



# THE SMITHS

written by  
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# LEE ROY — THE FOUNDATION

**DURING THE 1960S, DEL CITY, OKLAHOMA, A SUBURB JUST EAST OF OKLAHOMA CITY** that grew along with the importance of nearby Tinker Air Force Base, created a thriving elementary school sports league. City pride was at stake as grade schools competed against each other for dominance in several sports.

One recess, the wrestling coach at Epperly Heights Elementary was on playground duty and noticed a new kid that he hadn't seen before.



**SMALL AND WIRY, THE BOY WAS SHOWING HIS TOUGHNESS AGAINST ALL COMERS IN LEG WRESTLING COMPETITION ON THE MONKEY BARS.**

“And so the coach said, ‘Hey, have you ever thought about wrestling?’” Lee Roy Smith recalls. “I said, no, I was starting football and my dad was a coach for a youth group and I loved it, loved football. But he said, ‘Well, why don't you?’”

A few days later, the coach set up a playground match with one of the members of the wrestling team close to Lee Roy's size. All the other wrestlers circled around to watch.

“That was half frightening,” Lee Roy says. “All of a sudden, you're in a theater in the middle and you're the show.”



## LEE ROY MORE THAN HELD HIS OWN.

“And all of a sudden, all these guys are my best friends. They're like, why don't you come out?”

By the end of that day he was home asking his parents if he could join the wrestling team. Their answer would affect not only his future, but also the future of each of his younger brothers.

“Lee Roy was in the fourth grade,” Madalene Smith, matriarch of the Smith family recalls. “I didn't know what he was talking about. I came from a small town in the southeastern part of the state that

didn't have wrestling. I just hadn't been exposed to it and knew very little about it. Basketball and football was our big thing.”

Although her husband, Lee Roy Smith, Jr., (Big Lee) had grown up in Oklahoma City, he hadn't seen much wrestling either. The two parents put their heads together and encouraged their oldest son to try the sport.

“He had just switched schools,” Madalene says. “He'd been going to Catholic schools and started into the public schools. We thought wrestling would be good for him. He could meet friends that way.”

Young Lee Roy was successful almost immediately, making the starting lineup as



a fourth grader, competing alongside fifth and sixth graders. From the start, it was clear that he had found his passion.

**“ HE WAS A WINNER FROM THE BEGINNING-- VERY COMPETITIVE, FUN TO WATCH,” MADALENE SAYS. “HE WAS GOOD IN OTHER SPORTS TOO. HE WAS VERY SUCCESSFUL IN GRADE SCHOOL FOOTBALL, BUT HE WAS OBSESSED WITH THIS SPORT.”**

Big Lee, the volunteer football coach, transitioned to a wrestling dad, studying the sport and learning everything he could to help his son.

“He was a great planner,” Lee Roy says. “And that skill rubbed off on us, whether it was planning for a vacation or planning for being a successful wrestler, he’d walk us through that.”

**TOGETHER THEY DEVELOPED THE THREE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES THAT EACH OF HIS YOUNGER SIBLINGS WOULD COME TO DEPEND ON IN THE SPORT:**

**1. DON'T MAKE EXCUSES** DON'T BLAME THE COACHES, BUT LEARN TO COACH AND PUSH YOURSELF.

**2. WORK HARD, BUT WORK SMART** BE STRATEGIC WHEN YOU TRAIN AND COMPETE. NEVER STOP LEARNING.

**3. DON'T BE A QUITTER** ALWAYS FINISH WHAT YOU START.

**A FOURTH, STAY HUMBLE, WAS ANOTHER FREQUENT MESSAGE.**

“My mother, on the other side, was all about our spirit, you know, the various character traits that would enable us to be successful in life and even after this life,” Lee Roy says, “But you can’t underestimate my mom’s competitiveness. She played basketball and softball through high school. My dad was a three-sport star in high school and went to college to play basketball. So they both loved sports.”

During Lee Roy’s grade school years, Madalene attended most of his matches, usually with a baby on her hip and a trail of younger children following behind. As the second oldest of 10 children, he had four more sisters before his first brother, John, came along. Eventually, another daughter and two sons would round out the family.

As Lee Roy grew more successful, the stairstep ages of the children meant that they all became involved, as fans, wrestlers, living room workout partners and volunteers. His brother John followed him into the sport.

“Poor little old John, he started at 4 or 5 and he was just getting beat all the time,” Madalene remembers. “The girls were in junior high school and we’d go to those matches and he’d come off the mat just crying his eyes out. The girls would run out there and pick him up and it was fun.

“Then, he started winning and getting better and better and being obsessed with the sport, because he had Lee Roy who he just idolized at the time, literally. That’s who he wanted to be like.”

**“ AS SOON AS JOHN COULD CRAWL, HE PROBABLY KNEW HOW TO WRESTLE FROM BOTTOM,” LEE ROY SAYS. “I MEAN, YOU KNOW, I GRABBED HIM ALL THE TIME AND PLAYED WITH HIM AND HE HAD THIS UNIQUE ABILITY ABOUT LOOKING AT A SKILL OR WATCHING SOMETHING AND THEN DOING IT. HE WOULDN’T EVEN HAVE TO PRACTICE IT. HE COULD WATCH A MOVE AND THEN GO DO IT.”**



Like, any good big brother, Lee Roy showed him the ropes, often painfully.

In those days, the family would push aside the living room furniture and anyone was fair game as an opponent. As Big Lee told reporter Mac Bentley for a 1988 article in the *Daily Oklahoman*, “We’ve had a lot of matches in the front room, more so with Lee Roy and John, because they had the sisters around them. The girls were able to whip the boys for a while, Cathy was whipping Lee Roy for several years.”

With no female wrestling in the 1960s and 1970s, the girls worked their share of wrestling tournaments to support the boys, all while managing to compete in their own sports and pursue their own interests.

“We’re blessed by God,” Big Lee told Bentley. “We have a very tight-knit family. We care for each other and we support each other.”

While wrestling was important in day-to-day life, their faith and devotion through the Catholic Church provided the real centering force for the family. Madalene, true to the stereotypes of the Italian Catholic matriarch, made sure that nothing ever became more important than going to mass and practicing their faith.

As the family followed the boys, no matter where their wrestling travels took them, the first thing they looked for was the closest Catholic parish. And tucked into every workout bag, along with the wrestling shoes, clean socks, headgear and singlets, were prayer cards, reminders of what comes first.



In 1972, as the family gathered around the television to watch the Olympics on television, 7-year-old John and 14-year-old Lee Roy learned just how far the sport of wrestling could take them. For years, the family had attended University of Oklahoma football games, just 20 minutes away from their home. So when Wayne Wells, a former OU wrestler won a gold medal, it opened a world of possibilities to the two young wrestlers.

“Well, there’s no question that was huge,” Lee Roy says. “When he came back from the ‘72 Olympics, I was at a football game and they introduced him as the Olympic champion. I was wrestling then, so I was just so inspired by him wearing that Olympic gold medal.”

“But of course we were getting to watch it on TV too, because that was one of the most televised wrestling competitions ever produced on a major network. You had Gable, you had Wells, you had Peterson winning golds. And they were showing every one of those final matches and other matches throughout the tournament on ABC.”

**FROM THAT MOMENT, BOTH BROTHERS SET A GOAL OF BECOMING AN OLYMPIC CHAMPION.**



“Ours wasn’t a house where they say be more realistic, ‘Stop that Lee Roy, you’re not going to be national champ,’” Lee Roy recalls. “They never said that kind of thing. No, in fact, we were encouraged to try.”

By the time Lee Roy got to seventh grade, he was already one of the most successful wrestlers in the state, finishing third in the unofficial junior high state championships. He won the title the next two years. He suffered three losses during his sophomore year, the only losses of his high school career.



“I was the first state champion at Del City High School to win it more than once,” Lee Roy says. “And I was the first multiple national junior freestyle champion from the state of Oklahoma. I had a lot of success coming through high school and what really triggered that development was freestyle. When I did the extra, when I spent the spring and summer wrestling, my career really took off.”

As a senior, he was the Outstanding Wrestler of the state tournament. His two state championships, as well as two national junior freestyle titles, drew national recruiting interest.

“Dan Gable came to Del City to watch me wrestle,” Lee Roy recalls, “Myron Roderick pretended to block the door and told him to go home.”

Among others, Lee Roy heard from all of the coaches of the traditional wrestling powers: Harold Nichols at Iowa State, Stan Abel at the University of Oklahoma, Tommy Chesbro of Oklahoma State University, up and comer Bobby Douglas of Arizona State and Gable, the soon-to-be new head coach at the University of Iowa. Lee Roy chose to visit only three schools.

“I knew that I really didn’t want to travel and I didn’t want to waste anyone’s time,” he recalls. He flew with other blue-chip recruits from the Pittsburgh Classic to Iowa City on Roy Carver’s plane. Ultimately, nothing could compete with staying close to home.

“I really didn’t know much about Oklahoma State or Stillwater, but I learned real quick,” Lee Roy says. “They had this great tradition. I loved OU football and I followed OU football, but I wasn’t going to college to play football. Wrestling was the most successful sport on OSU’s campus and I was going where it’s most important.”

Lee Roy arrived at Oklahoma State with plenty of accolades but encountered a coaching staff that thought he wasn’t quite ready to make the starting lineup.

**THE MEDIA GUIDE HIS FRESHMAN YEAR PREDICTED, “HE’S ON THE DOCKET FOR FUTURE STARDOM, BUT INITIALLY CAN’T GET PAST THE COMPETITION IN RANKING MATCHES.”**



But deep in the bowels of Gallagher Hall, a then- 6,750-seat arena named for legendary OSU wrestling coach Edward Clark Gallagher, in a smelly, two-mat wrestling room with a shower room that opened right onto the mats, Lee Roy proved them wrong. He won the starting spot at 134 pounds and racked up a 19-4 record, winning his first Big Eight title and placing fifth at the NCAA tournament.

“My freshman year, I should have won the NCAA championship,” Lee Roy says. “I lost in the semifinals on criteria.”

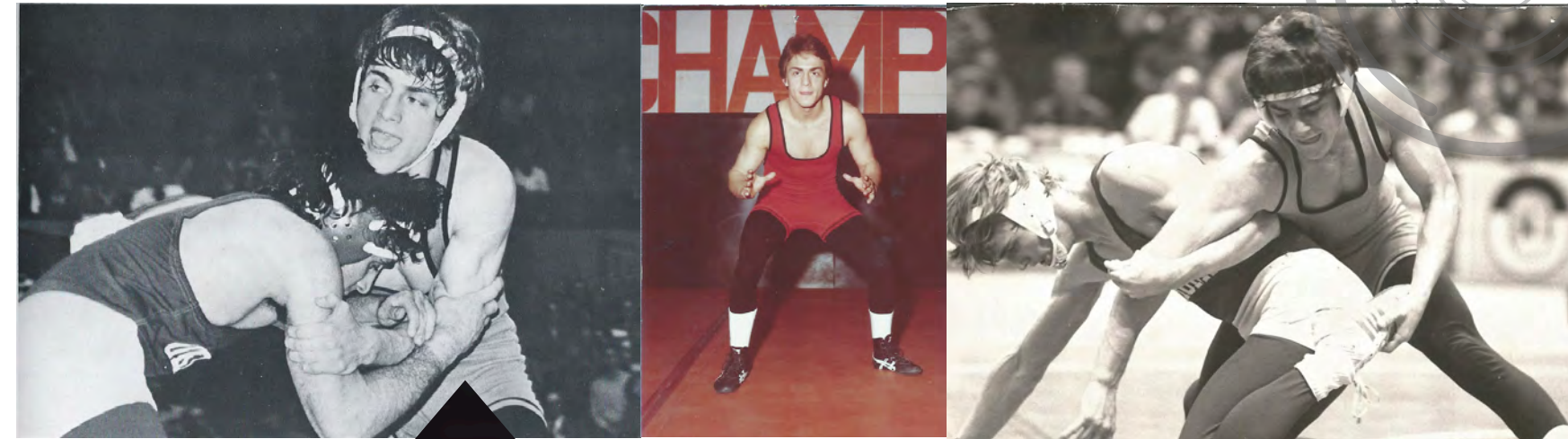
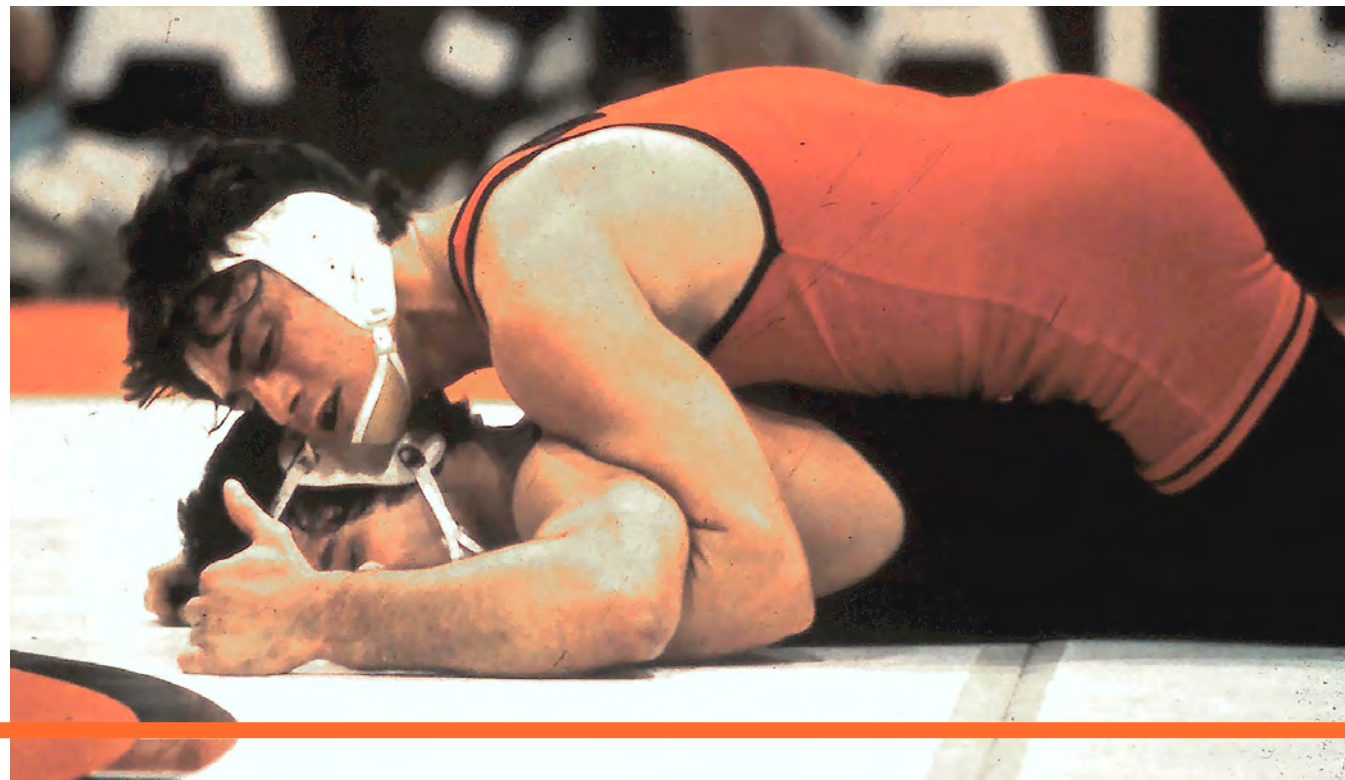
He quickly became an OSU fan favorite for his aggressive, crowd-pleasing style. Wrestling tickets had always been a hot property in Stillwater, and the fans lined up to watch him and his teammates perform.



