

# MEMORIES AND ADVICE

## from a Former Wrestler



By Dr. Bill Welker

**D**on Lehman, webmaster of the West York Wrestling Alumni website, asked me for an interview regarding my scholastic wrestling career and my involvement in wrestling throughout my life. The reason he was interested in interviewing me is because I competed against a West York opponent my final bout as a high school wrestler.

I told him I would be glad to accommodate him. Below are excerpts from the interview.

**DON LEHMAN** - After reading your resume, I guess I can safely say that the sport of wrestling has been a huge part of your entire life! At what age did you take up the sport of wrestling, and who were your early mentors up in the Shamokin (PA) area of Pennsylvania?

**BILL WELKER** - I began wrestling in the third grade. We had a six-week wrestling program in elementary school which concluded with an intra-squad tournament in the high school gym sponsored by the Key Club. Varsity wrestlers were the officials and no one ever complained.

My coaches were Mr. Delbaugh, Mr. Artman, Mr. Dapra (state runner-up) and Mr. Cawthern (regional champion). They taught us only the basics, absolutely no fancy stuff. But, what was just as unique, none of them had a son on the team. They coached out of their love for the sport, not to protect the interests of their offspring, which you often witness today.

**DON LEHMAN** - Dr. Welker, your wrestling accomplishments at Shamokin High School are exceptional...85 high school victories in a three-year span with three Sectional titles, three District IV titles, two Northeastern Regional titles, a PIAA

State second place and a PIAA State title! I know you give a lot of credit for your success to Coach Mal Paul and Coach Lyman "Beans" Weaver of Shamokin High School. Tell me a little about the technique drilling and physical training emphasized and taught by these two fine gentlemen during your high school career.

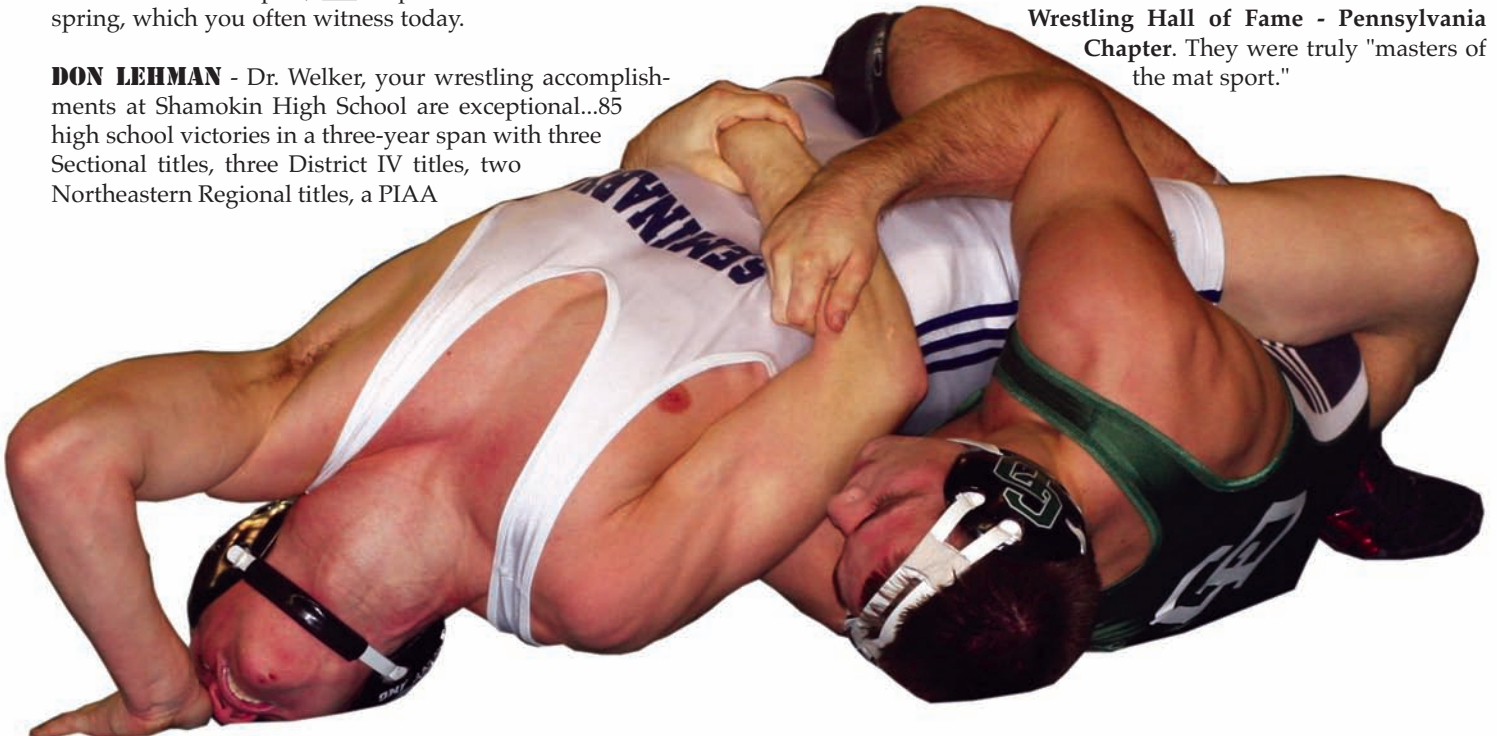
**BILL WELKER** - I can still remember the first day I walked into the Shamokin High School wrestling room. I was in awe with the two icons of Shamokin's "Golden Age" of wrestling - Mal Paul and Lyman "Beans" Weaver. Their success as wrestling coaches was their emphasis on drill work, be it takedowns, rides and pinning combinations, or escapes and reversals.

