want any part of water. I had a fear of water and still do to a certain extent. It caused problems for me when I was at the Naval Academy.”

Butch still has two other siblings who are still alive: Angela and Clyde, who were born in 1959 and 1965, respectively. He also had two siblings who have passed away, Ruth, who was born in 1955 and died in 2012, and Dortha, who was only three months old when she died in 1953.

“She died of jaundice of the liver,” recalled Butch, who was just three years old at the time. “I remember people crying all of the time. My mom was crying and had a hard time. It was unsettling as a kid.”

So too was the racism that Butch and his family encountered growing up in that era and community.

“I didn’t know a white person until I was in seventh grade,” recalled Butch. (He does note that a handful of white kids played on his little league baseball teams. They did not practice with the black kids, but played in some of the games.)

“We had our own elementary school which was the third site of the school that was originally founded by Julius Rosenwall, former head of Sears Roebuck, and Booker T. Washington,” he said. “They were trying to build schools in black communities throughout the country. My school was also where my dad went to school.”

## Overcoming Sin of Segregation

Butch witnessed the economic and social differences between his hometown and the two white communities — Linthicum Heights and Brooklyn Park — that sandwiched Pumphrey. For example, those towns had paved roads compared to the dirt and gravel roads of Pumphrey.

Linthicum Heights and Brooklyn Park were neighborhoods that he avoided walking through.

“You’d see our guys coming back through one of those neighborhoods, all bloodied and stuff, because they’d been jumped,” said Butch, who also recalls the racism he found at a Woolworths in Baltimore where he would not be served. He found similar situations growing up in the south, including when the family traveled to the Carolinas to visit other family members and saw “Whites Only” restrooms.

“One time we stopped to get gasoline and my uncle wanted to use the men’s room. He came back out, cursing up a storm and spun off in our car. Then, we’d pull off to the side of the road, get out of the car, go in the woods and do our business.”



Originally a railroad stop in the late 1800s, Pumphrey, Maryland, is now an unincorporated community in Anne Arundel County. It still features Lloyd Keaser’s elementary school that now serves as a community center, which bears his name.

Butch also has memories of an uncle beaten to death in a local jail and another uncle who drowned in a pool in a white community, “where he was a handyman and didn’t like to swim.”

Butch added that the impact of racism was not necessarily a direct interaction with people who hurled insults at him, but things like the denied access to movies and other things.

“They were things right next door within eyesight of the house,” he remembered.

Butch said his parents helped him and his siblings deal with such racism; something that he relies on today.

“My mom and dad always stressed that you judge each person as an individual,” he said. “Yes, we had those (racist) circumstances there. But still, how do you judge? Treat everybody as we want them to treat us.

“We were not treated as equals, but I guess I developed some coping skills. I don’t know who said it but this saying it just latched on to me: ‘If you are looking for racism, you’ll find it.’ My assumption in life has always been everybody has good intent until they prove me wrong. That’s the way I interact with them. I go the other way, assuming that they have no ill intent.”

Lloyd dealt with being a minority in many of his future communities. He attended a high school where blacks made up just 13 percent of the total enrollment and he was just one of 26 out of 4200 total Midshipmen (.06 percent) to attend the Naval Academy in 1968. He later became a U.S. Marine when only 1.2 percent of the officers were black and was also one of a few African-Americans at IBM where he worked for 29 years in the IT world.

“I still see African Americans and others of color facing systemic challenges as well as viewpoints that have not changed over the decades,” he said. “What I do see is that there has been substantial change in many in areas of acceptance of interracial relationships and people of color as being deserving of equitable treatment.

“During my adult life, I believe there has been a shift of at least 30 to 40 percent of the U.S. population towards what Martin Luther King sought. As evidenced by George Floyd, my neighborhood and others in the U.S. recently, we still have a good ways to go. I do not believe that day will come in my lifetime. Yet, I am still hopeful.”

## **Pumphrey was More Than Home**

Despite the segregation of his youth, Keaser’s memories growing up in Pumphrey — made up of about 300 families — are special and he is overwhelmingly fond of it and of other black communities of that time. He often travels to Pumphrey, where he still has family members, and is on the board of directors of the Lloyd Keaser Community Center, which was his elementary school.

“When you are poor, you are not going to have a good childhood, but it goes beyond material things,” he said. “It was almost like we were against the world. We banded together and had a real good environment within that bubble. Outside that community, the racism was more prevalent.

“When I look back on my childhood, I treasure the moments with people in the community and my peer group. I was aware of the lack of equality, that we were not allowed to go places because of the color of our skin. But I believe that I and other members of the community moved forward in life, in spite of those inequalities.”

Eventually school integration came to his community. Otherwise he would have needed to travel 25 miles one way to attend a black segregated high school in Annapolis, Maryland. Once at Brooklyn Park High School, his athletic ability in soccer and wrestling earned him all-county honors and also helped him gain respect. But he did not want to be considered just an athlete.

“Of all my high school accomplishments, the biggest thing was not my wrestling accomplishments,” he said. “It was winning the math award and being the top math student my senior year and being in the National Honor Society throughout my high school years. I wanted to be judged as just a normal person. In so many cases back





Lloyd Keaser (far right) was honored by his hometown in 1976 after he won an Olympic medal. He was joined by his high school teammate Larry Avery, who was an All-American at Michigan State and an alternate on the United States Olympic team that summer in Montreal, Canada.

then, African Americans felt they were being viewed as athletes and workers and that stuff and not really for having intellect.”

Butch’s leadership, which later earned him entry into the Naval Academy, also played a big part in his relationship with his siblings. That included a time in 1990 when he brought his siblings together to purchase their mother a home.

“As kids, we wanted him to represent us,” Michael said. “He would go to our parents, and he would make it happen early. “He was always our spokesperson, but that was the type of person that he was, and he’s still that same type of person today. Well, he’s always putting others’ needs beyond his own and he’s always been a person that’s willing to help people in any way he can.”



## Lloyd “Butch” Keaser, Etched in Stone Part II – Wrestling gave him a future

**T**here was a natural toughness that Lloyd “Butch” Keaser developed as he grew up in Pumphrey, Maryland, especially when he chopped wood or sawed logs with his brother Michael as a way to heat their second home at age 11. They also picked laurel, a plant that was common in Maryland and used for floral arrangements.

“We had to navigate the streams and hills, where it grew,” recalled Keaser. “We picked it in all kinds of weather and I did it all through high school, which allowed me to buy a letter sweater.”

And there were plenty of honors to put on that sweater for the future World champion and Olympic medalist, especially in wrestling. Keaser won three county and two regional championships between 1965-68, at a time Maryland did not offer state championships ... and for a school (Brooklyn Park High) that eventually closed in 1990 ... and did not integrate until the early-1960s.

By that time, the smallish Keaser, who only weighed 103 pounds when he first started wrestling as a high school

freshman in 1965, had developed a tough reputation that he showed in other sports like baseball and soccer ... and playing around with friends.

“As I got older, (my friends and I) would see who could take the toughest punch,” he recalled. “You would stand there and a guy would punch you in the gut and then you’d do the same to him. Each time they would increase the intensity of the punch. The person who crumpled over first would lose.”

Such moments were brought up as he got into organized sports as a child.

“Coaches would ask who’s the toughest and friends would point to me,” he recalled. “That’s how I became a catcher. I wanted to play outfield.”

Keaser’s entry into wrestling didn’t come as easy.