"I can remember going to weigh ins, you know, four or five hours before a match and there were lines," he says. "You had to go through the fans to get to the locker room and they're calling your name out and they knew who you were. And it was packed, 6,000 something of the most educated fans of the sport."

As a sophomore, he continued to do well, putting together a 22-3-3 record and winning his second Big Eight title. He was seeded first for the NCAA tournament, but lost to a wrestler from Cleveland State who under the rules at the time, did not pull him back into the competition.

His junior year, he moved up a weight class to 142 pounds. He once again won the Big Eight, but fell to fourth in the NCAA tournament, finishing the year with a 35-4-1 record.



And then came his last chance.

As a senior, He put together a record of 38-2-0, winning his fourth Big Eight Championship and defeating in-state rival Andre Metzger from OU, 10-7, to **finally win an NCAA title.**

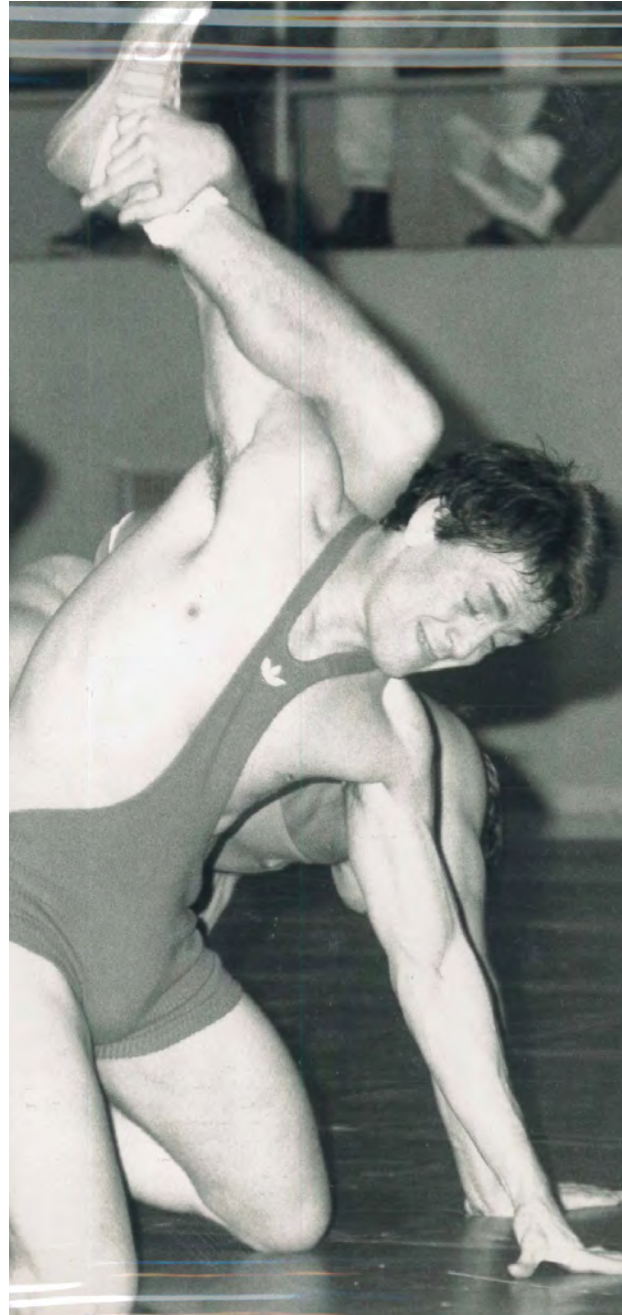
"I got it all together then discipline-wise, because I had a very active social life in college," Lee Roy says, laughing. "We had a lot of fun, let me just put it that way. But I was much more disciplined, much more, hey this is it. I've got to get it done. So, it was more of a relief than anything to win the championship."

After college, Lee Roy turned his attention to coaching and to freestyle wrestling toward the goal forged back in 1972 while watching the Olympic Games on television.

Shortly after the collegiate season ended, Lee Roy rattled off the first of three National Open Freestyle titles, competing in the United States Wrestling Federation championship in 1980 and the Amateur Athletic Union championships in both 1981 and 1982. (The United States Wrestling Federation became USA Wrestling in 1983 and assumed responsibility from the AAU as the United States' Olympic governing body for the sport.)

In 1982, he made the U.S. World team, only to be injured and unable to compete. He suffered a separated shoulder in training, but coaches allowed him to come to training camp, thinking he could be sufficiently healed in time to take the mat.

"I get up to Canada, two days before competition and I'm in the shower and I slip," Lee Roy recalls. "My feet go out from under me and I post my hands behind me and re-separate my shoulder. Lee Kemp was in there with me and had to help me get back to my room."



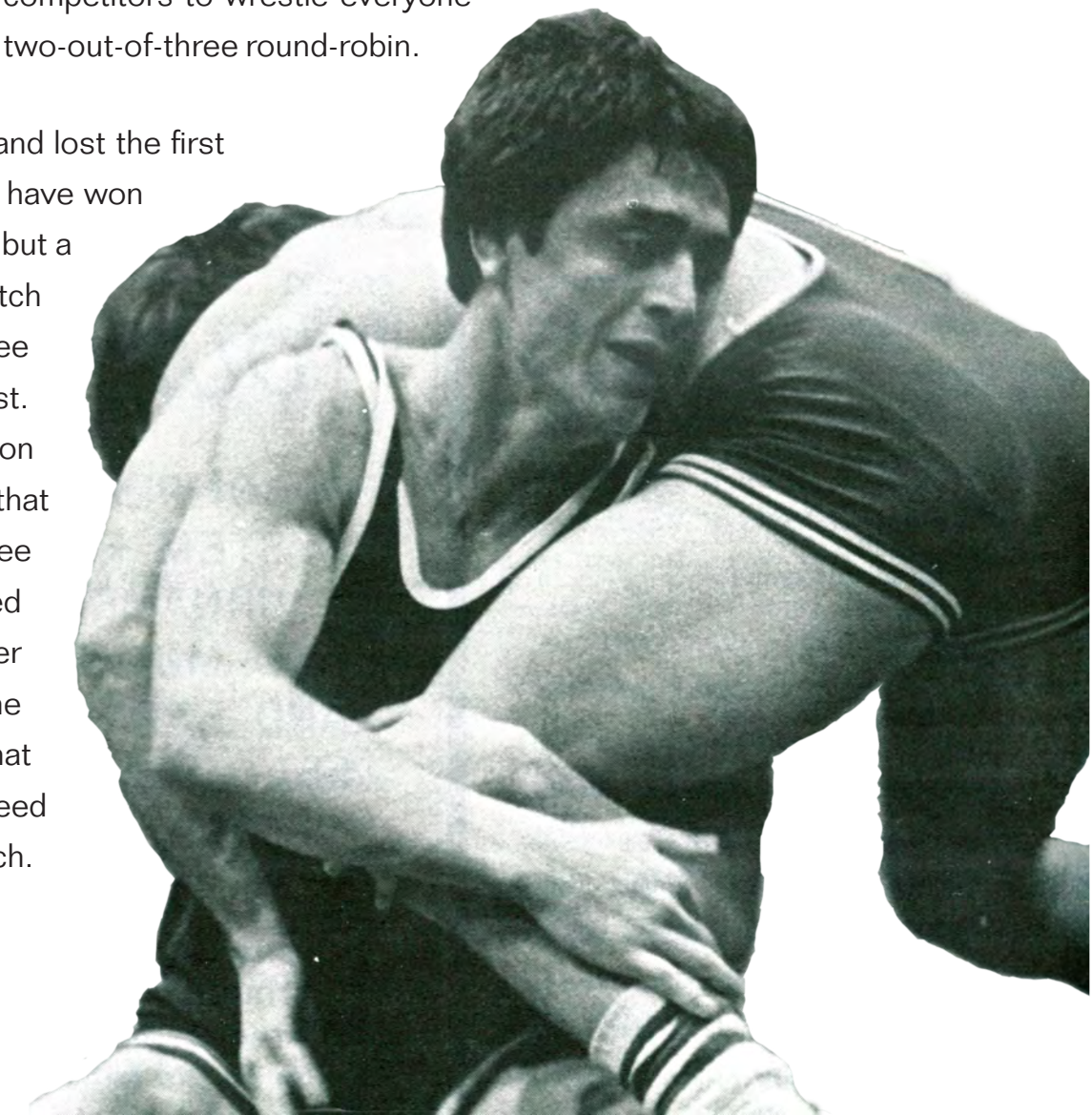
"And I went and told the coach. I knew, you don't go out and wrestle a World championship on one arm. I'm not the kind of guy that can do that. There may have been others who were strong enough, but I had to rely on speed and agility."

Randy Lewis was flown in to take his place and finished fourth in the championships.

1983 was a different story. Lee Roy swept through a competitive field to win the World Team Trials and earn the right to compete in Kiev, Soviet Union. He wrestled well, falling only in the finals to Viktor Alexeev in his home country. Winning a silver medal appeared to have him in good shape heading into the 1984 Olympic year.

The 62 kg field leading up to the Olympic Trials was one of the most competitive ever. Four wrestlers, Lee Roy, Lewis, Rick Dellagatta and Darryl Burley had been trading wins throughout the competition year. Organizers decided that the only fair way to choose the team was for each of the competitors to wrestle everyone else in the weight in a best two-out-of-three round-robin.

Lee Roy drew Lewis first and lost the first match. Lewis appeared to have won the second match as well, but a scoring flurry late in the match proved controversial. Lee Roy's corner filed a protest. Based on the competition rules set up in January of that year, the protest committee convened and reviewed video of the match. After ruling in Lee Roy's favor, the committee determined that the fairest way to proceed was to re-wrestle the match.



Lee Roy won the re-wrestle, 13-0, and was ahead in the final match, 8-2, when Lewis defaulted with a knee injury. He did not continue with competition in the trials. Lee Roy went on to beat both Dellagatta and Burley in straight matches.

**He had done it.** He had qualified for the Olympic team and made it one step closer to achieving his dream.



**AND THEN CAME THE NEWS. LEWIS HAD PROTESTED TO THE U.S. OLYMPIC COMMITTEE. WHEN THE COMMITTEE DENIED HIS PROTEST HE TOOK IT TO FEDERAL ARBITRATION.**

USA Wrestling had been the governing body for only a matter of months. This was the first Olympic Team Trials it had ever administered. Officials there told Lee Roy that he did not need legal representation, that this was a case between them and Lewis.

Lewis, on the other hand, showed up with not only a legal team, but also witnesses, including Olympic coach Dan Gable, his college coach at Iowa. The arbitrator voided the third match and ordered that the last 84 seconds of the disputed match be re-wrestled with Lewis ahead. Try as he might, Lee Roy could not score in that short time and Lewis was on the team.



**“ THAT WAS OUR TRAGEDY. IT AFFECTED US FINANCIALLY. IT AFFECTED MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS A LOT BECAUSE OF THE WAY THAT IT AFFECTED MOM AND DAD. THEY COULDN'T LET GO OF IT EASILY. ”**

Madalene and Big Lee mortgaged their home to fight the decision in court, only to fail. Lee Roy's Olympic dream was over.

"I'd prayed to win a gold medal," Lee Roy told Bob and Doris Dellinger for their book, *The Cowboys Ride Again*. "I'd been practicing my faith pretty hard. But my faith gave me strength in resolution of the Olympic issue."

Lee Roy, however, put it behind him and turned his focus to coaching.





# JOHN ————— THE SUMMIT

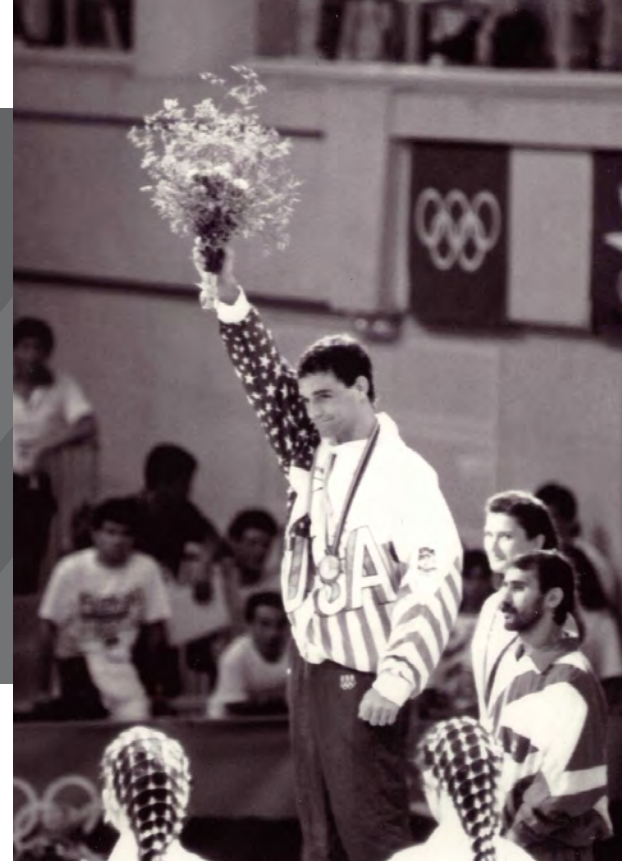
**AS LEE ROY GREW IN THE SPORT, JOHN FOLLOWED RIGHT BEHIND,** taking advantage of his older brother's opportunities at Oklahoma State.

When OSU hosted the Big Eight Championship in 1978, John was the towel boy, signaling to the referee when match periods came to an end. In that tournament, defending conference champion Iowa State was the favorite to win again. It came down to OSU versus ISU in the final three matches. OSU needed to win all three to unseat the Cyclones.

OSU won the first, but in the second, OSU's Daryl Monasmith would have to face defending 190-pound national champion Frank Santana. Few gave him much of a chance, but the Cowboy took Santana down out of the gate and later tacked on another takedown and nearfall for a 7-4 win. The over-capacity crowd in Gallagher Hall erupted.

Just 22 seconds into the heavyweight match, the crowd roared again as Jimmy Jackson pinned his Cyclone opponent to clinch the title for the home team. It was later discovered that the noise had been so loud, the light fixtures broke.

**TWELVE-YEAR-OLD JOHN ABSORBED IT ALL - THE CROWD, THE ATMOSPHERE AND THE JUBILATION HEAPED ON THE COMPETING WRESTLERS.**



He developed a close relationship with OSU head coach Tommy Chesbro and began traveling with him to summer wrestling camps across the country.