We were introduced to situation wrestling, round robin workouts and chain wrestling on the bottom. Back then, it wasn't one escape or reversal move and stop, but combinations of escape-reversal maneuvers, constantly moving and changing directions.

Their primary area of emphasis was takedown instruction. In fact, our adversaries referred to the Shamokin "Greyhound" wrestling team as "Double Leg" High School.

Finally, when it came to physical training, they kept us moving all the time. If we weren't wrestling, we were running. If we weren't running, we were climbing ropes multiple times, arms only. In essence, we were continually moving throughout the entire practice.

No wonder Coach **Mal Paul** and his assistant **Lyman "Beans" Weaver** were both inducted into the **National Wrestling Hall of Fame - Pennsylvania Chapter**. They were truly "masters of the mat sport."



**DON LEHMAN** - Did you do any off-season training, such as weight-lifting or running to prepare for the sport of wrestling?

**BILL WELKER** - Unlike today's philosophy of just specializing in one sport, we in the 1960s were influenced by our coaches to participate in various sports during the course of the year.

I also participated in football as a junior high student. In high school, I played baseball and golfed off-season; we didn't have a track program at the time. I also remember lifting weights three days a week and running in the summer.

Whereas contemporary coaches place emphasis on their wrestlers competing in various off-season tournaments, our mentors stressed attendance at summertime wrestling clinics to fine tune our mat skills. My clinic mentors included the likes of Chris Poff, **Edwin Peery** (3-time NCAA Wrestling Champion), Henry "Red" Campbell, **LeRoy Alitz** (Army's Hall of Fame coach), and **Gerry Leeman** (Lehigh's legendary mat mentor, Olympic Silver Medalist and NCAA Wrestling Champion). I was indeed surrounded by the best coaches during my competitive days.

My advice to contemporary wrestlers who attend clinics - don't try to learn as many new moves as you can, but instead (1) observe the clinicians carefully when they are demonstrating moves you use to see how you can execute them more effectively and (2) take home one new wrestling maneuver in each area of wrestling you like, and add it to your total mat repertoire of moves.

**DON LEHMAN** - As a senior, you reached the 1965 112 lb. PIAA State Wrestling finals... and your opponent was West York High School's **Dana Luckenbaugh**. What did you and your coaches know about Dana before the match, and walk me through your mental approach?

**BILL WELKER** - Coach Paul and Coach Weaver were exceptional when it came to scouting our opponents. Their analytical abilities in evaluating our adversaries mat skills were nonpareil.

I don't remember the specifics of our strategy for wrestling Dana Luckenbaugh, but I do know my general "game plan" for the match. I was aware that Dana was an exceptional pinner, strong and very aggressive. My strategy was to slow down the pace of the match to get Dana away from his style of wrestling. In other words, I wanted to keep him off-balance regarding the tactics he normally felt comfortable with during a match. My goal was to keep the match close until the third period and then let loose. Everything worked as planned when Dana and I reached the final period of the bout. In fact, the score was tied 3-3 at that point. Victory and a second state championship was mine for the taking since I was down the third period, and escapes and reversals were my forte.

**DON LEHMAN** - What was your thought process? I know if you escape or reverse Dana you win, but Dana rides you out for the "riding time" point and prevails 4-3. You had to be devastated!

**BILL WELKER** - Yes, I was. I had the match in the grasp of my hands. I knew I previously escaped from Dana, and all was going according to my plan. Being in the down position was perfect; rarely has an opponent ever held me down. But then I made the fatal mistake that all great wrestlers dread happening during a match, I HESITATED! As I mentioned before, Dana was strong. He

rode me out, acquired one-point for riding time, and was crowned the 112-pound PIAA State Champion in 1965.