“The reason why I got into (amateur) wrestling is that I got my butt kicked in backstreet wrestling,” laughed Keaser, recalling a time when he was about to “tap out” a friend with a choke hold he learned watching professional wrestling on TV, only to be reversed to his back and lead to him tapping out.

“I said, ‘How’d you do that?’ He said, ‘I used a move called the switch.’ And I said, What is that? So he told me he learned it on the wrestling team. I didn’t have a clue that we had a wrestling team. So I said, Okay, I’m going out for the team.”

But Keaser’s earliest results were not good as he struggled winning and dealing with making weight.

“I got my butt kicked all over the place ... and I tried to quit the team because I didn’t believe I had what it took to wrestle.”

And Butch nearly did quit even after his coach tried to change his mind by saying “you have to walk before you run” and pointed out that the wrestlers who beat him were more experienced.

“I said, ‘Nah, that’s it. I’m done,’” he recalled. “I started packing my stuff in the locker room, but I looked up and I saw a piece of paper that had the wrestling schedule. I looked at the schedule and said, ‘Whoa, I stopped packing and told my coach I’m coming back out.’ The reason is I saw we’re going to wrestle School for the Blind next.”

“And guess what finally happened for me? (That blind wrestler) kicked my butt and so I said, coach, this is it, I’m done. I can’t beat a blind guy.”

“My coach told me that wrestler was a conference champion and said you don’t need to see to know how to wrestle. He made me aware that you beat guys wrestling by feel and that when you wrestle by feel, it cuts down on your reaction time to your opponent. He sold me on that as we practiced with a blindfold at times ... and I didn’t lose any more duals the rest of the year.”



**Lloyd Keaser (right) and his brother Michael (10 months younger) both excelled on the wrestling mat at Brooklyn Park High School.**



## All-Around Athlete & Student

Keaser also played soccer and baseball in high school, soccer at Navy and eventually chose to focus on wrestling as a sophomore at Navy during a time when college freshmen were ineligible to compete.

“I chose wrestling because it was an individual sport,” Keaser said. “The only person who could be blamed was me. In a team sport, you can blame others.”

Among the wrestling coaches who had the most impact on him in high school was Dick Purdy, who started coaching Keaser, then a sophomore.

“He sat down and told me that I could become an All-American,” recalled Keaser, who finished 72-9 as a high school wrestler ... and even considered trying out for the 1968 Olympic team as a high school senior ... even though he had never wrestled freestyle.

“I asked him, what is the best thing you can do in the sport? He said I could become an Olympic champion or World champion and I said, What’s that mean? I had no idea.”

Coach Purdy had contacts with some of the best college and national wrestling coaches around the area, like three-time NCAA champion and Hall of Fame Distinguished Member Ed Peery of Navy who invited Keaser to an Olympic developmental camp in Pennsylvania.

“I was learning (freestyle), learning the rules and whatever,” he said. “So I wrestled and won the South Atlantic AAU tournament, which qualified me for the Olympic regional qualifying tournament ... which I got third. I was wrestling one guy and kept taking him down, but he still beat me because I was doing a little dump and he would expose (my back). That’s OK because I’m not sure I could have afforded to go farther.”

Purdy today remembers meeting Keaser and taking pride in the young Keaser, “who called coaches ‘Sir,’” and took a lot of pride in his family.

“He came from a loving family and from a poorer neighborhood, yet he and his sister and brother came to school with starched clean clothes every day,” Purdy said. “It was amazing how close and how dedicated they are. It was a family that took a lot of pride in themselves.”

Purdy is still amazed that Lloyd would win a World championship less than 10 years after taking up the sport.

“If you figure he didn’t start wrestling until his freshman year of high school, that was amazing,” Purdy said. “He



In addition to earning all-county honors in wrestling, Lloyd Keaser also starred in soccer and baseball at Brooklyn Park High School, where he was also in the National Honor Society for all four years and served as president of Brooklyn Park’s Varsity Club as a senior.

had a lot of personal drive, a lot of personal dedication in a sport that allowed him to grow.

“Butch was a humble athlete. A gentleman would never boast and nobody would know, unless you knew, how much he accomplished. He showed tremendous growth and leverage. I never saw him put on his back or lose control. He always had so much balance.”

That balance showed up in many of Keaser’s high school moments, including academically as he excelled in chemistry, physics and math. Keaser really took pride in taking it upon himself to expand his knowledge. He still remembers a time when he thought he discovered a math formula.

“I showed my teacher that I had about seven pages of these formulas and I was so proud,” Keaser recalled. “He gave me an A plus on the paper, but said, ‘I hate to break it to you but that formula already exists.’ Despite that disappointment, the next thing I know I’m on stage when it was announced that I was receiving the math award, I was stunned.”

Such athletic and academic honors soon earned him an invite to attend the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, which is 30 miles south of his hometown.

In a 1967 recommendation letter from H. Lewis Alsobrook of Brooklyn Park High School to U.S. Senator Daniel Brewster, the school administrator wrote: “As an individual, Lloyd is equally outstanding. He is a natural leader-liked by all, and I do not know of anyone, either student or teacher, who has ever said anything derogatory about Lloyd. During his years at Brooklyn Park High School, Lloyd has brought nothing but honor to his school. Given the opportunity, I am sure Lloyd would bring honor to the Naval Academy, the Navy and to his country. He is a kind person, and I highly recommend him for your consideration.”

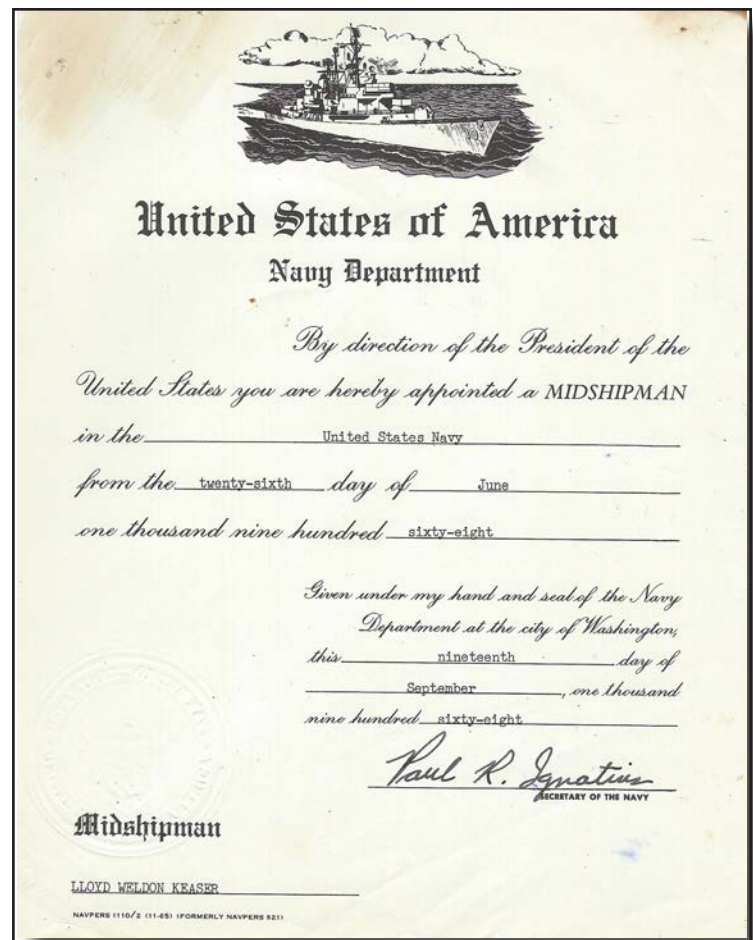
“I’d always dreamed about being a Marine for several reasons, for my country, protecting my family, my community,” said Keaser, who understood the phrase about the Marines looking for “a few good men.” “I wanted to be in the service branch that was the most challenging.”