"He just kind of took me under his wing and, um, hard work, man, I mean, nothing easy about it," John says. "You know, three days, three times a day. And of course he was the best teacher I'd ever been around."

"He could do three hours. He could do five straight hours and just boom, boom, boom, boom, boom skill, skill, skill, skill. It was phenomenal, you know?"

John admits that in spite of learning and demonstrating Chesbro's technique, he didn't immediately begin to use it.

He finished second in the state as a high school freshman and third as a sophomore, before winning the state championship his final two years. As a senior, he went 38-0 for an overall record of 105-5 and was named the Outstanding Wrestler in the state for 1983.



And then, it was off to college at Oklahoma State where the media guide for his initial season predicted, **“APPEARS TO HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO SURPASS EVEN HIS OLDER BROTHER’S ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR OSU.”**

John experienced success immediately, competing at 126 pounds on one of OSU’s best teams in years featuring returning national champions Clar Anderson and Mike Sheets, returning All-Americans Kenny Monday and Leo Bailey and several other future All-Americans. As a team, they finished their second straight undefeated dual season, going 19-0, including a dominating 24-6 win over defending national champion Iowa.

In that match, John faced Mark Trizzino, who had pulled down from 134 pounds. Trizzino took him down twice in the first period, the first time almost to his back. By the end of the second period, John was down 5-2. But a couple of stalling points put John within reach. He took Trizzino down with :08 on the clock and secured the win, his biggest to that point in his young college career.

His jubilant teammates, as well as big brother Lee Roy, an assistant coach, were



there to greet him.

**“I can remember walking through the gym like two hours before the match and this line was going all the way down the street,”**

He understood then that the match was serious. “Definitely my memory of it is just one of my cherished moments in my career, you know, just the pure excitement of my first big match in Gallagher-Iba Arena. Exciting.”

John says he won that night on attitude, “I was just immature, you know, but I beat a lot of guys that year just on pure attitude.”

One wrestler he couldn’t seem to get past was top-ranked Kevin Darkus of Iowa State who beat him twice and tied him once during the season, including during the Big Eight tournament. Still, his runner-up finish in the conference championship qualified him for the national tournament.

In his first NCAA match at the Meadowlands in New Jersey, John, seeded third in the tournament, easily dispatched his first opponent with a fall. But in his second-round match, he



dropped a 6-2 decision to the wrestler from Cleveland State, the same school that knocked Lee Roy from the tournament a few years earlier.

John's loss was just one of the things that seemed to go wrong for the Cowboys during that tournament. Defending champion Mike Sheets was knocked out cold during a match and would have lost if not for assistant coach Ricky Stewart running out onto the mat to draw the referee's attention. Of six semifinalists, the Cowboys advanced only two to the finals and essentially ceded the tournament to Iowa's Hawkeyes that night.

"If I would have done something my freshman year we would have won, you know, but I didn't place," John says. "Was I ready to place? Heck no, I wasn't mature enough. I was a kid. Put me on the mat in the big match, I'll show up. But take me through a three-day tournament? That's a grind. I wasn't ready for that."

OSU head coach Tommy Chesbro lost his job the next week, in spite of back-to-back undefeated dual seasons and two runner-up NCAA finishes. For Myron Roderick, the new athletic director and one of the Cowboys' previous legendary coaches,

second place just wasn't good enough.

Joe Seay, who had led Cal State Bakersfield to seven NCAA Division II championships was chosen for the job. He brought with him a style that continued to emphasize sound technique, but also placed equal emphasis on motion.

"In the past, Oklahoma State has been more of a controlled kind of wrestling team on their feet," the new coach said in OSU's pre-season prospectus. "They controlled the tempo and they didn't give up takedowns easily, but they weren't real aggressive on their feet. We want them to use controlled movement to get in position so they can get the ankle and do the scoring from their feet, build up the lead in that position and try to take the momentum away from their opponent."

**“JOE SEAY BROUGHT A LEVEL OF SKILL TO OSU THAT REALLY HELPED ME, MOST OF IT BEING MOTION ORIENTED,” JOHN SAYS. “THE IDEA OF MOVING YOUR FEET ALLOWED ME TO DO A LOT MORE SKILLS THAT I LEARNED AT THAT YOUNG AGE WITH CHESBRO...”**

It was a style that complemented John's growing skill set.

That summer, although he might have wanted to take time off, he helped Lee Roy prepare for the Olympic Trials.

"When you grow up in wrestling and you have an older brother that's seven years older than you, it's not good," John says. "You have to do things that you're not really ready for and he was rough."

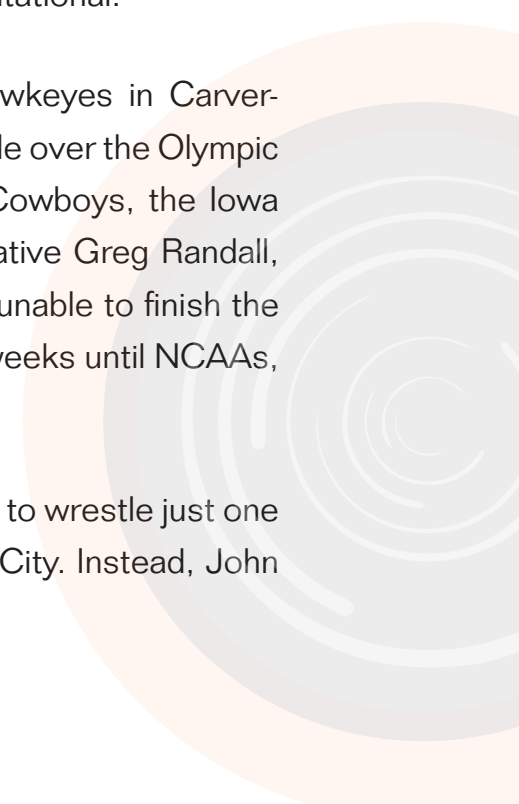
**I REMEMBER WORKING OUT WITH (LEE ROY) WHEN HE WAS TRAINING FOR THE 1984 OLYMPICS AND HIM SCREAMING AT ME BECAUSE I WASN'T WORKING HARD ENOUGH.**

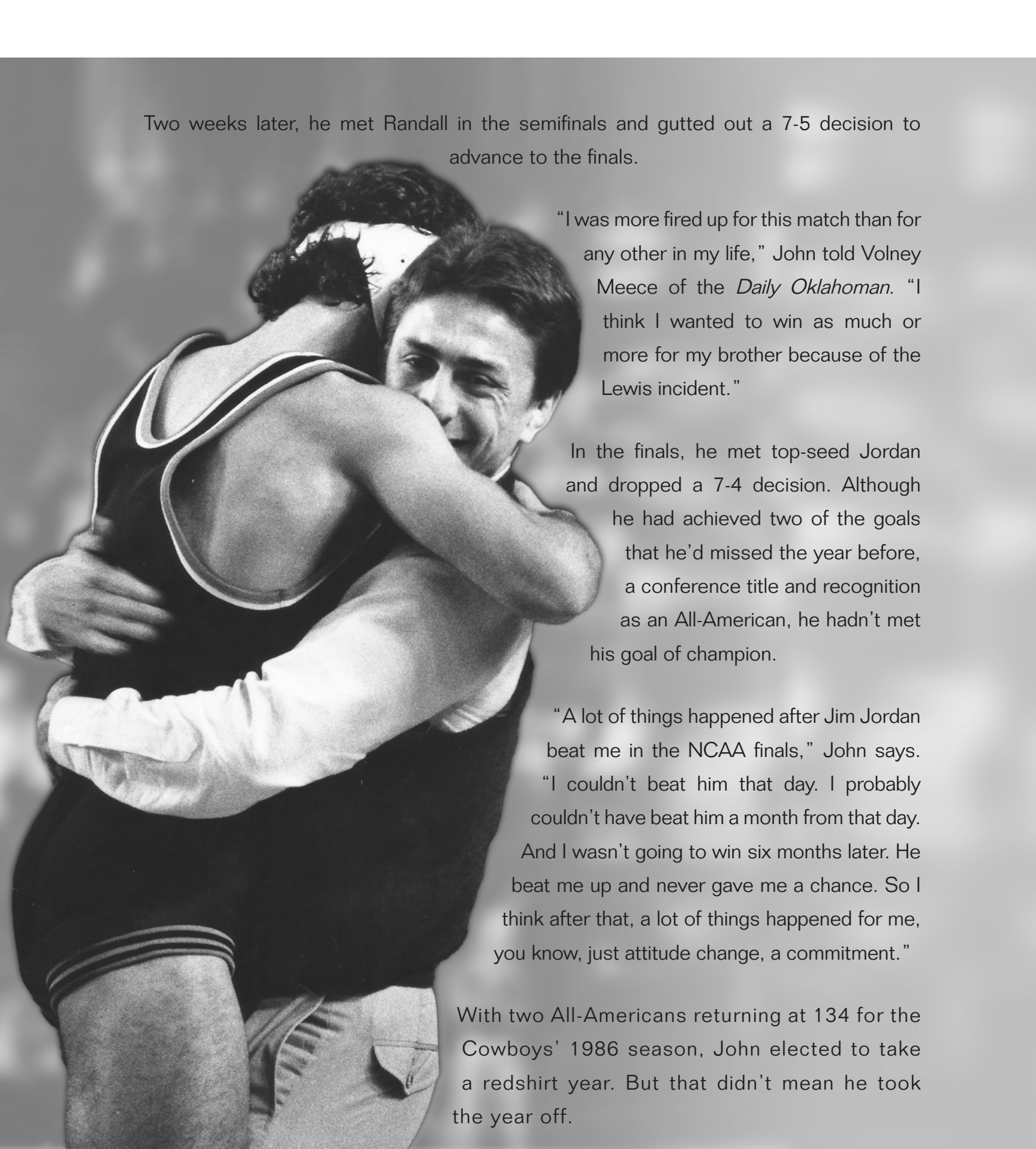
"I wasn't ready for him, but the one thing I did learn is I saw what it took." The lessons helped him to his own summer success, a gold medal in the Espoir Freestyle World Cup for 18-20 year olds.

As he started into his sophomore season, John was again projected to do well at 126 pounds, a weight he was starting to outgrow. Ultimately, he just couldn't make the cut any more and moved up to 134 where he was undefeated until December when he met and lost to Wisconsin's Jim Jordan in the finals of the Las Vegas Invitational.

In mid-February, the Cowboys headed to Iowa to take on the Hawkeyes in Carver-Hawkeye Arena. Slightly more than half a year after the protest debacle over the Olympic Trials, and ready to avenge two straight dual meet losses to the Cowboys, the Iowa crowd was hostile. John was scheduled to wrestle talented Iowa native Greg Randall, but was staggered in the first period with a separated shoulder and unable to finish the match. With just two weeks until the Big Eight tournament and four weeks until NCAAs, OSU fans were afraid his season was over.

John entered the Big Eight with Joe Seay strategizing that he needed to wrestle just one match in order to qualify for the NCAAs in two weeks in Oklahoma City. Instead, John won his first conference title.





Two weeks later, he met Randall in the semifinals and gutted out a 7-5 decision to advance to the finals.

“I was more fired up for this match than for any other in my life,” John told Volney Meece of the *Daily Oklahoman*. “I think I wanted to win as much or more for my brother because of the Lewis incident.”

In the finals, he met top-seed Jordan and dropped a 7-4 decision. Although he had achieved two of the goals that he’d missed the year before, a conference title and recognition as an All-American, he hadn’t met his goal of champion.

“A lot of things happened after Jim Jordan beat me in the NCAA finals,” John says. “I couldn’t beat him that day. I probably couldn’t have beat him a month from that day. And I wasn’t going to win six months later. He beat me up and never gave me a chance. So I think after that, a lot of things happened for me, you know, just attitude change, a commitment.”

With two All-Americans returning at 134 for the Cowboys’ 1986 season, John elected to take a redshirt year. But that didn’t mean he took the year off.

“Coach Seay didn’t want me to redshirt,” John recalls. “But I really felt like there was a level of maturity that I needed. And I was maybe a little bit nervous that it was all going too fast. I don’t know if I’m ready to go in a national championship, but going into my junior year, I probably wasn’t. If I didn’t redshirt, if I didn’t take that redshirt, I’m not sure I would have won. I’m not sure I would have developed some of the skills I’d have.”

John spent hours drilling, two often three times a day. And during those hours, a change began to take place.

“Just maturity, you know, you realize what you want,” John says. “We often talk about the things we want to do, you know, and the things that we want to accomplish, but how bad do you want them? I hit a time in my life where I’ve lost the national championship the year before. I walked off the mat knowing that I couldn’t beat the guy. I’m not competing for my school for the first time in my history and all that kind of just stirred me up.

During this time, he also began to show hints of what would become his signature move, the low single leg.

“He’s in that sophomore, junior year where he’s about to take a huge step in his development and we’re wrestling in the workout room in the basement and he’s starting to master the low single,” Lee Roy recalls. “He could hardly take me down up to about that point.

**BUT THEN HE STARTED MASTERING THAT LOW SINGLE AND I COULDN’T STOP IT.**

“THERE WAS A LEVEL OF URGENCY TO WIN THAT WASN’T GOING TO BE DENIED. I MEAN, ALL OF A SUDDEN I HAD AN ATTITUDE AND THEN BACKED IT UP WITH A WORK ETHIC THAT, BETWEEN THE TWO, TURNED INTO A LOT OF MEDALS, A LOT OF GOLD MEDALS.”



And he was all of a sudden on top of me and I didn't want him on top of me. He started trying to get rough with me, giving me elbows and trying to work my head over and giving it back to me, you know. He's on top and there's nothing I can do about it."

**"I'LL NEVER FORGET SAYING, OKAY, I'M OUT OF HERE. JOHN, I FEEL GOOD ABOUT WHERE YOU'RE AT NOW AND I CAN LET YOU GO ON YOUR OWN NOW. I'M HEADING OFF AND BUILD MY COACHING CAREER."**

As a redshirt, John was able to tour internationally with USA Wrestling and in the spring, won the U.S. Open.

His win made him eligible to compete in the inaugural Goodwill Games, the brainchild of Ted Turner of Turner Broadcasting. With back-to-back Olympic boycotts in 1980 and 1984, it was the first time that athletes from the United States and the Soviet Union competed against each other in a major multi-sport competition.

"It was a unique event and it was big, pretty exciting," John recalls. "I mean, it kind of reminded me of maybe the experience I was going to have at the Olympics. And man, I was around some good guys. It was a good team."

And John wrestled well. When he defeated Khazer Isaev to win the gold medal, he handed the Soviets their first loss in 32 matches, and joined Dave Schultz and Bruce Baumgartner as champions.

**"I really wrestled over my head.** But what I experienced from winning that tournament and then listening to Coach Gable's remarks and listening to some of my teammates remarks really fired me up, like saying, 'hey, you're good,'" he says.

But if he thought he'd made it, he was quickly brought back down to earth after forgoing the World Championships to return to the unfinished business of college wrestling. In OSU's first dual that fall, he lost to Nebraska's Gil Sanchez.