For years after the bout, I lamented the mistake I made in my final high school match. But as time passed, I became more philosophical regarding my scholastic career. In fact, I now count my blessings. God was so good to the Welker brothers (Floyd Welker won states in 1959), giving us physical abilities and the opportunity to experience a state championship in one of America's most respected scholastic wrestling states - Pennsylvania.

**DON LEHMAN** - Dr. Welker, you went from Shamokin High School to the University of Pittsburgh. Did you wrestle at PITT, and if so, how did you do on the mats?

**BILL WELKER** - Let's first digress a bit. My high school years were the best years of my life. I had a great time. Unfortunately, classes were a nuisance to me, and my grades proved it. I think I graduated in the top 95% of my Shamokin class!

Then, there's the area of student behavior; I was not the perfect student. I was kicked out of chorus for talking too much. My band experience was short-lived as the band director told me to never step foot in the band room again my sophomore year for not paying attention and messing up for the umpteenth time. I was expelled from Key Club my junior year for missing too many meetings. And finally, I was suspended from school for three days my senior year for being caught BY THE PRINCIPAL playing "hooky." I must say Dad was not pleased at all with my suspensions since he was a member of the school board at the time.

Needless to say, I was accepted by the University of Pittsburgh, but on "probation."

On a positive note, years later as a teacher, my misdeeds in high school were a plus. The students never got away with anything in my classroom. I frequently told my students over the years, "I have done everything you're thinking about doing, and much more. Kids, you can't snow the snowman!"

Now, to a more serious topic - my "failure" as a college wrestler. I could make the excuse that my motorcycle accident after my freshman year in college ended my wrestling career, but I won't. I could blame it on an injustice that occurred to me at PITT. But I won't. The plain truth is I lost "desire" to wrestle. What caused this? My excessive and improper dieting for years was my downfall as a wrestler. Allow me to digress again.

The year I won PA states at 95 pounds I weighed in prior to practice at 113 pounds the Monday before Sectionals. Coach Mal Paul was not happy and suggested that my alternate Harry Weinhofer (eventual state champ himself in '66) wrestle at 95 pounds. I told Coach Paul I would be down to weight by Friday's Sectional weigh-in. Coach Paul simply said, "You better be!"

I had to lose over 15 pounds in four days.. At Friday's Sectional weigh-in, I was 2 1/2 pounds under weight!

Yes, I lost my desire due to dieting, but never my love for wrestling. Since then, I have devoted my entire adult life as a wrestling enthusiast in promoting the mat sport, and teaching wrestlers proper "weight-watching" habits. I am still doing so. I don't want any wrestler to make the same mistakes I did as a wrestler. I hope in some way over the last four decades, I have redeemed myself regarding the sport I so deeply love - Wrestling.

**DON LEHMAN** - You then moved to West Virginia where you taught and coached wrestling for ten years. Did you see any difference between Pennsylvania and West Virginia wrestlers?

**BILL WELKER** - Don, the only difference I noticed was that West Virginia was in need of more wrestling coaches when I arrived in 1970. Don't get me wrong, there were some outstanding coaches at the high school level who taught me more tricks of the trade..What we were in need of at that time were more qualified junior high coaches, and we acquired them over the years.

You must also realize that West Virginia is a much smaller state with only 80 schools that have wrestling. But, I have watched our Mountain State wrestlers compete with the best and give a strong showing.. Wrestlers from West Virginia are beginning to make a name for themselves nationally.

Keep in mind, last year at the 2009 Pittsburgh Dapper Dan Wrestling Classic, the West Virginia Team defeated the WPIAL Team 24-21, in the Preliminary Event. We're holding our own and getting better every year!

**DON LEHMAN** - Dr. Welker, I appreciate your time and insight into this great sport of wrestling which you are a huge part of! Thanks again, Bill, and congratulations on your upcoming April 25th induction at State College, into the Pennsylvania Wrestling Hall of Fame, Class of 2010, as an accomplished scholastic wrestler.

**BILL WELKER** - Don, it has been an extreme pleasure. I attribute any success that I have had in my life to being surrounded by people of strong religious character and positive ideals - my parents, my grandparents, my teachers, my coaches and my devoted wife Peggy.. Without them persistently guiding me in the right direction, I don't know what might have happened to me.

Finally, I thank God for all His blessings. Though I don't deserve His "Grace," I thank Him everyday.. I think my mom's total devotion to God has also had a lot to do with it.

The entire interview can be found at [www.westyorkwrestlingalumni.com](http://www.westyorkwrestlingalumni.com). I think you will find it very interesting, candid, and thought provoking.

## Mat Message

*"Certain thoughts are prayers. There are moments when, whatever be the attitude of the body, the soul is on its knees."*

-Victor Hugo

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