## A Navy Man

Keaser earned the appointment to Annapolis and would eventually graduate from the academy with on and off-the-mat honors: winning three EIWA championships, including 1971 when he was named the Outstanding Wrestler and twice earning NCAA All-American honors, finishing fourth in 1971 and third in 1972 while also earning honors like the Naval Academy’s 1972 “NAAA Sword for Men,” an award “Presented to the midshipman of the graduating class declared by the Association’s Athletic Committee to have personally excelled in athletics during his years of varsity competition.”

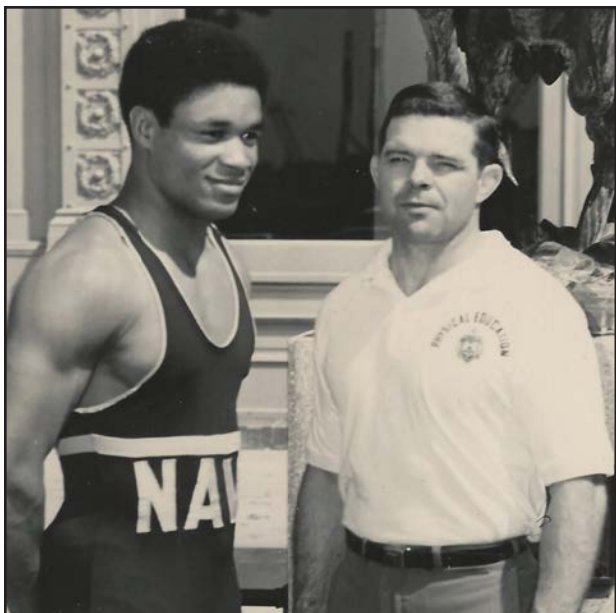
But Keaser had a tough start to his college life.

“I almost flunked out my freshman year,” said Keaser, who said he had a 1.5 grade point average after his first semester. And even though this came at a time when the NCAA ruled freshmen ineligible to compete, he still



Lloyd Keaser’s appointment to become a Navy Midshipman.





Lloyd Keaser (left) first met his Navy coach Ed Peery in high school. Peery, a Distinguished Member of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, helped Keaser win three EIWA titles and two All-American honors before also helping him train for the 1976 Olympics.

had trouble getting down to 130 pounds for his freshman team ... at the same time he was tackling the academic, military and social demands of the academy while also playing on the freshman soccer team.

“We were required to go to the meals and I wouldn’t eat. It was a mess,” he recalled. “I couldn’t use my body, my legs kept locking up and I told my coach, I can’t do this anymore, and I was flunking out of the Naval Academy. It was horrible. I would come back to the room and try to get my studies. I just couldn’t do it.”

Things got better when he decided to move up to 142 pounds, but he had other issues to face. That included overcoming his fear of water and learning how to swim, an obvious necessity for being in the Navy or Marines.

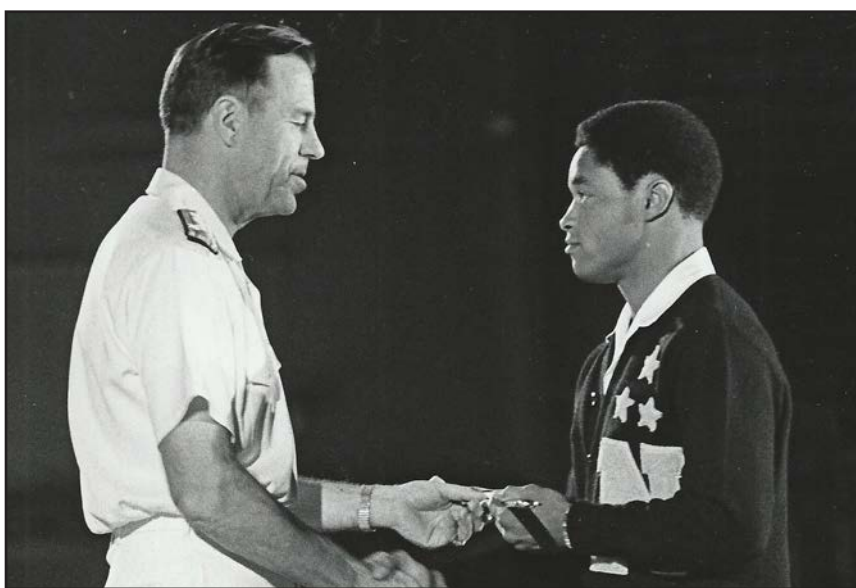
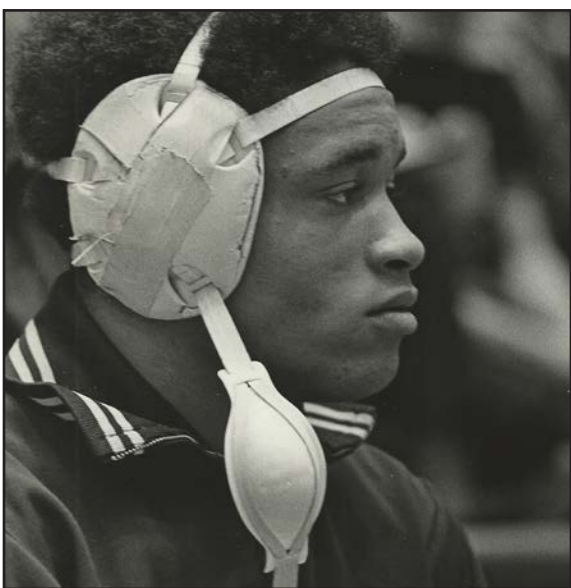
“I got to learn the crawl in freestyle swimming, but I didn’t know how to breathe,” he said. “I was able to swim 100 meters, but could not swim the second 100 and I sank to the bottom because I ran out of breath. They had to pull me out.”

“They told me to stay on top of the water the best way I could and put me on my back. I could swim with a little backstroke for 20 minutes. I was worried about my swimming, but I believe I had all the help.”

That included his father, who offered some candid advice to his oldest son.

“He said, ‘You know, Jesus didn’t quit. You got it,’” recalled Keaser, who also remembered some academic advice he took from his high school days.

“Every class I found that no matter how unreal something may be, if you work towards it and you take the advice of people who know how to navigate that path, you maximize where you can go. My brother (Michael) told me the key to my success had always been that if I say this will work, I will do that.”



Lloyd Keaser compiled a 54-6-1 record in three years of wrestling at Navy, during a time when freshmen were ineligible to compete. He would later be presented the Naval Academy Athletic Association Sword by Superintendent Admiral James Calvert.



**Left:** Lloyd was among “The Duzen,” the largest group of African Americans to graduate from the Naval Academy at that time (1972). **Left to right:** 1st Row: Earl Smith, Edwin Burnette, Lloyd Keaser, Steven Tindall, Walter Crump, Charles Rucks. 2nd Row: Julius McMillan, Alfred Coleman JR., Ronald Staton, Eugene Lovely, Matthew Mason III, Nelson Jones  
**Right:** During his time in Annapolis, Lloyd trained to become a Marine Corps pilot before his international wrestling opportunities put his military career on hold.