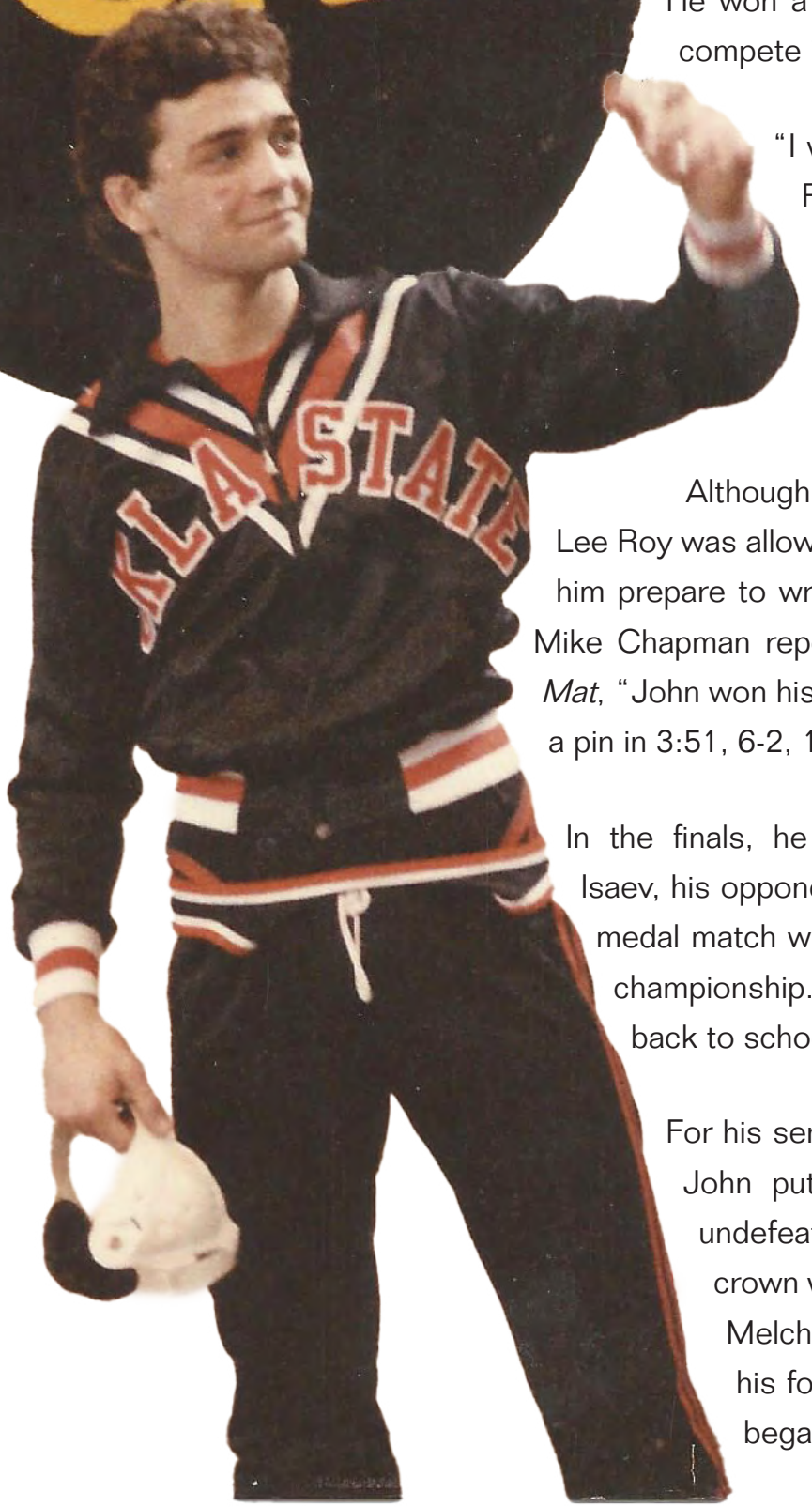
"I did not approach the match like I was going to be in a battle, and he just beat me up," John says. "Now, I think he even took me down more than I took him down. It wasn't just on the mat, although he did turn me with cheap tilts and things I wasn't prepared for.

"It was just a humbling experience, just really embarrassed, you know? I don't think I was even mad. I think it was just embarrassed, but again, another learning lesson--don't ever not give people respect."

**From that point on, John rattled off 90 straight wins, defeating Sanchez three times, including 18-4 in the finals of the 1987 NCAA Championships.**

Shortly afterwards, newlywed Lee Roy stuck to his word to focus on his coaching career and moved to Martigny, Switzerland where he became a member of the Swiss national coaching staff and coached a club team in the town preparing to host the 1989 World Championship.

# NCAA



John turned his attention back to freestyle.

He won a spot on the 1987 World team to compete in Clermont-Ferrand, France.

“I was in Switzerland coaching,” Lee Roy remembers. “I was only a four- or five-hour drive away and I came with my team to watch him wrestle in the World Championships and really enjoyed that one right away.”

Although he couldn't be in John's corner, Lee Roy was allowed in the warm-up area and helped him prepare to wrestle. John made it look easy. As Mike Chapman reported in his book *Legends of the Mat*, “John won his first six matches by scores of 9-1, a pin in 3:51, 6-2, 16-3, 10-2 and 15-2.”

In the finals, he was slated to meet the Soviet Isaev, his opponent from the Goodwill Games gold medal match who had since won the 1986 World championship. John beat Isaev, 5-4. Then it was back to school.

For his senior season of collegiate wrestling, John put on a technique show, finishing undefeated and earning his second NCAA crown with a solid 9-2 win over Iowa's Joe Melchiorre in the finals. He quickly shifted his focus from folkstyle to freestyle and began his Olympic quest.

## HE WON HIS SECOND NATIONAL FREESTYLE CHAMPIONSHIP. THEN IT WAS ON TO THE OLYMPIC TRIALS.

USA Wrestling held its Final Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Topeka, Kansas, in May. The top eight finishers in Topeka would advance to Pensacola, Florida for the final trials.

John advanced easily through the tournament until the finals, only to face a familiar opponent. Randy Lewis, the defending Olympic champion who had deprived Lee Roy of his Olympic opportunity, stood in his way. The two had met once before with John coming from behind to beat Lewis in a wild 10-8 thriller in the national championship.

But in Topeka, the story would reverse. Lewis came away the winner of a hard fought 7-5 match.

“First off, I'm still getting better,” John says about the Topeka final. “I had developed my leg lace, and when I wrestled Randy, the low single leg was still being developed. I don't really think I had a whole lot of turns, although I did turn him. I was still developing and I was stubborn. I was like, he's not stopping my high crotch, you know, he's not stopping my high crotch...that match in Topeka, I was just an idiot. What do you keep going back to it for, you stubborn son of a gun?”

“I walked away and learned another lesson. There's people better than you in certain positions. Right? And so that was something I did the rest of my life. I respected some people in positions and I avoided them.”

## In Pensacola, John beat another old nemesis, Jim Jordan, to earn the right to wrestle Lewis two out of three matches for the chance to go to Seoul, South Korea. When he squared up with Lewis this time, it was another story and he won the first match, 8-4. In the second, **Lewis injury defaulted with a knee injury. The Smith family had an Olympian.**

The competition began in Seoul on Sept. 27 and stretched over three days and seven rounds of competition. John got off to a good start, easily winning his first match, 11-



4, over the Hungarian. But in the second round, he drew 1981 World champion Simeon Shterev of Bulgaria and suffered a broken nose during the match.

“I did get dizzy in that match,” he recalls. “It was my toughest match in the Olympics, I think. Shterev was as good as anyone I ever wrestled at that point in time in my career and I was well aware of that going into the match, that this is one of those guys that you’re going to have to beat. He ended up third, you know? By far for me, I think it was the toughest match I had in the Olympics.”

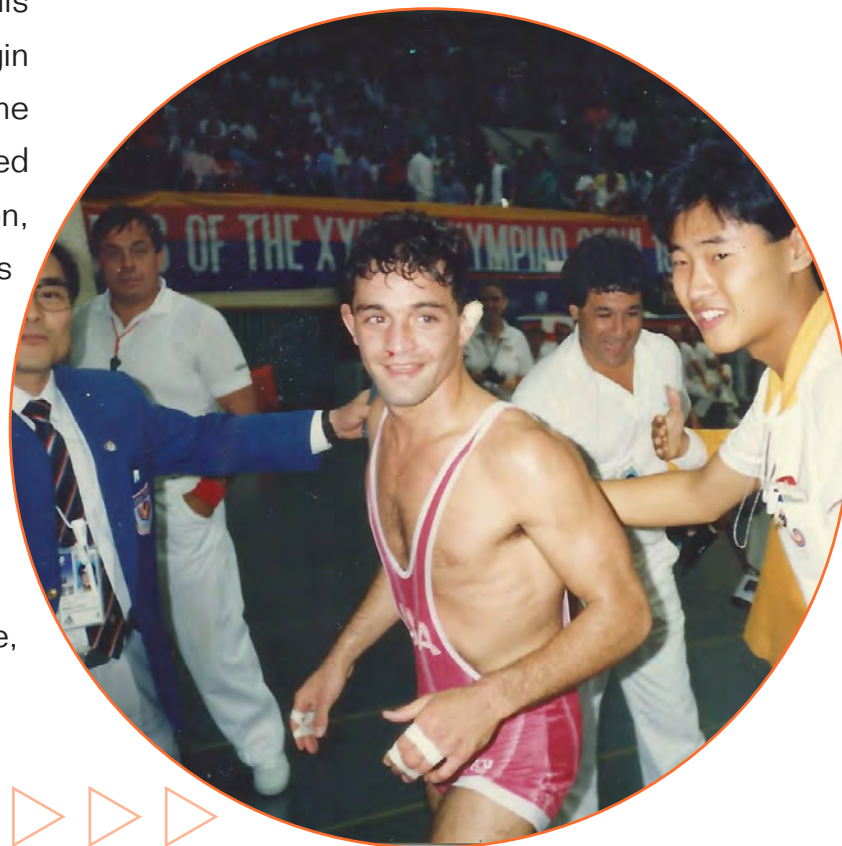
His last match of the night saw him defeat the Polish wrestler, 4-2. The next day, he hit his stride, dispatching opponents from Finland, Italy and Mongolia. While the competition may have been easier—his closest match ended in a five-point margin of victory—by the time he reached the finals, he had a broken nose, abscessed ear and some very sore, if not broken, fingers. As he prepared for his finals match against Stepan Sarkissian of the Soviet Union, he thought of the advice he’d received from his older brother.

“Lee Roy wrote things,” John says. “He always gave me a list of things to do. he was actually still in Switzerland at the time,

but he sent me some messages. He was more focused on what I did, not here’s how you’re going to beat so-and-so. It was more to remind me of what I did well and that I can take it and beat anyone in the world.

“It just kind of reminded me of my talents and my abilities, helping me build the confidence that I can execute and I will execute, not here’s how you’re going to beat Sarkissian.”

John beat the Soviet wrestler decisively, 4-0, to become the 1988 Olympic champion. **At the age of 23, the same year he graduated from college, John was both a World champion and an Olympic champion.**



## AND THAT WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING.

“My dad was there and that was special,” John says. “I remember making eye contact with him and there’s nothing like when you see that flag for the first time. I mean, winning my first World championship was the greatest experience in my life. Winning my first Olympic championship was even better.”

Three months after the Olympics, Lee Roy returned to the United States to become USA Wrestling’s national developmental coach. Dave Schultz had been hired as national coach, but had second thoughts. Lee Roy took the job as national coach, selected to work with the senior wrestlers on the national team. The job also gave him the opportunity to be by John’s side throughout the rest of his competitive career.

**Over the next three years, John dominated the 62 kg weight class in World competition.** Although he lost a match or two in international competition, in three straight World Championships, no one came close to challenging him.

“Well, going back to ‘91 might’ve been my best tournament I ever wrestled, the very peak of my career,” he says. “1990 was Tokyo, ‘91 was Varna. Yeah. In that short span of my career I hit a level of peak in my career where I was just devastating on top and I knew if I could take someone down, I could take anyone. It didn’t matter if they were a World champion or what, I had that much focus on top and had developed so many levels of skills.”



And then came preparation for the 1992 Olympics.

Throughout his international career, John had remained at Oklahoma State, continuing to train and serving as an assistant coach. In September of 1990, OSU received a letter of inquiry from the NCAA informing the university that there were potential violations in the wrestling program. By January, there were official investigators on campus.



None of the violations appeared to be too serious until the summer when Coach Joe Seay admitted he had committed the cardinal sin, lying to the NCAA. He was immediately suspended, **leaving the Cowboys without a coach heading into the 1991-92 season.**

On paper, athletic administrator Dave Martin stepped into the role, but in the wrestling room, **John and fellow Olympic gold medalist Kenny Monday assumed the responsibility as co-head coaches.**

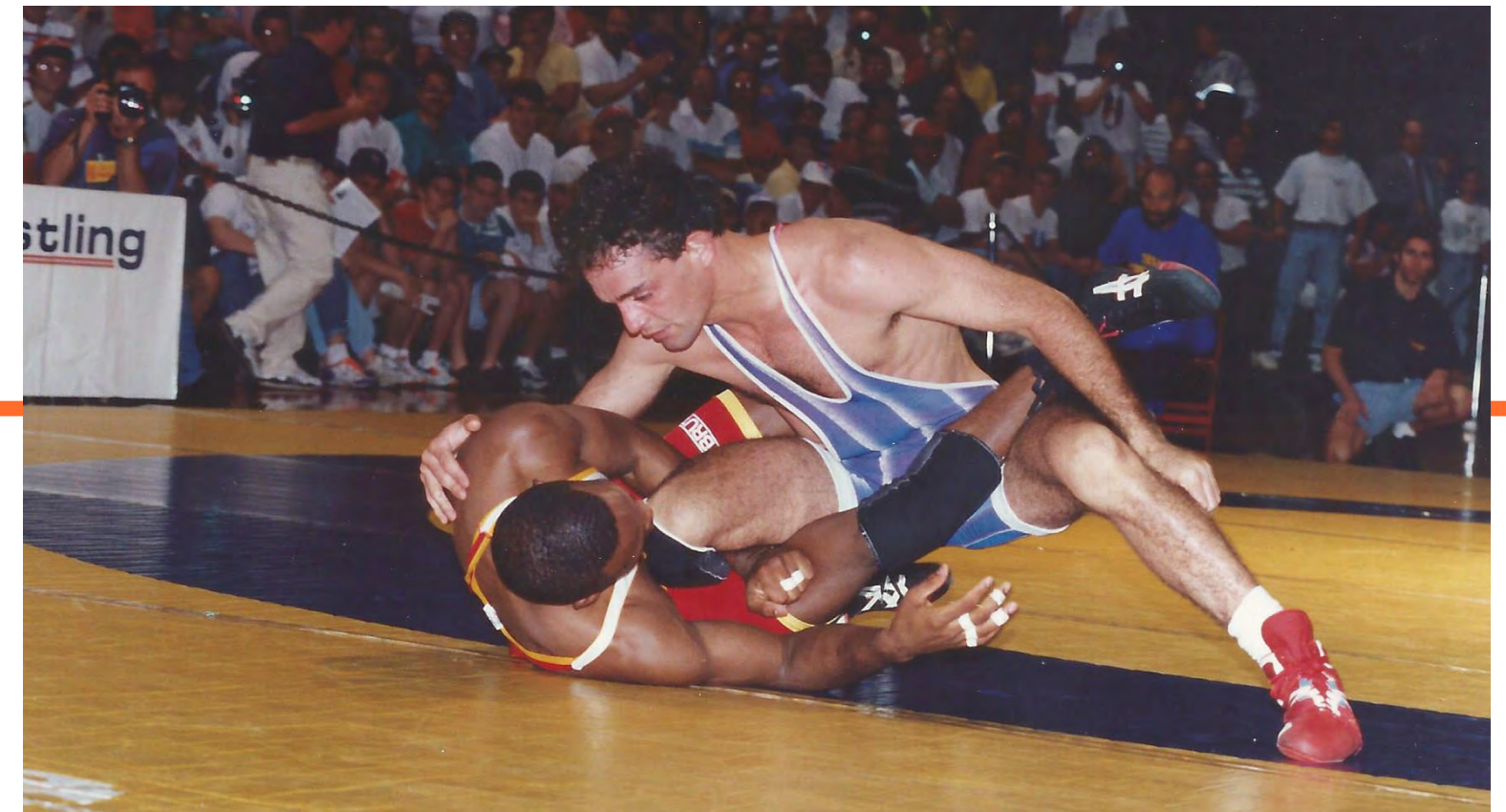
“All of a sudden you’re dealing with 40 athletes,” John says. “You’re making sure they’re making their grades. You’re doing some things that you never had to worry about. During a lot of those years, you’re so centered on yourself and all of a sudden you’re giving some of your time up.”

