

Refman's Blog: "National Duals"

Fred Feeney - OhioWrestling.Net

January 23, 2007

I was all prepared to write about the great wrestling and, of course, the intense Iowa atmosphere the fans exhibited last weekend at the National Duals... until I met a certain young wrestler waiting with his mom to get back home from Iowa.

We were "stranded" somewhat in Iowa due to a snow and ice storm but the Good Lord does tend to work in mysterious ways and I do believe, He does truly have a plan.

As I sat in the airport, somewhat upset that I was late getting home and all that went with that, the mother of a young boy about ten years old was sitting behind me and leaned over and asked if I was a wrestling coach. She had overheard me talking on my phone about the duals and wanted to ask me a few questions. When I explained that I was a mere referee and not a coach, instead of looking disappointed, she smiled softly and said her son was a wrestler and was disappointed they didn't get to see the duals, as they were visiting family in Iowa. She went on to explain that while her son had wrestled for several years, he had yet to win a match but he was very enthusiastic about the sport. I told her that there is more to life than winning a wrestling match and she gently smiled and she said, "oh yes, I agree, and Billy doesn't mind at all. He just loves to be with his friends."

I looked behind me and there sat a smiling, cheerful ten year old boy, that just so happened to have Downs Syndrome. His mom introduced us, and I will tell you that I have never met a happier young man. I introduced myself and shook my hand with extreme gusto.

I asked him his favorite takedown, he said he wasn't sure but his mom said he was a "single leg man, just like his dad was". He asked me point blank if I knew Dan Gable. I told him as a matter of fact, that I had just been to the new Dan Gable Museum and you would have thought I told him I had met the Emperor of the World! He was gushing and wanted to know all about it. I told him I had actually taken pictures of many of the exhibits so we sat there together and I scrolled down through each and every one, describing each and every one in great detail. If he asked one question, he asked a thousand! His questions were clear and to the point; wanting to know everything I saw, touched and heard.

As we chatted and looked at the pictures, we talked about wrestling and his favorite moves, and then out of the blue, he wanted to know all about what it is like to be a referee. I started to share a little what it is like and then he looked at me in the eye very serious and said, "you know, coaches really do know what's best, right?" I looked at him and then he began to giggle. That little mat rat laughed because he knew he had got me!

Interspersed between topics, he always went back to talking about Gable, sort of like telling me, “hey, it’s okay to talk about wrestling, but don’t forget the main topic here, Gable!”

Before I knew it, it was finally time to board the plane. This young man, with a smile that could very well bring world peace, stood and put his hand out to shake goodbye. I looked at him and told him I wanted more than a simple handshake from this wrestler! He stepped in and hugged me appropriately... with a wrestling bearhug! For a second I thought he might suplay me!

As I started to walk away, his mom shook my hand and gave me a quick hug as well and thanked me for spending time with him. I told her through my red eyes that it was truly my pleasure to have spent the time with her favorite wrestler.

As I sat on the plane ride home, I thought about this young wrestler and his positive outlook. Not once did he talk about losing, or getting a bad call or anything, it was all 100% positive. Wouldn’t it be great if everyone was that way?

That young wrestler may not win by points, but if winning was based on the size of his heart, he would stand tall on the podium with a shiny gold medal draped around his neck.

Oh yeah, this was suppose to be about the National Duals... they were fine.

For more information on Down Syndrome, please visit: <http://www.ndss.org>

“A hero is someone we can admire without apology.”



About the author, Fredrick Feeney: Fred, a long time Ohio wrestling official, is a member of the CDWOA, the CWOA and the NWOA, and is a moderator on several popular wrestling discussion forum. Fred's in-depth experience encompasses both scholastic and collegiate levels, having culminated with numerous assignments at the OHSAA State Tournament and NCAA Division II and III Championship finals. Fred and his wife reside in Dublin, Ohio.