Keaser’s time in the Academy also came at a time when the United States was dealing with a lot of racial unrest. Martin Luther King had been murdered in April of 1968 and Lloyd was one of just 26 black students among the 4,300 Midshipmen at the Academy. He was well aware of the racism that existed at that time, but felt that he could help change the mindset of society.

“We probably had more people in our (Pumphrey) community with the mindset of Martin Luther King, far more than Malcolm X,” said Keaser. “I looked at it as an opportunity to represent the black community in an environment that normally would be out of our reach and not available to us. People have told me that I helped (white people understand) because they’d say I was the first black person they had ever been around.”

Keaser also developed a brotherhood with many Midshipmen on the wrestling team, a group that remains in contact. One is Tommy Schuler, who competed for Navy from 1970-72 and was a three-time EIWA champion at 118 pounds.

“Butch never flew the race flag when he was at the Naval Academy,” said Schuler. “Butch is one of the toughest guys and about the most gracious guy I’ve ever met. How you marry up toughness and graciousness is a combination I’ve never heard. But he did. And he knew it. I never saw Butch intimidated about his identity.”

Keaser eventually regained his wrestling mindset and it helped him compile a 54-6-1 collegiate record while also developing a reputation for pinning. At one point he pinned 20 out of 22 straight opponents (in high school).

Unfortunately, he came up short in his attempt to win an NCAA championship.

In 1971, Keaser lost by referee’s decision in overtime to eventual champ Darrell Keller of Oklahoma State in the semifinals and settled for fourth when he lost the consolation final, 4-2, to Leandro Torres of Cal Poly. One year later, Keaser claimed third place after he lost 3-2 to eventual champ Tom Milkovich of Michigan State in the semifinals.

“I live by the little bit of advice my father and coaches gave me back in the day: because you lose, doesn’t mean that you failed. And many times a loss can be one of the best things that could possibly happen for you,” he said. “The key is to learn from that loss. So I knew I was close. I was disappointed, but I just wanted to continue to grow into sport and see how far I can go.”



## The World Awaits

Keaser's bad luck on the college mats turned to good luck in the freestyle world when one of America's top-eight wrestlers, who made up the "ladder" qualification system of the time, did not make weight at 149.5 pounds. That allowed Keaser to join that group and nearly reach the top when he reached the finals of the 1972 Olympic Trials ... before losing 22-0 and 11-0 to eventual gold medalist Dan Gable.

"(Gable) was an idol of mine and I used some of the things that he had used," said Keaser, who excelled as a wrestler with an arm drag to a heel pick and fireman's carry. "I went after him but it felt surreal. His positioning was unbelievable, but his pressure was not overwhelming. He wasn't tight. He had this loose feeling, which was different for me. I was amazed by it."

Keaser's 1972 Olympic attempt also caught the eyes of the Marine commander of the Quantico training base, where Keaser was going to be assigned after graduating from the academy. The Olympic Committee also took notice as it was looking for someone from the United States to compete at the Tbilisi tournament as part of a cultural exchange with Russia. Considered a mini World Championship at the time, the event was held in January 1973.

"The Olympic Committee went to the Commandant of the Marine Corps and asked if I could go to Russia," Keaser recalls. "I hadn't been on the mat since the Olympic Trials and we were wrestling nine-minute matches. There is a photo of me where my coaches are holding me up as I'm sucking in (air). I couldn't breathe but I started to get in better shape for every match of the tournament."

Keaser eventually claimed third, which set his mind on even bigger things in 1973.

"There's a chance that if I hadn't been on that trip, that I may not have progressed as far as I did," he said.

## The Best of Times, the Worst of Times

1973 was indeed a big year for Keaser, on and off the mat for positive and negative reasons. Before he made his way to Tehran, Iran for the 1973 World Championships, he planned to get married in late July. But a few weeks earlier, his 43-year-old father died after suffering a stroke.

"He was a truck driver, a big guy, about six feet and 240 pounds," Keaser recalls. "He started having seizures and doctors put him on medication. But his weight dropped to 180 pounds and he changed jobs. One time I came home from school and saw him pushing a mop. It was hard to watch. He was doing his job, which he wanted. But he was a broken man because he could not do the normal things he would do."

"Finally, I remember I came home for the holidays as did Michael, who was in the Air Force. My mom came down and says she's going to take dad to the hospital. So we went upstairs and he didn't want to go," Lloyd remembers. "It finally got to a point where he couldn't fight us and we called the ambulance. They took him to the hospital and he was struggling. But the doctor said, 'You guys can go home. It looks like things will be okay.'"



Lloyd Keaser (right) competed in both freestyle and Greco-Roman after he graduated, but it was a third-place finish at the prestigious Tbilisi tournament in Russia (where he was coached by Hall of Fame Distinguished Members Jim Peckham and Bill Wieck, below) in 1973 that caught the attention of the American wrestling community.



“The next morning, we got a call that he had died,” he says. “I was actually at a wrestling clinic at Navy, where coach Peery and coach Purdy came in with a strange look on their faces. I thought I had done something wrong, but they told me my dad had died. I hopped in the car and drove home just crying all the way.”

Butch admitted he focused on winning a World championship for his father, who was also going to be the best man at his wedding.

“I pinched myself 1000 times to believe that it was real,” Butch said. “And I had that gnawing ache that my father could not witness it.”

Butch also had to put his assignment of training officers on hold to focus on training for the World Championships, which took place in September of that year.

Eventually, Keaser found himself in the gold medal match with the Soviet Union’s Nasrula Nasrulaev, who led 10-1 after the second of three periods.

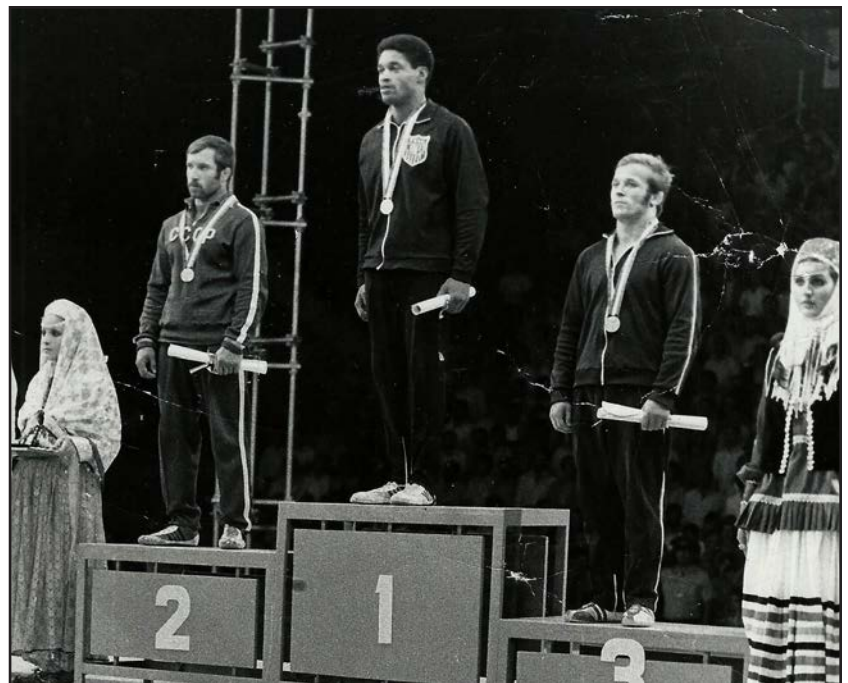
“I was sitting in my corner, saying, ‘Man, I’m embarrassing myself, Pumphrey, Brooklyn Park, the Marine Corps, and the United States.’ I said, ‘I’ve got to score a point here, a point there and do something.’”