“You’re helping some guys get better. You’re helping some people through some issues academically, whatever. I wasn’t ready to do all that and it kind of threw me for a loop and I knew I was in trouble.”

But John had made a commitment and couldn’t walk away. He took on the responsibility because he loved Oklahoma State and he knew he had to see it through.

“I had an infection that lasted for about three months, really weakened me,” he says. “You have to make changes in your career if you’re going to improve, no question. So you make those subtle changes, but you want to stick real close to a routine. Well, that year there was no routine.”

“I had a hard time letting that go. Like, why did you do this to yourself? Why did you give this much time to something that could wreck you here at the end of your career? So I fought with myself a lot that year, trying to find myself. It wasn’t a smooth year like 1990, where you’re just blazing through everything and everyone, and you feel like King Kong.”



John’s struggles showed up in the Olympic Trials. In a best-of-three final against U.S. Open champ John Fisher, he had to wrestle all three matches. In the first match, Fisher scored two takedowns and exposure points to win, 4-2. John was stunned.



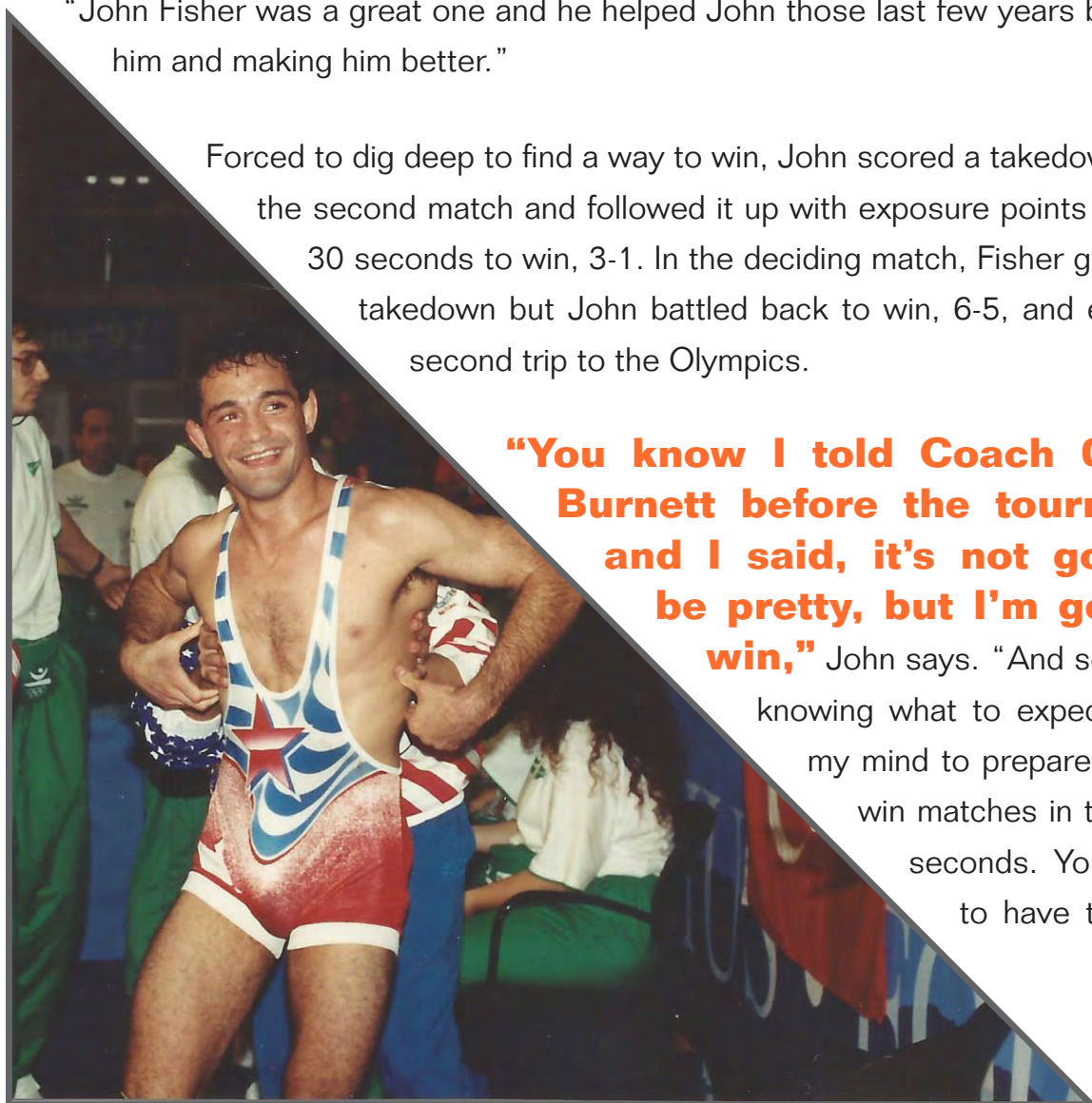
“It was really a tough position for me to be in because I had his ear, I knew what to say,” Lee Roy recalls, “I’m sure whatever I said was to keep him focused. But I wasn’t flagrant about being on his side. I couldn’t be—I was a national coach. I wasn’t in his corner and I was very concerned because of having been on the other side of that where coaches go against you and don’t want you on the team. You want to try to keep a fair playing field and that was hard.”

“John Fisher was a great one and he helped John those last few years by pushing him and making him better.”

Forced to dig deep to find a way to win, John scored a takedown early in the second match and followed it up with exposure points in the last 30 seconds to win, 3-1. In the deciding match, Fisher got the first takedown but John battled back to win, 6-5, and earned his second trip to the Olympics.

**“You know I told Coach (Bruce) Burnett before the tournament and I said, it’s not going to be pretty, but I’m going to win,”** John says. “And so I went in

knowing what to expect and set my mind to prepare to maybe win matches in the last 30 seconds. You’re going to have to prepare



to win by one. Are you ready to win by one? You know? So for me, I was ready to win by one. I knew that’s the kind of tournament I was going to have to have.

“At least I was honest to myself, right? Hey, you’re going to be wrestling some of these same guys you just beat the living hell out of a year ago, you know? You’re going to have to find ways to just win matches.”

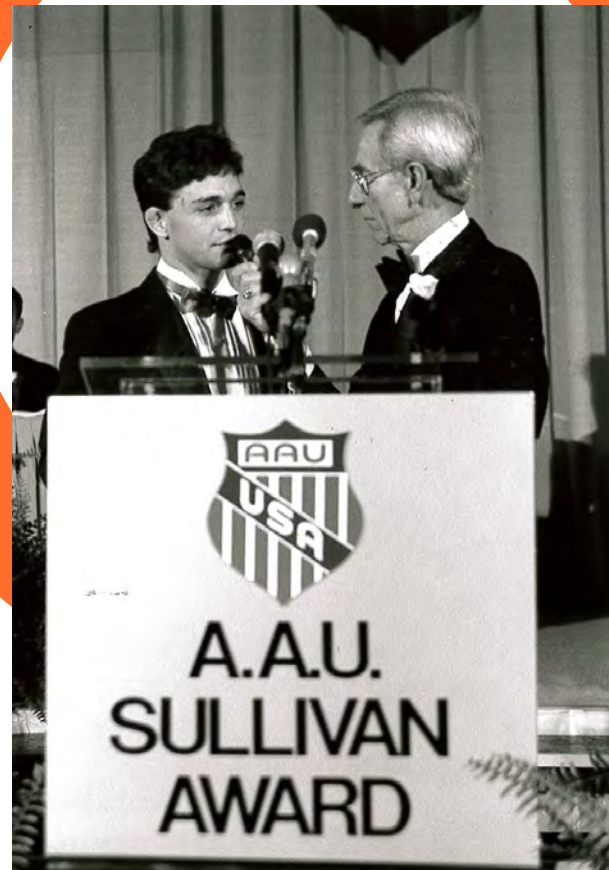
And that’s exactly what he did. He narrowly defeated his first two opponents, Turkey’s Ismail Falkoglu, 3-2, and North Korea’s Kin Gwang Choi, 2-1, before rolling over Germany’s Karsten Polky, 8-0, and the Unified Team’s Magomed Azizov, 17-1.

The tech fall over Azizov gave John enough advancement points to move to the finals despite losing in the next round to Cuba’s Lazaro Reinoso, 3-1, in overtime.

“I don’t think we’ve ever seen a wrestler 15-point a Soviet in Olympic or World competition,” Lee Roy told *Amateur Wrestling News* after the Olympics. “That was vintage John Smith in that match.”

In the finals, John shut out Iranian Asgari Mohammadian, 6-0, to clinch his sixth straight gold medal.





"I think in '92, winning the gold medal, I wasn't nearly as excited," he says.  
"There's more a sense of relief."



His Olympic journey was finally over. The coaching journey could begin.





# PAT ————— THE FIRST

**SINCE HE WAS A SMALL BOY ROLLING AROUND IN HIS PARENTS' LIVING ROOM, PAT WATCHED AS HIS TWO OLDER BROTHERS PILED UP WRESTLING HONORS.** Most people would find that family success intimidating, but not Pat.

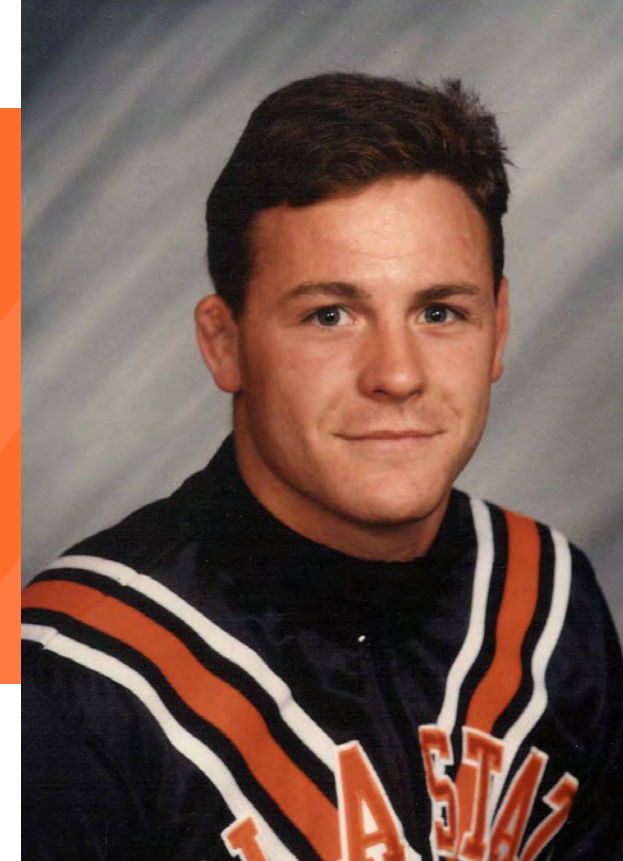
"Pat started and was successful from day one," Madalene recalls. "He had a different personality, real serious, but he also had a lot of fun. He wasn't quite as serious at the beginning as the other two when they were small children. In high school, he got serious, but as a little fellow, he was fun to watch."

Pat's first organized wrestling was at the Midwest City YMCA, and he was beaten out of his first tournament at age nine.

"I wasn't upset or anything," he says. "I was just there having fun."

Wrestling was just one of the sports he tried. He also played baseball and football through his junior year until focusing strictly on wrestling as a senior.

**"He was just good in sports,"** Madalene says. "He was a little bit bigger than the other two boys. He was a good baseball player and a real good football player. He was always real successful at whatever he did, always working hard, very dedicated to whatever sport he was in. So he was kind of fun. It was fun to watch him play any sport."



"Pat was very motivated in his youth," Lee Roy says. "He was always looking to me and I'm sure to John to a certain degree. He wanted to do what his brothers were doing and we were wrestling, so he took right to it."

"But what was so unusual about him? Even at a very young age, it was his desire to work and do whatever it took to achieve success in wrestling and in training."

From a very young age, he went to matches in packed Gallagher Hall and remembers sitting close to the mat, watching as his brother Lee Roy wrestled. After a big win, the fans would pile out of the stands and line up to get his brother's autograph. Observing that, his dream was born. He wanted only to wrestle for Oklahoma State and wear the bright orange singlet.

**“ HE WOULD PUSH HIMSELF HARDER THAN YOU WOULD THINK A KID THAT AGE WOULD BE WILLING TO GO. I MEAN, HE WOULD GO TO FAILURE. THERE'S NOT MANY KIDS THAT'LL PUSH THEIR BODIES TO FAILURE AND PAT EMBRACED IT. ”**



In the early years, because they were closer in age and size, and Lee Roy was already off to college, Pat learned his basics from John. But as he got older and more serious about wrestling, Lee Roy spent more time with him.

“They both kind of teach the exact same way,” Pat says. “What always stuck out in my mind with Lee Roy especially, is he always kept emphasizing hips. Every time I would take a shot, he’d always let me know where my hips were. You’ve always got to keep your hips where you can move your man with them. It helped me throughout my career.”

From John, Pat picked up the low single leg attack and learned how to move his feet.