Keaser said he also heard something among the thousands of Iranian fans who pack the soccer stadium in Tehran, Iran.

“I started hearing, ‘Keaser’ ... bump, bump, bump ... sort of like a football game where fans are chanting and



Butch’s father Lloyd (right, with wife Almedia in 1971) sadly did not get a chance to see his son make history in 1973 as the former truck driver died earlier in the year.



Butch Keaser reached the top step of the award podium at the first-ever World Cup in 1973 (when he beat future Russian rival Pavel Pinigin) in Toledo, Ohio. Later that year, Keaser rallied from a 10-1 third-period deficit to beat the Soviet Union’s Nasrula Nasrulaev to become the first black American to win a gold medal at the World Championships in Iran.



rocking,” he recalled. “And all sudden, I’m getting goosebumps thinking about how I just felt this charge going through my body.

“I’m sitting in the corner. I couldn’t wait to get back out there. I scored two points here, a point there, two points here, a point there and the final two points came with a few seconds before the buzzer.”

Keaser had actually tied the match, 10-10, but earned the World championship because he had fewer “black marks” than the Russian.

“Then the Iranians ran up to the mat, grabbed me and put me on their shoulders and ran me around the middle of the soccer stadium, chanting ‘Keaser’ while I bounced around on their shoulders and arms.”

Keaser said he did not know what got the Iranian fans so excited for him when he was down. He eventually learned that his first wife, Mary, became so upset by seeing him lose that she found an Iranian cheerleader and started the chant.

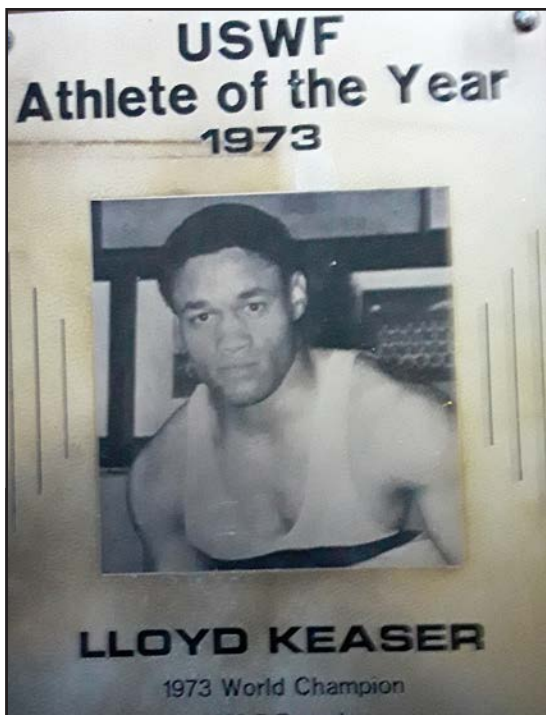
“When it was over, we were walking back to the International Hotel and a group of 40 plus walked up to me and one of them said, ‘Keaser, you are good, a damn good World champ.’ Then he walked over to my wife, raised her hand and said, ‘You are a champion with the World champion.’

“Everybody gave her a little ovation in the street. It was just a goosebumps moment,” he remembers. “I tell the story all the time of how important teamwork is. In that moment if she had not done that, I probably would not be a World champion right now.”

Unfortunately, as historic as the moment was for American international wrestling — he also became just the fifth all-time American, joining Rick Sanders (1969), Fred Fozzard (1969), Wayne Wells (1970) and Dan Gable (1971) — he got little notice back in the states. In fact, even Keaser thought little about it.

“I saw one article about it that lasted three lines, compared to when I was traveling in Russia, where they would have crowds waiting for the train for when Americans came,” Keaser recalled. “In Poland, my picture was on the front page of the newspaper and they would show my entire match on the evening news.

“Maybe 15 years ago, my aunt in Oregon saw my name being mentioned in a Jeopardy-type question in one of the game show questions that asked, ‘Who was the first African American to win a World championship in wrestling?’ I didn’t know that.”

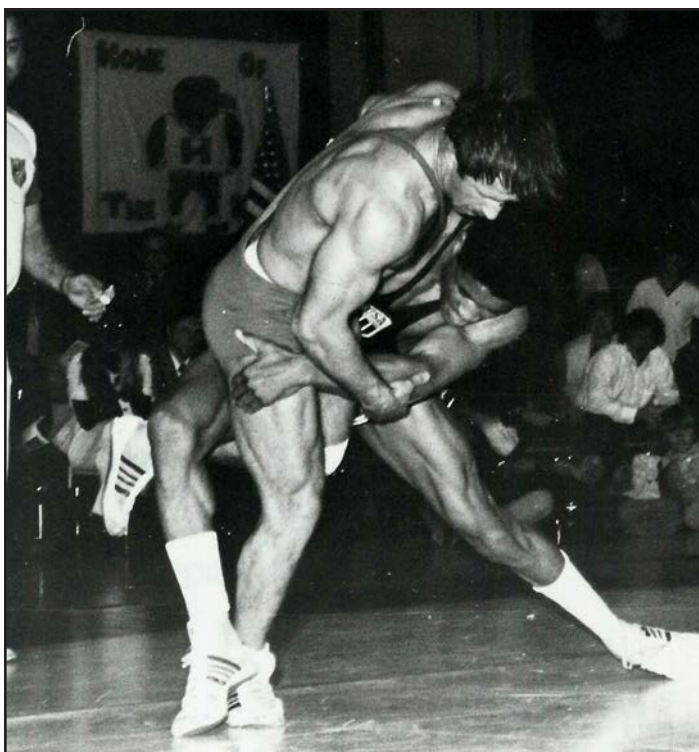


Lloyd Keaser was honored by the United States Wrestling Federation and Amateur Wrestling News for winning a World Championship in 1973. But the hype that came with such an honor was seen more internationally in Poland, where the U.S. team toured in 1974.



Lloyd Keaser  
Fot. „PS” Janusz Szewiński





As he prepared for the 1976 Olympics, Lloyd Keaser represented the United States in the 1973 and 1975 World Championships and in many exhibitions against Russia.

But Keaser will never forget being on the medal stand and receiving the gold medal.

“Words can’t describe what that feels like,” he said. “I get goosebumps now just describing it and it’s a pinch-me moment. I got emotional at that time thinking, ‘I wish dad could see me.’ I’m sure he was looking down on me.”

## More than Misfits

Keaser would get another chance to wrestle in the World Championships in 1975, but not before he spent 1974 as a Weapons Platoon Commander in a Rifle Company that trained at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina and at another base in Puerto Rico.

At first the group of men tested his leadership when only half showed up for his first inspection.

“I didn’t know what I was supposed to be doing,” Keaser admitted. “But I told them, ‘Believe me, by tomorrow, I will know what I’m doing and we’re going to have an inspection then.’”

Keaser eventually started connecting

with his men, who were considered “misfits” by society, including creating contests among the men, like who could take apart blind-folded, clean and put their machine guns back together again the fastest.

And once members of his squad learned that he was a World champion in wrestling, they wanted a go against their leader. Keaser was hesitant at first, not wanting to go against military rules regarding officers and enlisted men. But eventually his colonel allowed such a moment and Keaser found himself surrounded by several hundred Marines on a beach in Puerto Rico.

“I tossed one right to his back and he said, ‘Damn, let me go again,’” recalled Keaser. “Soon there were at least 20 men lining up to take me on, including one radio operator who was built like the football player Herschel Walker.

“He came at me and hit me and I thought I was getting hit by a tank. And so I locked around his waist and did a belly to belly throw as we hit the ground. And I didn’t quite turn on my back. I’m doing a high bridge and put him on his back.”

Soon it was over and he had the respect of his men.

“The interesting thing was that, in many cases, when I was interacting with the guys, there was a time when I felt they would look at me and say, ‘Man, I wish I could get you behind the barn or something like that.’ They were questioning and wanted to debate or whatever. But after our time on the beach, it was not a problem.”

But Keaser also knew his time with these men would be short and he would move on. But nearly 45 years later, he has not forgotten those men. At one point during this interview, Keaser broke down in tears and was unable

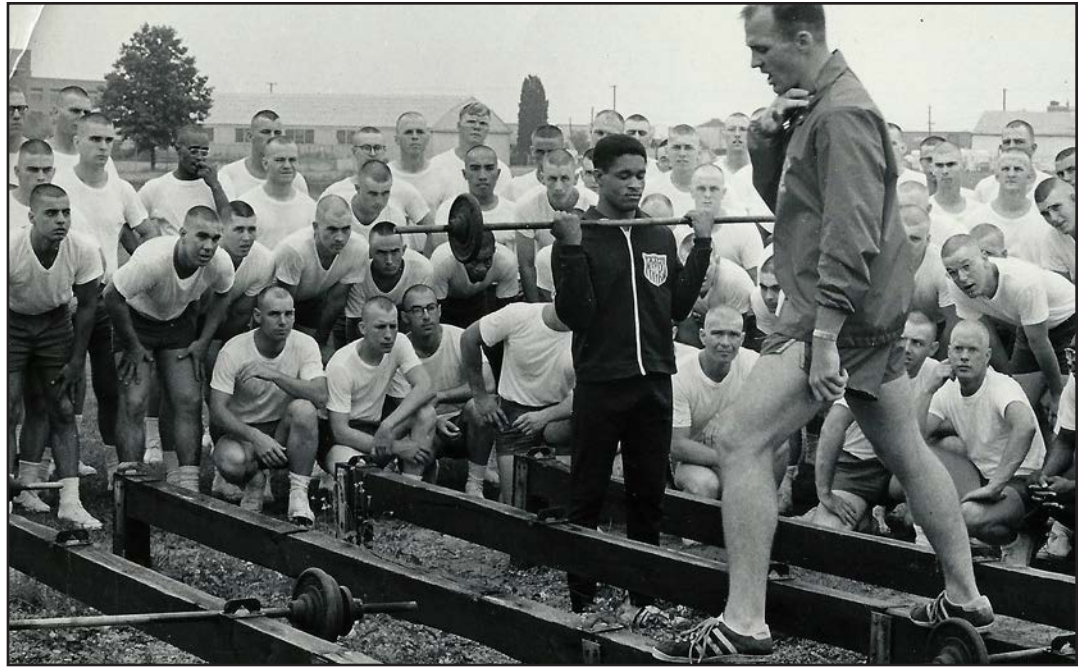


U.S. Marine Lloyd Keaser, 1974



to speak for over two minutes as he thought about that time and his men.

“When they found that I was leaving, probably 15 to 20 percent of the guys were crying. And I asked them what’s the deal and they felt that they were being cheated,” said Keaser as his voice faded. “To watch these guys who are pretty tough or who people don’t want to meet on the street, to see them vulnerable and showing their emotions in a setting where others or their peers could see it, too, that was an overwhelming experience.”



In 1975, Lloyd Keaser served as a P.E. instructor at the U.S. Marines Officer’s Training School in Quantico, Virginia.

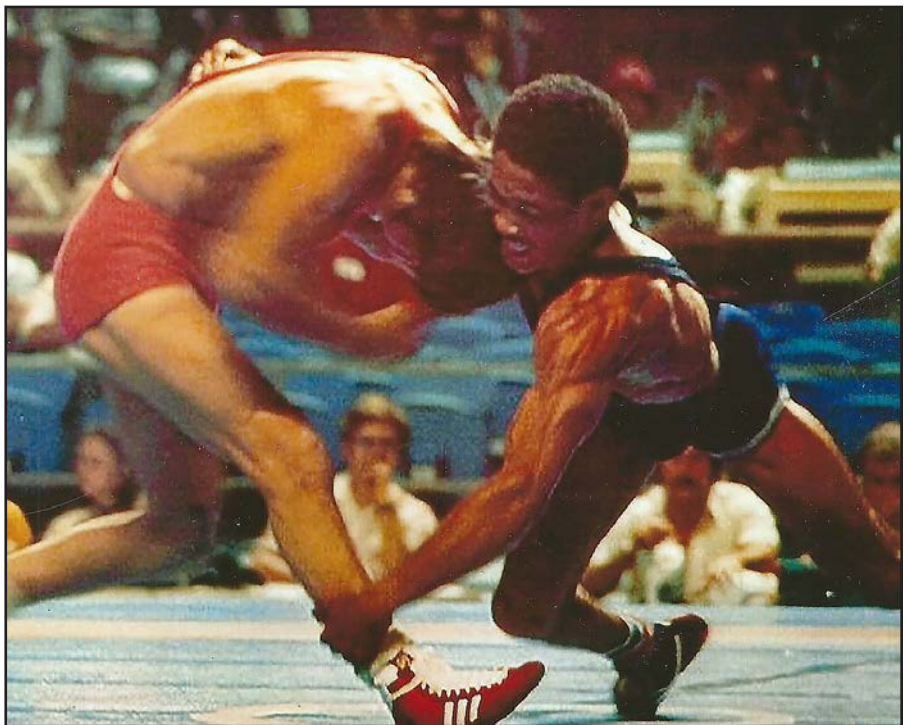
## Olympic Disappointment Becomes Life-long Friendship

Keaser knew that winning an Olympic championship would be the highest honor he could earn, which is why he chose to return to the mat. The Marines also wanted him to compete in Montreal in 1976 so they asked him where he wanted to train. After considering many different locations around the country, he chose to return to the Naval Academy to prepare for the 1975 World Championships.

Keaser did compete again at the World Championships in Minsk, Russia. Unfortunately, there would be no medal for the American, who lost to eventual champion Pavel Pinigin of the Soviet Union. It was also the continuing of a bit of a rivalry between the Russian and Keaser. It was a rivalry that started in Tbilisi in the Soviet Union in 1973 and intensified later that year when the American beat Pinegin at the 1973 World Cup in Toledo, Ohio.

“I started attacking Lloyd and felt like I was hitting a stone wall,” said Pinigin through a translator from his home in Russia. “I was surprised and shocked. Keaser seemed like a completely different man and I felt that I could not do anything against him.”

And one year later, the two wrestlers met on an even bigger stage: the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, Canada, where



Lloyd Keaser’s famous “ankle pick” helped him dominate his first six foes at the 1976 Olympics to earn a spot in the gold medal match in Montreal.





There was some confusion in Lloyd Keaser's corner at the 1976 Olympics, where he was coached by Hall of Fame Distinguished Members Wayne Baughman (left) and Dan Gable and was forced to settle for a silver medal after losing to Russia's Pavel Pinigin.