“He listened, he knew what to do as far as technique goes, as far as being smart and not getting into any kind of injury,” Lee Roy says. **“BUT MAN, HE JUST HAD AN INCREDIBLE DESIRE, FROM THE GET-GO.”**

But probably the most important lesson, Big Lee told *Amateur Wrestling News* is the winning attitude.

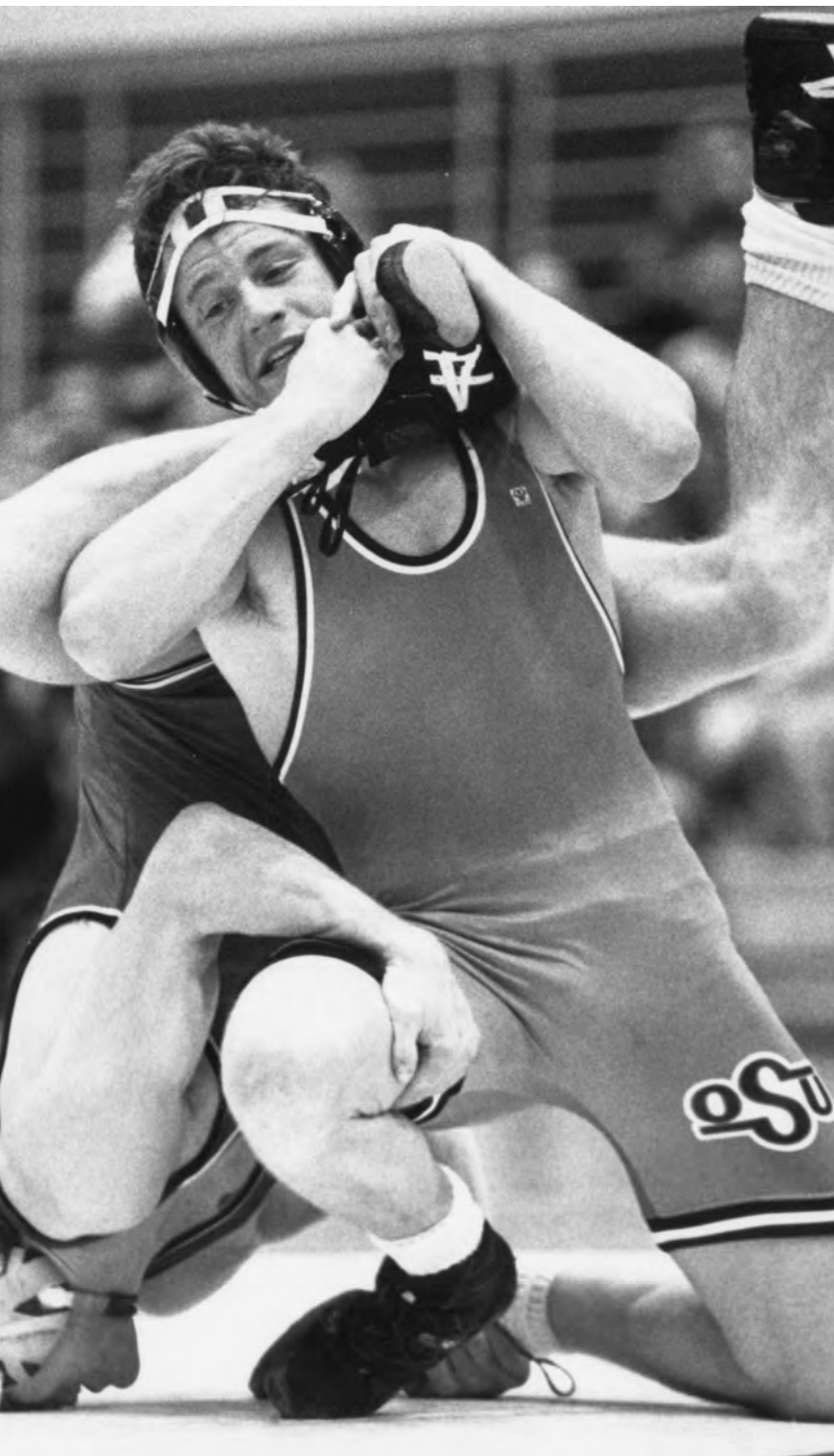
“As far as actually comparing Pat’s style with Lee Roy and John’s, he fits somewhere in between. There’s some differences between all of them, but they all have much in common. That is, they’d rather die than lose.

“By observing the other boys, Pat saw success and he saw from what they did what it took to be successful. He just patterned himself after them. Success breeds success. The more you’re around winning, the better chances you have to win.”

And win Pat did. In high school, he captured three state titles for Del City High School. He also won two national junior freestyle titles.

He was recruited by OSU and Nebraska, where his brother-in-law Mark Perry, a Cowboy alumnus was then an assistant coach. Most wrestlers with two such successful older brothers might want to forge their own path to avoid the pressure of living up to expectations, but Pat wouldn’t buck the family tradition and chose to be a Cowboy.





"You know, he was one of those guys that you've got to get him," John says about recruiting Pat. "You know he's going to have an impact immediately, but a four-time national champ? Nobody can see that coming. But he's got the right attitude, he's growing up with a brother that's reeling off some championships and doing some things and it's having no effect on his personality, no effect on what he wants to do.

**"We want you, Pat, because you're not worried about nothing, not worried about living up to anyone. You want to win yourself."**

Pat didn't count on being beat up in the workout room where his every day practice partners were Olympic gold medalist Kenny Monday and two-time NCAA champ Chris Barnes. He decided he wasn't cut out for Division I wrestling, but Big Lee made him promise to stay until the end of the year.

By January, he had proven he was the best talent in the room to take over the 158-pound spot in the Cowboy starting lineup. Coach Seay decided to pull him out of redshirt and let him wrestle. In his first collegiate match, the Cowboys traveled to Portland State

where he met third-ranked Dan Russell.

"So I get out there, I get the orange singlet on for the first time and I get out there against Dan Russell," Pat remembers. "Pretty good first period. Second period rolls around and all of a sudden, I start hyperventilating, fatigue, everything, mental breakdown exhausted, probably pumped myself up too much, whatever. And he cradled me in my first match."

The referee slapped the mat for the pin and Pat headed out the door, down the hall to a classroom near the gym.

"Joe Seay's trying to find me," Pat says. "He found me in the classroom and leaned over to me and he said, 'Patrick' and I looked up and he said, 'It was the worst mistake I ever made pulling you out

of redshirt, 'cause we already sent Jeff McAllister to Fresno State and he's ranked fourth or fifth in the country right now. And he's gone. So it's not like we can throw him back in.' And he walked off.

"I'm telling you, I felt like my blood in my body was flowing so hard, I felt like my head was going to pop off. I was so angry and mad. When a coach talks to a kid that way, there's kids, that would have broke them. They'd never be the same again. I wasn't that kind of kid. When you do that to me, you're just putting fuel in the fire, buddy."

Pat and Russell met again a couple days later and wrestled to a much closer score, although Pat lost again. He lost only three more matches that year—the only mat losses of his college career.



By tournament time, he was ready. He clinched the Big Eight title and advanced to the NCAA tournament where he rolled through the field, winning every match through the semifinals by bonus points, including a 16-7 major decision over Russell.

When he beat Navy's Scott Schleicher, 11-7, to win the 1990 158-pound NCAA championship as a freshman, he, John and Lee Roy became the first three brothers ever to each win a national collegiate crown.

"I truly believe in all my levels that I, and I still believe this to this day, is that my freshman year in the NCAA tournament, I was probably the best wrestler I ever was in my career," Pat says. "I was hitting on all cylinders. I was smoother. I was faster. I was dominant. My confidence level was higher."



His sophomore year, Pat was on top of the world. People were already talking to him about four NCAA titles. Then, when semester grades came out in January, disaster struck. OSU officials revealed that Pat's grades weren't good enough for him to remain

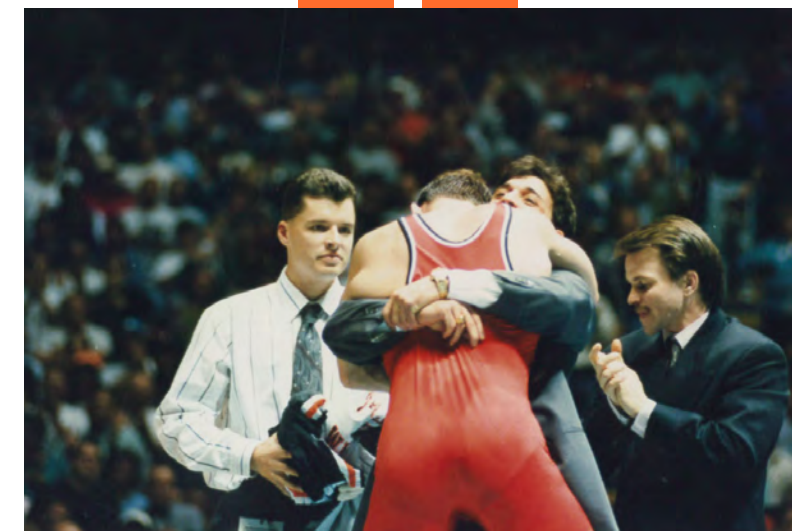
eligible and would not allow him to enroll for the second semester. The Smiths chose to fight in court for his readmission, based on the fact that Pat had a previously undetected learning disability.

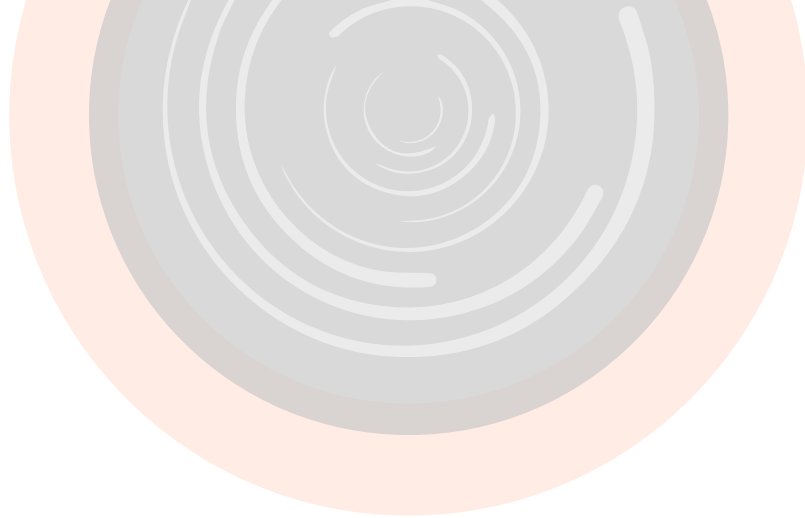
The publicity, the attention, the focus on his problems in the classroom were embarrassing and frustrating for Pat, a young man described by his mother and sisters as very gentle, sensitive and compassionate.

"Things are going to happen and all of life is not good," Big Lee told *Amateur Wrestling News*. "When it turns out bad, you've got to fight it. I learned through experience that the courts are a remedy or solution to your problems, but it doesn't always work in your favor."

This time it did. Federal law mandates that universities provide extra help to learning disabled students. Because Pat had not had that opportunity, he was readmitted to school and his eligibility restored.

"I told him several times, son, no one ever promised you that life was going to be a bed of roses," Big Lee told *Amateur Wrestling News*. "There's always going to be adversity in life. The more adversity that you've overcome when you reach success, the sweeter it tastes. And I always pointed out to





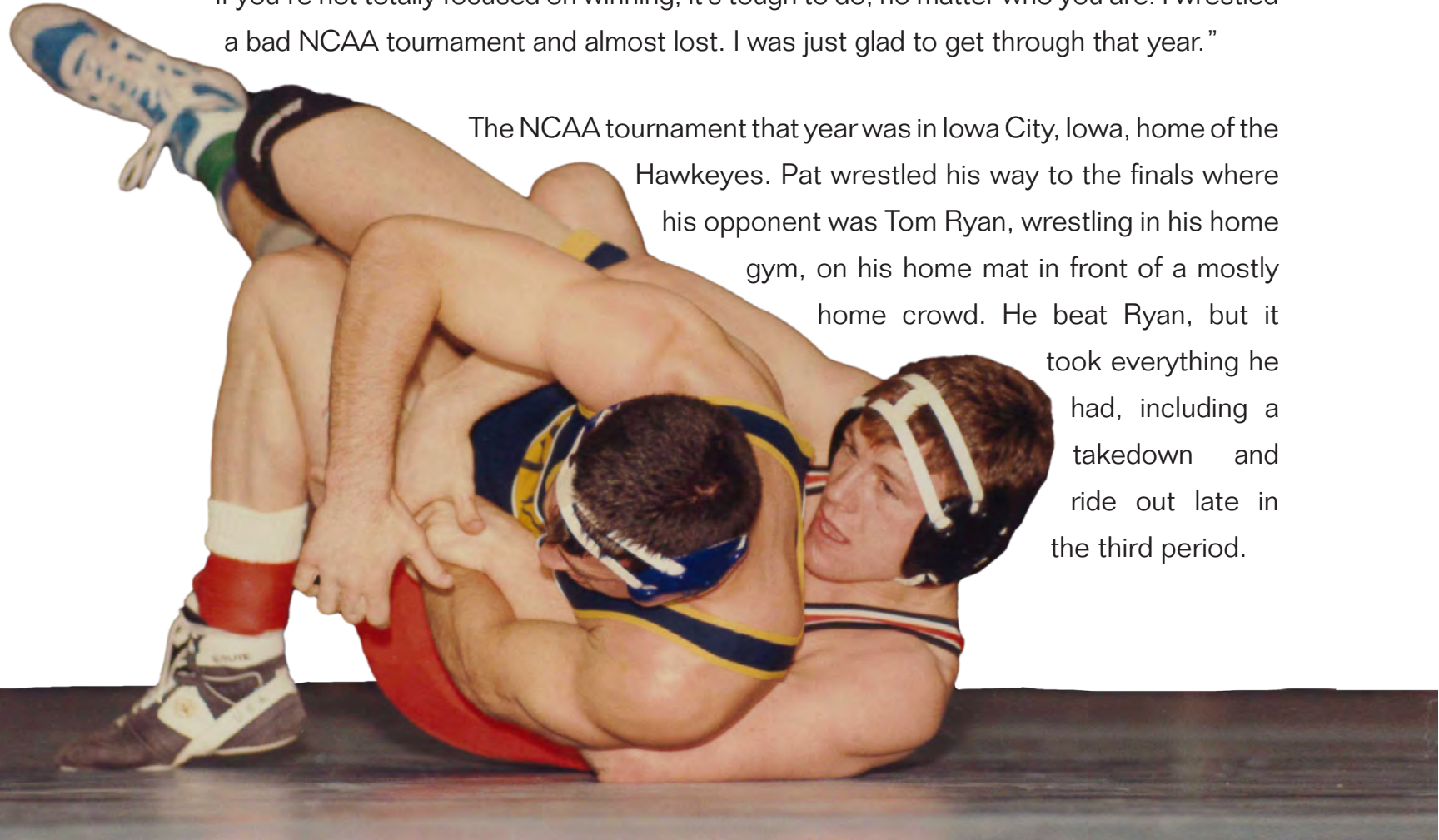
him that what we were talking about wasn't the most important thing in life. If he lost, he lost. Life would still go on and life would still be good. **If the worst thing you ever have happen to you is not being a four-time NCAA champion, you will have lived a pretty good life."**

The stress took its toll, but still Pat was able to win when it counted.