Keaser represented the United States after he defeated the likes of Larry Morgan and Chuck Yagla to make the Olympic team.

Keaser had an excellent chance of earning a gold medal by winning his first six matches in Montreal and had fewer black marks than the Russian heading into the gold medal match. That included a DQ win over Japan's Yasaburo Sugawara in the round robin while Pinigin wrestled to a 5-5 tie with Sugawara.

Because of the black mark system, Keaser could have won the championship as long as he did not lose by more than eight points. The Russian won 12-1. Keaser mistakenly thought he could lose by 12 points and still win a gold medal. In the end, Keaser had to settle for the silver medal.

"For a long time, it was hard for me to look at it because it was such a disappointment, what could have been or whatever," said Keaser, who did make history by becoming the first African-American wrestler to earn an Olympic medal. "People said, well, you won a silver medal, but the circumstances around me just didn't sit with me as well. Over time, I just viewed it as a learning experience that I can share with others so hopefully they don't make the same mistake that I made."

**"(The) 1976 Olympics result) is still a challenge for me ...  
What would happen if I had known? When I do my motivational talks to  
young people, business executives and military leaders today, I talk about it  
all the time. It was fresh in my mind then. It is still fresh."  
— Lloyd "Butch" Keaser**





Lloyd Keaser and Pavel Pinigin were reunited at the 1995 World Championships in Atlanta, where the Russian was a mat official. Then in 2003, Keaser was invited to speak at Pinigin's birthday celebration in his village of Yakut, Siberia.

"It's still a challenge for me, in the 'what if?' What would happen if I had known? I don't know the answer. (The result) could have been the same. But I would love to have known before that. When I do my motivational talks today, I talk about it all the time. So it was fresh in my mind then, this experience is still fresh."

After losing to Keaser at the World Cup, Pinigin said he spent countless hours looking at videotape in preparation of facing Keaser again.

"Lloyd was one step ahead of everyone else (entering the Olympics)," the Russian recalled. "(Winning the gold medal) over Lloyd was a miracle."

Pinigin also said he felt like he had spiritual help from his village of Yakut in Siberia.

"It was a very hot summer and a bear appeared that day (August 31, 1976) in our village," Pinigin recalled. "One of my close relatives faced and killed the bear. Once I returned home, the village presented me the claw of the bear to honor what I accomplished."

It was that love of wrestling amongst the Russians that would also send Keaser to Yakut, Siberia, nearly 30 years later to celebrate the birthday of Pinigin. The two wrestlers had actually seen each other again at the 1995 World Championships in Atlanta, where the Russian was serving as a referee.

"There were so many people who came up and wanted to meet me," recalled Keaser. "It still is a big moment for that village."

Keaser knew that he would be retiring from wrestling after the 1976 Olympics and eventually enter the business world. But he still can't help but think of that younger Lloyd "Butch" Keaser, who had such big dreams in the 1970s.

"I feel like a proud Papa of a son when I think of my younger self," Keaser said. "There's been a lot of experiences that I look at through different lenses, including the 'what if?' But the body of work enabled that guy to be in that spot, which still is special. I feel good about that."

# Lloyd “Butch” Keaser – Etched in Stone

## Part III – Paying It Forward

### *The Man Who Thinks He can* by Walter D. Wintle

*If you think you are beaten, you are;  
If you think you dare not, you don't.  
If you'd like to win, but think you can't  
It's almost a cinch that you won't  
If you think you'll lose, you're lost,  
For out in the world we find  
Success begins with a fellow's will;  
It's all in the state of mind.  
If you think you're outclassed, you are.  
You've got to think high to rise.  
You've got to be sure of yourself before  
You can ever win a prize.  
Life's battles don't always go  
To the stronger or faster man;  
But sooner or later the man who wins  
Is the one who thinks he can.*

**T**his poem, written in 1905 and originally titled, “Thinking,” has provided inspiration for many over the past two centuries. It also served as a common prose that Lloyd “Butch” Keaser actually used, when the World champion and Olympic silver medalist became an accredited motivational speaker, well after he left the wrestling mat for good following the 1976 Summer Games in Montreal.

The reality is that the Naval Academy graduate probably needed to hear these poetic words more as he took on a new life, after completing a historic wrestling career that also included a stint in the U.S. Marines.

For in 1977, four months after the Olympics and shortly after the birth of his son Michael on Jan. 1, he and his first wife, Mary, had to decide on his next step that was as rewarding as his first 26 years on this planet.



After retiring from wrestling in 1976, Lloyd Keaser (left) began a successful 29-year career with IBM, which loaned out the former Olympian and motivational speaker to teach computer skills at the Baltimore Urban League.





**Lloyd Keaser has shared his life and Olympic story with countless adults and children.**

Keaser originally considered joining the FBI, but said that he found his reward in the business world and specifically with another three-letter entity, IBM. He worked 29 years for IBM, beginning with five years as a salesman, a role he never saw himself doing. But he also thought back to his high school days and an aptitude test that suggested he might be good at sales ... and problem solving.

Since leaving the sport, Keaser says one phrase — “helping others” — sums up his life, and that stems from a job fair that he attended as a junior officer in the Marines, that introduced him to IBM as a way to make a living and impact on others.

“They asked me if I knew what they were about. I had no clue,” recalled Keaser, who had graduated from the Naval Academy with a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering. “I told them I wanted a job that challenged me and that I would be around people.

“They said, ‘You just described a marketing rep.’ I said I wasn’t into sales. I thought of used-car salesmen and wanted no part of that job.

“But then they said, ‘If you knew something that would help people, would you want to share it? That’s what we do.’

“I was in heaven. The most challenging problems, which are the worst time for the customer, were the best times for me.”

Keaser knew that he didn’t want to be in management, but that he did want to help people, just as he had helped a weapons platoon of “misfit” Marines in 1974 ... and he used his new career with IBM to reach that level.

“At first I didn’t think I could do it and struggled with the terminology of selling office equipment, but I was able to push through it because of a team approach that IBM provided,” recalled Keaser, who said he eventually loved knocking on doors and getting to learn as much about people’s lives as their business needs.

He also recalls how people were afraid to try out an electric typewriter, which he helped introduce. These early moments served as a metaphor to his life’s philosophy.

“My goal was to get them to push a button,” Keaser recalled. “Once they did, they’d want to push another button. It’s like getting someone to take a first step in doing something. It will lead to something even greater.”



**In 1996, Lloyd “Butch” Keaser was inducted as a Distinguished Member of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in Stillwater, Oklahoma, sharing the moment with friends and family, including his second wife, Cate.**

## **Lloyd has a Voice, a Story**

Within four years, things changed within IBM, which was learning to find other ways of reaching out to a less-advantaged consumer and workforce.

“IBM created a joint effort with Westinghouse in Baltimore and put together an Urban League Informational Training Center to help those who were disadvantaged,” said Keaser, who eventually wrote the curriculum for the Word Processing Component of the program and shared it with local government and business officials. “The average person was a 29-year-old black female with three kids, who was under or never employed and may have dealt with abuses in life. We helped them build their skills, how to dress, interview, make a presentation and taught them word processing, typing and data entry.

“For many of these people, their heads were down when we first met them. After six weeks, their heads are up and they are strutting around.

“I had one lady come to me and started crying because she had gone to a bank and the bank would not cash her check. But the next day she was attending an IBM presentation and was dressed in the manner that we taught and the bank cashed her check. We tried to communicate that people do judge you on outward appearances.”

Keaser earned several awards while working with the Baltimore Urban League for over two years. It was about this time that people believed that he could become a motivational speaker with the company.

“At the Urban League, they learned that I competed in the Games and asked me, ‘Why don’t you speak about your experiences? I said I don’t feel comfortable and don’t want to be tooting my own horn,’ he recalls. “Then they said, ‘Has anyone helped you along the way?’ “I would list several. Then they asked, ‘Wouldn’t you want to do the same for someone else?’”

One of those encouraging him was Cate, who became his second wife in 1991. Lloyd and his first wife, Mary, had divorced in 1986.

“(Cate) has been one of my biggest supporters and she was one of those who said I needed to do public speaking,” recalled Keaser, who later joined a speaker’s association and earned an accreditation for his verbal skills.

Now married nearly 30 years, Lloyd still calls Cate his “soul mate.”



“What I saw in her were the things that really resonate with me, like caring for others” he said. “She led with feelings and picks up on the feelings of others. At times, I might be a little weak in that area. She is good with reaching out to people. Everyone gets a birthday card from her.

“I’m a ‘square’ guy who thinks like an engineer. She is opposite to that, which is a great compliment to her. There will be things around the house that she’ll talk about doing and I may say, ‘I don’t care for that.’ But then when it is done I will say, ‘Wow, that is something else and beyond my imagination.’

“She was athletic when I met her and we have spent time training together to run 5K and 10K races or even go rollerblading. I’ve told her she has the spirit of an Olympian.”

Lloyd did not brag about his wrestling accomplishments to Cate three decades ago.

“When I met him, I was not thinking of (his wrestling medals),” recalled Cate. “I was one of two white people working (at the Urban League), where we were working together. There was something else about Lloyd. He had this sense of confidence, of strength; nothing that I had ever experienced.”

Cate said that Lloyd helped her deal with the realities of a mixed-racial marriage.

“He was more adept at living on both sides than I was,” Cate said. “It was quite challenging at the start for both of us and our families. But we stayed with it and grew tremendously in the process. I remember this interesting conversation that I had with my grandmother.

“She was in a nursing home ... and I introduced (Lloyd) as my friend. She tugged on my skirt and said, ‘Come on down here.’ And then she said, I really like him.’

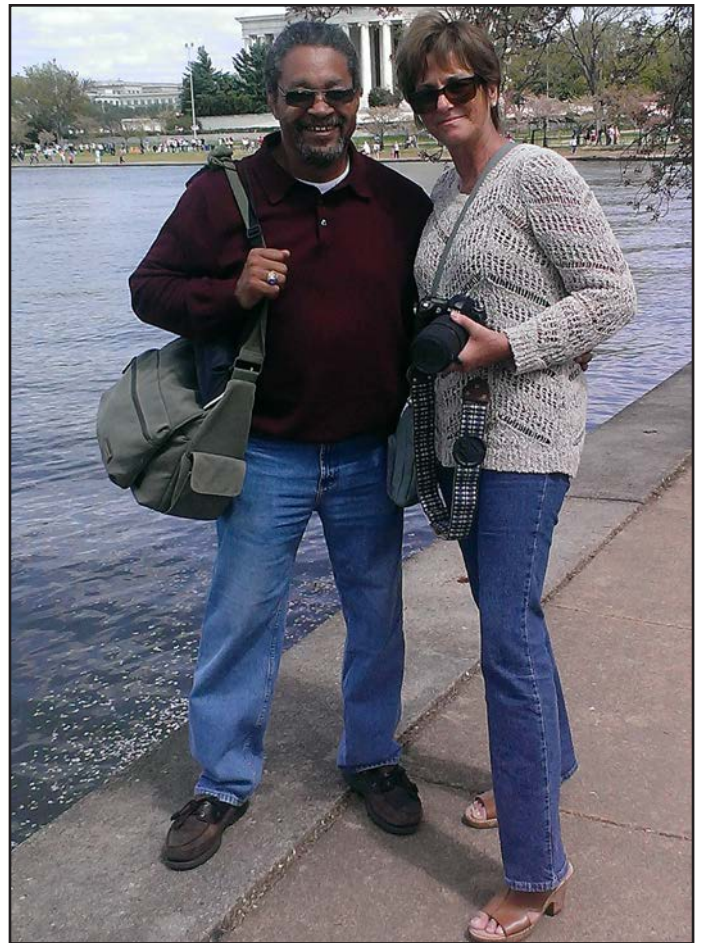
“It was just an amazing moment for me to see that the person I really cared about the most. She said, ‘It’s great.’”

Cate admitted that she knew little about wrestling and Lloyd’s mat history.

“We were talking about his medals and all of his accomplishments in the sports world and I said, ‘Where are your medals?’” she recalled. “He said, I think they’re in a shoe box somewhere?”

“I was in a new culture, and I was trying to figure it out and here was this man who had all of these accolades and had reached the pinnacle. I said you need to do something with the honors that you have.”

“I remember I took Cate to the (National Wrestling) Hall of Fame Induction in 1996,” Lloyd recalled. “I felt proud, but she thought I was more deserving of it than I thought. It’s been sinking in more and more in how others view it. She encouraged me to put myself out there. I finally came around to seeing it as a way of helping others.”



**Now married nearly 30 years, Lloyd and Cate Keaser remain very active and live near Washington, D.C.**

## Return to the Mat

Lloyd eventually retired from IBM in 2006 and was looking for something else to do, including a return to the sport of wrestling.

That would happen over a five-year period in which he served as an assistant for Wild Lake High School in Columbia, Maryland, a school that was 30 percent lower economic status and comprised of kids from multiple nationalities.

“What surprised me was that he was so humble,” said Azmar Hagler, who served as head coach of the program. “He never boasted about his medals.”

“We went from being a laughing stock to finishing in the Top 10 in two years,” Keaser recalled. “We even had a couple state champs.”

One of those was Zathy Ndiang, who now lives in Texas, but remembers what Keaser brought to him and his teammates.

“I started wrestling my freshman year of high school,” Ndiang recalled. “So after football practice, we’re going in and moving the wrestling mats and cleaning the mats and coach Keaser was there, and I had no idea who he was. I actually just assumed he was just one of the janitors helping out.”

“And the next day he came in and showed us some of his old pictures of wrestling and everything. I was like, oh, wow, this is this guy,” he continues.

“I didn’t really understand the magnitude of his story, really, until we started to talk more and more. And I was fortunate enough that I got to know him really as a person first before I really kind of got to know the whole story.”



In 2020, Lloyd Keaser (left) reunited with his Navy wrestling teammates Tom Schuler, Tom Jones, Andy Tolk and John Sattler, who either graduated in 1971 or 1972.

Keaser, who turned 71 in February, is unsure about his future, but would like to write more about his experiences.

He even considered titling his autobiography “Watching Gold Turn to Silver.”

“Someone said I shouldn’t write about it because it means (the 1976 Olympic result) still haunts me, which it does,” Keaser said. “But I also believe there would be a rich story to that result.” ■



After retiring in 2006, Lloyd Keaser returned to coaching, first as an assistant at Wylde Lake High School and then as a coach for the Maryland national team at the Junior/Cadet Nationals.



Lloyd Keaser remains involved in raising money for the Keaser Community Center in his old home neighborhood in Pumphrey, Maryland.



A full-page photograph of a Marine in combat gear, including a helmet and goggles, holding an M4-style rifle. The Marine is looking off to the side with a focused expression. The background is a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

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