"It was hard for me to concentrate, but I had to find a way to overcome it," Pat says. "It was toward the end of the season. The Big Eight and national tournament were right around the corner. That's when Lee Roy and John and my mom and dad's role helped. They kept me positive, and I tried to block it out of my head for that short time.

"If you're not totally focused on winning, it's tough to do, no matter who you are. I wrestled a bad NCAA tournament and almost lost. I was just glad to get through that year."

The NCAA tournament that year was in Iowa City, Iowa, home of the Hawkeyes. Pat wrestled his way to the finals where his opponent was Tom Ryan, wrestling in his home gym, on his home mat in front of a mostly home crowd. He beat Ryan, but it took everything he had, including a takedown and ride out late in the third period.



"Tom stepped out on that mat and he was ready to win it," Pat says. "He was coming at me and I had to dig deep. It was the one match in my career that I had to go dig deeper than I've ever dug in my life to win that match. He was hitting on all cylinders. He was strong and he was determined and he was not going to be denied. You could feel it when you were wrestling him."

His parents were glad to see the season end.

"I saw so much going on during that period of time it's almost frightful to think of," his mother Madalene told *Amateur Wrestling News*. "I saw a kid who had a lot of self-confidence, a lot of drive, a lot of get up and go, just on top of the world, begin to kind of deteriorate. We had to rebuild. I saw this from the bottom of my heart, we could have lost Pat in that sophomore year if he hadn't had good brothers, good sisters, good family support. Instead, it made him a stronger person."

**PAT SAYS IT MADE HIM A MAN. HIS FAMILY WORKED TO HELP HIM TURN ALL THE NEGATIVE THINGS THAT WERE HAPPENING TO HIM INTO A POSITIVE MOTIVATIONAL FORCE.**



The next year wasn't much easier. By then, the NCAA was deep into its investigation of the Oklahoma State program and Pat's first semester, the semester he had planned to redshirt, was under intense scrutiny. He was in danger of losing the rest of his eligibility.

OSU canceled the first half of its dual meet season to appease the NCAA investigators. The Cowboys wrestled in the conference and national tournaments, but, as a self-imposed sanction, refused to accept their second-place NCAA trophy.

Pat narrowly won his third NCAA title with a 3-1 decision over fellow Oklahoman Ray Miller who wrestled for Arizona State. He still can't explain how he was able to concentrate and keep his focus.

Madalene credits the family for Pat's mental toughness.

During the summer of 1992, OSU was still in limbo. Finally, the NCAA announced that OSU would be banned from postseason competition. Pat had to decide whether to transfer and try for his fourth title from another school—possibly Arizona State where Lee Roy had just accepted the head coaching job—or to redshirt and stay at Oklahoma State where John had just been named head coach.

He reached out to Lee Roy to talk about transferring, but Lee Roy says he was afraid to make the rest of the family angry.

"Well, I knew he wasn't leaving," John says. "I knew my brother was trying to get him. He wasn't going anywhere. He might've thought he was for a while, but we also didn't know a lot of things. Right? And, we didn't know the health of the program. Was it going to be healthy? I think in the end I worked really hard to reassure my mom, my dad and people around us that we're going to be fine."

Pat stayed at Oklahoma State. His final season was by far his easiest, but even it wasn't without hardship. In December, he withdrew from the Las Vegas Invitational with a leg injury after the semifinals. And two weeks before the Big Eight tournament, he injured some cartilage around his ribs and was in pain right up to the national tournament. But at the championships in North Carolina, he never felt it.

Maybe as Madalene, rooted in her faith, believes, it was the hand of God. Maybe it was Pat's unusual power of concentration. Or maybe it was just meant to be.

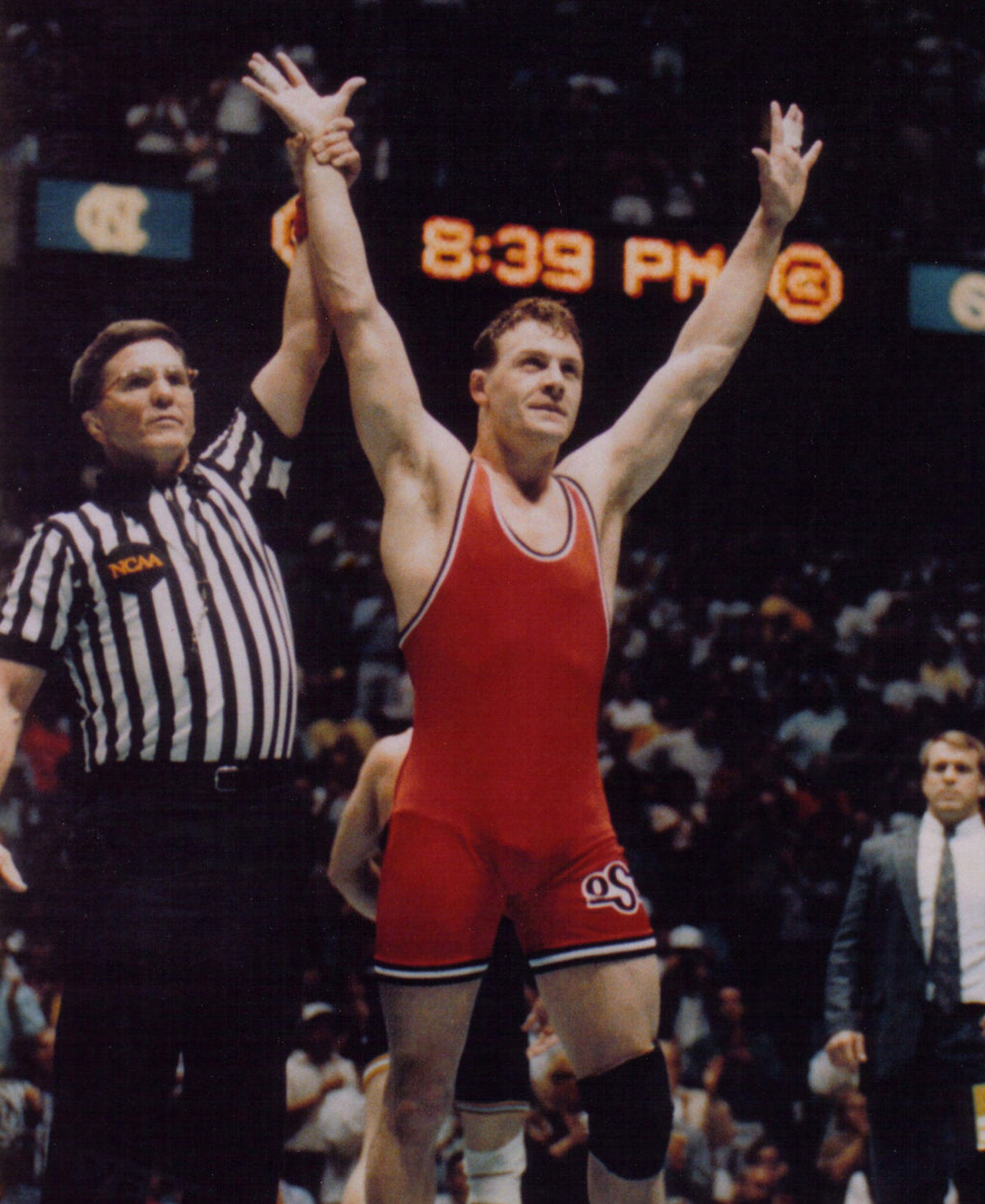
When it was all over, he had beaten Michigan's Sean Bormet, 5-3, and made history. Pat stood at the top of the podium, the first-ever four-time NCAA champion and the meet's Outstanding Wrestler. Even sweeter, his team took home the first-place trophy.

**HIS FINAL RECORD AT OKLAHOMA STATE WAS 121-5-2 AND HE WON HIS LAST 98 MATCHES, TYING AN NCAA RECORD.**



**“ALL OF OUR KIDS ARE MENTALLY TOUGH,” SHE SAYS. “THEY GREW UP IN A FAMILY OF 10. THEY HAD TO BECOME MENTALLY TOUGH AND PHYSICALLY TOUGH AT AN EARLY AGE. AND I THINK IT’S IN THEIR GENES.”**





**“YOU FEEL PRETTY GOOD WHEN YOUR CHILDREN ARE SUCCESSFUL,” BIG LEE SAID AFTERWARDS. “YOU FEEL GOOD WHEN THEY REACH THEIR DREAM, WHEN THEY’VE SET THEIR GOAL HIGH, THEY’VE PAID THE PRICE, THEY’VE FOUGHT THE WAR AND THEY’VE WON.**

**“AND REALLY, IF THEY SET THEIR GOALS HIGH AND FIGHT THE WAR, THEY WIN EITHER WAY, WHETHER THEY’VE WON OR LOST.”**

## MARK ————— THE YOUNGEST

**LIKE HIS OLDER BROTHER PAT, MARK, THE YOUNGEST OF THE 10 SMITH SIBLINGS, WAS BORN INTO A FAMILY ALREADY WELL-IMMERSED IN WRESTLING.** Lee Roy was a junior in high school and thinking about colleges when Mark was born.

Of course he learned to wrestle nearly as early as he could walk, and was at old Gallagher Hall watching Lee Roy while still in his mother's arms. But he admits he wasn't all that interested in wrestling. As the youngest, he wasn't having to compete as much with his older siblings and developed other hobbies, one of which was coon hunting.

"I don't think I watched a match until I was maybe 10," he says. "I remember the sounds of the arena just roaring but I was outside playing football or chasing a girl or whatever."

**BUT WHEN JOHN WENT TO THE OLYMPICS IN 1988 AND CAME HOME WITH A GOLD MEDAL, MARK STARTED PAYING ATTENTION.**

"Now when John won in '88, I was just about that time kind of getting into wrestling and believe it or not, that was like seventh grade," he says. "You know, until then I just wasn't that interested in it. And it kind of took off from there. I mean, when you get to watch a brother win a gold medal, what else is there?"



"It's an eye opener. And then, all of a sudden I'm in the backyard working on motion, faking, pumping, hitting low, just, you visualize it. You're like, hey, if he can do it, I can do it."

At the time, Big Lee told Mac Bentley of the *Daily Oklahoman* that he had seen Mark begin to put pressure on himself because of what his older brothers had accomplished.

"We don't put any of that on them," he told Bentley. "But we just got through an experience with Mark, getting him to quit putting pressure on himself because of that. He's in the seventh grade, he's changed levels, he's been dominant at the elementary level and now he's up with the junior high boys. Wrestling at 108 pounds, most of the guys he's wrestling are not seventh graders. He's been beaten twice this year and that was really bothering him.

"He was putting a lot of pressure on himself and he was putting it on himself because he's a Smith. He felt like a Smith shouldn't get beat. We explained to him that Pat did, you just go through that phase. When you change levels and you're back down at the bottom of the heap, you're going to experience a little of that."



**Mark soon returned to dominating the competition in Oklahoma, putting together a high school record of 100-2, winning three state titles and two national junior freestyle titles. In his last two seasons, he never allowed an offensive point to be scored against him.**

He was considered the top wrestling recruit in the nation, but he wasn't highly recruited. Only two schools showed interest. The February 14, 1994 issue of *Sports Illustrated* included a full-page write-up of the recruiting battle between his older brothers Lee Roy at Arizona State and John at Oklahoma State.

"When the windchill in Oklahoma is in the minuses, I call Mark and say, 'It sure is nice to be running outside in short sleeves,'" writer Kelly Whiteside quoted Lee Roy as saying.

John's response? "I'm on to his tricks," John said. "I tell Mark, sure you can run in the sand if you like, but there's no coon hunting in Tempe."



**High School People**

The Oklahoma senior (light shirt) wrestles with Lee Roy, Pat, John and his decision.

THOUGH SIGNING DAY is only two months away, and Mark Smith, the best high school wrestler in the U.S., still hasn't decided on a college, it sure is quiet in Del City, Okla. So why is Smith's mailbox empty? When the phone rings, why is it just his girlfriend calling? Why isn't the top wrestling recruit being recruited? Why bother? "It would be dumb for schools to recruit me," says Mark. "They would be wasting their time since I'm either going to Oklahoma State or Arizona State." But Mark isn't receiving roses, valentines or hourly phone calls from the coaches at those two schools either. After all, the way the coaches at OSU and ASU see it, why wine and dine a kid who used to sit across from you at the kitchen table?

Mark's choice is between two programs run by older brothers. Lee Roy Smith, 35, is the head coach at 14th-ranked Arizona State. John Smith, 28, is the head coach at No. 1 Oklahoma State. "I don't want to hurt either brother's feelings," says Mark. "They both have a chance at getting me. When signing day [April 13] comes, it will be whatever side of the bed I wake up on."

The Smiths are the first family of wrestling. Lee Roy was a three-time All-America and national champion at OSU. John, a two-time Olympic gold medalist, a six-time world champion and a two-time national champion at OSU, is regarded as the finest American wrestler of recent years. Another brother, Pat, a senior at OSU, could make wrestling history this season by becoming the first four-time NCAA champion. "Each brother seems to say, 'How do I do more?'" says Lee Roy. "Each outdoes the others. If Pat gets four NCAA titles, what's next?"

"I could become the first college wrestler not to lose a match," Mark says with confidence. This season at Del City High, he is wrestling up a weight class at 189 and is 23-0 with 17 pins and five technical falls. With an 87-2 overall record in four years, he has won two state titles and a national junior championship. Mark is an unusual talent because he is so quick for his size. "I wrestle more like a 134-pounder," he says. "A lot of guys I face like to tie up their opponent and muscle him around. Hell, I don't like to touch them, I just give them a quick high crotch and a low leg." John, who wrestled at 134 pounds, pioneered this style, which is based on speed and low-leg attacks.

Every morning Mark drives his pickup truck to Del City High and parks outside the John Smith Field House. Inside the gym's lobby, he passes the Hall of Fame room, where portraits of his three brothers hang. In the middle of the room is a life-sized bronze statue of John, cordoned off by red velvet ropes. His parents' home is a veritable Smith-sonian museum, full of artifacts from his brothers' years of athletic achievements.

But amid the expectations, Mark says he doesn't feel a knot of pressure. His brothers have taken a lighthearted approach to this unique recruiting battle. "When the windchill in Oklahoma is in the minuses, I call Mark and say, 'It sure is nice to be running outside in short sleeves,'" says Lee Roy.

"I'm on to his tricks," says John. "I tell Mark, sure, you can run in the sand if you like, but there's no coon hunting in Tempe." Coon hunting is Mark's passion, and his favorite hunting spots are near OSU's Stillwater campus. "No matter what I do," says Mark. "I can't make a wrong decision."

—KELLY WHITESIDE

**Mark Smith**

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**In the end, family tradition and coon hunting won out.**

Mark chose to be a Cowboy and to wrestle for his brothers John, the head coach, and Pat, an assistant coach.

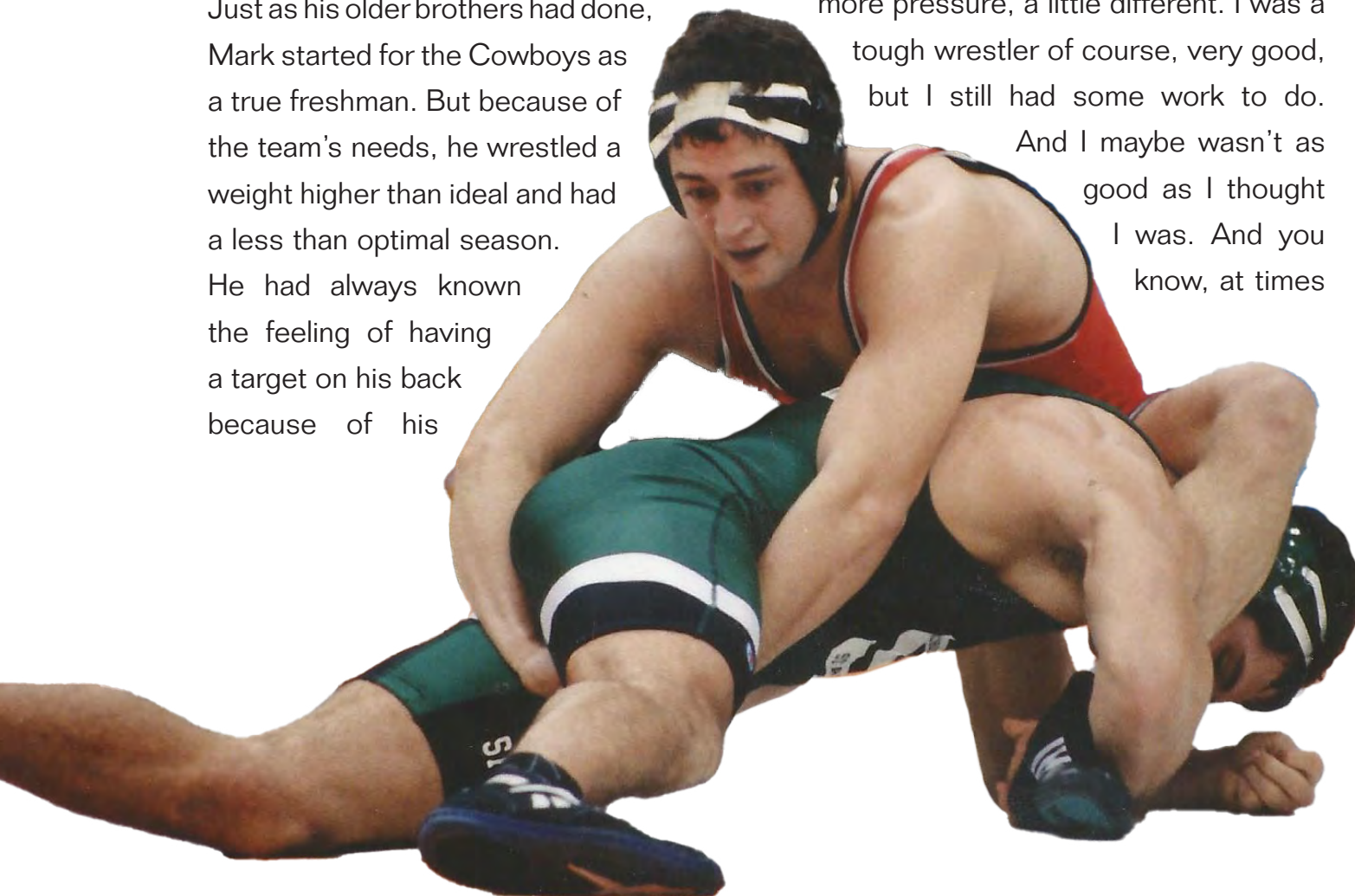
“To say he’s going to do what Pat did is almost impossible,” John told Rhett Morgan of the *Tulsa World*. “But he definitely can be a better wrestler than Pat has been and not win four. Coming out of high school, he’s better than any of us were and possibly one of the best ever.”

Just as his older brothers had done, Mark started for the Cowboys as a true freshman. But because of the team’s needs, he wrestled a weight higher than ideal and had a less than optimal season. He had always known the feeling of having a target on his back because of his

older brothers’ accomplishments, but now it was different.

“You know, I used it to my advantage for years because I thought, in maybe a little bit of an arrogant way, but I thought I’m better than you, a better athlete,” Mark says. “I think at that time I blossomed off of it. When I stepped on the mat, I was hoping that guy’s going to fear me, you know?”

“It’s kind of funny though. There’s kind of a twofold there. I think college, a little more pressure, a little different. I was a tough wrestler of course, very good, but I still had some work to do. And I maybe wasn’t as good as I thought I was. And you know, at times



maybe I didn’t pay that extra price there, even though I had a good career, but maybe I didn’t do that little extra that it took to get over that little hump there.”

Mark battled through injuries most of the season and qualified for the NCAA championships, but dropped two straight matches and was eliminated. The next year, as a sophomore, he blew out his knee, forcing surgery and a redshirt season. By May of that year, he had also gotten married and become a father. With new pressures, completely unrelated to wrestling, Mark took the mat for his sophomore season.

As a team, the 1997 Cowboys had a great season, finishing undefeated with a 21-0 record. They won the Big 12 tournament and Mark avenged an earlier season loss, beating Iowa State’s Barry Weldon, 5-3 in overtime, to win his first conference title.

Mark was seeded first in the NCAA tournament and Weldon second. But in the third round, Mark dropped a 10-9 decision to Lehigh’s unseeded John Van Doren. He battled back through the consolations only to drop a second one-point match to Van Doren and ended up fourth.

As a junior, Mark was able to wrestle at a more natural weight. Competing at 167 pounds, Mark repeated as Big 12 champion, again beating the Iowa State wrestler, this time Ben Perkins, by a 5-3 score.

He was seeded second in the NCAA tournament and rolled through the first three rounds with two major decisions and a fall. He looked poised to complete a great tournament. But in the semifinals, he lost 5-3 to Brandon Slay of the University of Pennsylvania. Once again, he was competing for third place, but lost that match on a tiebreaker to Michigan’s Jeff Catrabone.

“WITH THE EXPECTATIONS COMING IN, JOHN FELT THE PRESSURE, YOU KNOW, THAT KIND OF PRESSURE WAS THERE FOR BOTH OF US,” MARK SAYS. “I WAS PRETTY HARD ON JOHN, POOR JOHN. I WAS ROUGH ON THAT GUY, ‘CAUSE I LIKED TO PARTY AND HAVE FUN, JUST SOME KNUCKLEHEAD HAVING FUN.”





Mark had one chance left, but he was still dealing with distractions. By February of 1999, he and his wife had split and he was single again.

“Just to be honest, I didn’t have the right frame of mind at that time,” Mark says. “I mean, I loved wrestling still, but I was just a little undisciplined. I liked to hunt and fish. And I think back at that time and too, I think a little bit of it was, I might’ve been trying to escape a little bit of pressure and just didn’t know it, you know what I mean?”

“I still did a lot of the same things I needed to, but again, being honest, I needed to get better. I wasn’t quite as good as I thought I was--I was good and I was good enough to win a national title, but to win those, you’ve got to be mentally on a really high level. **I had some work to do and I didn’t do it.**”

Mark won the Big 12, beating Oklahoma’s Michael Barger 10-2 for the championship. He was seeded No. 1 for the NCAA tournament and won his first-round match with a 17-2 technical fall. In his second round match, the score was tied, 2-2, when North Carolina State’s Kevin Boros escaped and held on to win, 3-2.

**“He didn’t know the score,”** John told a reporter from the *New York Times*. “I was screaming and yelling, ‘You’re behind! You’re losing!’”

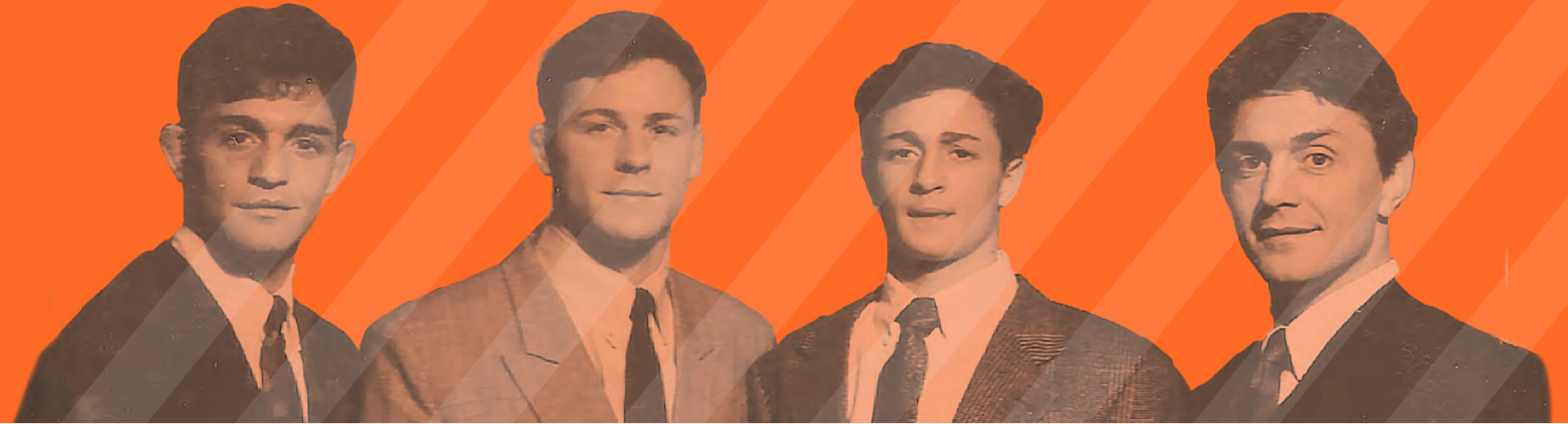
Mark’s quest for a national championship was over. Once again, he was forced to battle back through the consolations and finished fifth. In the end, he finished with a career that many wrestlers dream of — **three Big 12 championships, three All-America seasons and an overall 79-10 record as a Cowboy.**

**“YOU KNOW, I LOOK BACK AND I TELL MY KIDS THIS, USE IT AS AN EXAMPLE,” MARK SAYS. “YOU’VE GOT TO REALIZE YOUR WEAKNESSES AND YOU BETTER ATTACK THEM. IF YOU IGNORE THEM, THEY’RE GOING TO COME BACK AND HAUNT YOU OR THEY’LL COME BACK AND BITE YOU IN THE BUTT.”**



TODAY

THE LEGACY



After nine years at Arizona State, four-time Pac-10 Coach of the Year **LEE ROY** turned his attention to fundraising. He earned his stripes in the profession at Subiaco Abbey and Academy and the University of Florida before returning to Stillwater to take over as executive director of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame and Museum.

From the brink of bankruptcy, Lee Roy has led the Hall of Fame not only to financial stability but also to expansion. In 2010, the Hall acquired the Dan Gable Museum in Waterloo, Iowa. Since 2008, the Hall has raised the millions of dollars necessary to completely renovate both museums into state-of-the-art shrines to the sport of wrestling.



TODAY — THE LEGACY



**JOHN** is in his 29th year as head coach at Oklahoma State and has led the Cowboys to five NCAA team championships. As of this writing, he ranks third on the all-time win list among NCAA wrestling coaches.

He has coached more NCAA champions than any active coach

in college wrestling. Under his tenure, 32 athletes have finished on top of the podium. He's also coached more All-Americans than any active coach in the NCAA with a total of 134 place-winners. He became the first wrestler ever inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 2020.



**PAT** has been running the Arkansas Wrestling Academy since 2008. Alongside super booster Greg Hatcher, he has been instrumental in starting wrestling programs for youth, high schools and colleges across the state of Arkansas.

The state became the 49th to add high school wrestling when the Arkansas Activities Association approved wrestling as a sanctioned sport for the 2008-2009 season. Last year's state tournament featured 552 boys from 53 schools.

Two of Pat's favorite wrestlers are his sons, sixth-grader Gus, and fourth-grader Boone.



**MARK** is the only brother who does not earn a full-time salary with wrestling, instead serving as a successful salesman in the home improvement sector. That's not to say that he doesn't do his share of coaching, however. He helped his son Luke to an Oklahoma high school state championship in 2015 and currently coaches his younger son Hunter, a seventh grader.

He also still enjoys wandering the woods following his coon dogs.

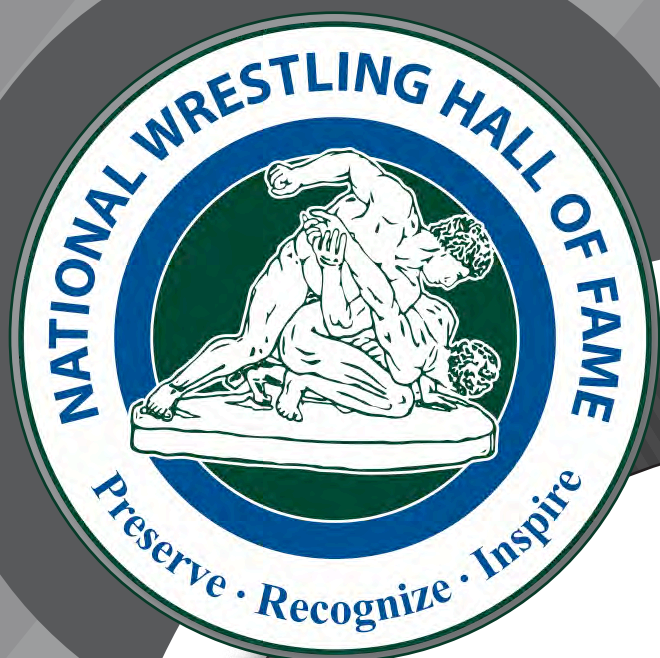


**ALTOGETHER, HEADING INTO THE 2021 CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON, THE SMITH SIBLINGS AND THEIR DIRECT DESCENDANTS HAVE WON 22 STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS, TWO NATIONAL PREP TITLES, NINE NATIONAL JUNIOR FREESTYLE CHAMPIONSHIPS, 21 COLLEGE CONFERENCE TITLES, 22 ALL-AMERICA SEASONS, 11 NCAA TITLES, FOUR WORLD GOLD MEDALS, ONE WORLD SILVER AND TWO OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALS.**

**IN ADDITION, NUMEROUS MEMBERS OF THE THIRD GENERATION HAVE BEGUN WRESTLING IN YOUTH PROGRAMS IN OKLAHOMA, TEXAS AND NEW JERSEY.**



**This story is dedicated to Madalene and Lee Roy Smith, whose loving guidance allowed dreams to thrive.**



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