

A History of Maine Interscholastic Wrestling

By John E. Smith

JOHN CARAMIHALIS

Considered the founding father of Maine Interscholastic Wrestling, John Caramihalis almost single-handedly brought wrestling to major sports status at Sanford High School and was a driving force in developing wrestling at the state level through recognition by State Principal's Association. He initiated the Sanford tradition that has endured for over 20 years.

John Caramihalis was a member of the Springfield College squad under Doug Parker (1949-53) and was New England A.A.U. champion in 1952. That same year he completed in the National AAU championships at Cornell University.

Caramihalis came to Sanford in 1958 and immediately made his presence known in this "new" sport called wrestling. Early newspaper accounts place the first interscholastic dual meet in Maine at Sanford gymnasium between Portland and Sanford High Schools in February 1959. That year Sanford and Portland split dual meets on a home and home basis, while Sanford lost to the Perkins School for the Blind. Mainstays for the squad were the brother combination of Ron and Rick Sparkowich. In the first interscholastic tournament ever held in Maine, Sanford outlasted a tough Deering team 110-105, with Sanford crowing four individual champions. This was the first of six consecutive championships that Caramihalis won at Sanford, and this first of 11 consecutive titles for Sanford before Belfast would knock them out of the top spot in the 1969 Class A tournament.

In 1960 Sanford extended their wrestling schedule to Cooperstown, NY against Central High. It was the start of a two year dual competition. Portland also continued to wrestle the Redskins. An oddity occurred in the state meet that year as Sweeney and Bean, both of Sanford, ended the 121 pound finals in a 6-6 draw. With no clear means of breaking the deadlock, both wrestlers were declared the winner, the only time that such a tie has occurred in any tournament competition in Maine.

Wrestling in New England was really beginning to grow in 1961 and the Sanford schedule was also extended to include Winnacunnett High School of Rye, New Hampshire, as well old foe Perkins School in Boston. This was also the first year the Northern New England Tournament, the winners of which would be eligible for the New England meet. Sanford won that first Northern tourney by edging Braintree, Massachusetts 70-79. White (120) and Sparkowich (154) won gold medals.

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Sanford continued to dominate in 1962 and 1963. The 1962 state tourney at Lisbon saw two classes crown champions, with four teams in class A and eight teams in class B. Sanford easily won A tourney that year and crowned six individual champs. The following year was an even bigger runaway in a four team and nine gold medal winners.

Caramihalis' best team at Sanford was the last team he coached there. That squad led by the likes of Doug Libby, Keith Kalman, Reggie Monroe, Paul Scarponi, and Dave Woodsome, made a shambles of the state tournament and won the New England Tournament as well, the first of only two Maine teams to ever accomplish that feat. Monroe (112), Libby (127) and Kalman (165) won New England titles.

Caramihalis moved to Biddeford for the 1965 campaign. That particular state tournament saw the closest finish in any state meet up to that point. Caramihalis had his Tigers up as Sanford and Biddeford wrestlers met head to head in six of the 12 classes. Sanford prevailed, however and the upset should have been, never materialized. That 1965 season marked the zenith of Biddeford wrestling. After one more season at Biddeford, Caramihalis did graduate study at Duke University, during which time he coached the freshman team. Upon returning to Maine, he worked as a physical therapist in Sanford. He initiated varsity wrestling at Nasson College in Springvale and coached there for three seasons (1972-74). He was on the Maine and New England board of wrestling officials for many years and was the United States Wrestling Federation representative for Maine in the early 1970's.

The impact that John Caramihalis has made on interscholastic wrestling in Maine is still being felt. Although no longer actively involved in the sport, he still follows intently the fortunes of the Sanford Redskins and can be seen at the state tournament, wherever it is held. Many of his early pupils are seen as coaches, officials, parents of wrestlers, and avid fans of the state.

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DON HOLSAPPLE AND FRANK SPIZUOCO

When one talks about the roots of wrestling in Maine, and Dexter wrestling in particular, Don Holsapple and Frank Spizuoco represent the Long Island connection. Maine wrestling has its foundation in Springfield College – New York asix. Don Holsapple graduated from Springfield in 1949, an able puple of the legendary Dr Raymond Sparks. Holsapple coached a total of nine years at Dexter, with a two year hitch in the middle at Valley Stream, Long Island, New York. Holsapple did for Dexter what John Caramihalis did for Sanford; namely, he built a winning mat tradition which endured long after he had left the Dexter school system. While Sanford was dominating class A wrestling in the 1960's, Dexter was mirroring that effort in Class B competation. Dexter had undefeated seasons in 1959, 1963, 1964, 1965, and 1971, during which consecutive win streaks of 31 and 33 dual meet victories were set.

In the early days of wrestling, the seperation of classes A and C and the class in which particular school wrestled was determined by the starting date for each school. Class B schools were those that started interscholastic competation after Februrary 1st, while class A teams started prior to that date. Holsapple and Spizuoco are credited with giving that guideline its impetus with the State principals Association. That concept held true through most of the early years. Holsapple left dexter at the end of the 1962 school year to take over the football coaching duties at Brewer High School, a position that he also held at Dexter. An intramural participant at Brewer would be Jerry Perkins. Holsapple later returned to Dexter, assuming the position as superintendent of schools.

Frank Spizuoco, a native of Valley Stream, Long Island, came to Maine after a standout interscholastic career in football and wrestling at Central High, and enrolled at the University of Maine at Orono. He played varsity football and was instrumental in developing an intramural wrestling program at UMO along with Ian MacKinnon. His ties with Dexter developed while an undergraduate at UMO and he assisted Don Holsapple prior to his graduation from college and for a two year period while teaching at Dexter. After Holsapple left for Brewer, Spizuoco coached football and wrestlinig and guided Dexter to wrestling titles in 1963,1964, and 1965. Its is interesting to note that during this period Spizuoco was instrumental in helping to develop programs at Foxcroft Academy, Skowhegan, and Piscataquis. He was always willing to travel to put on clinics or conduct assemblies in the name of interscholastic wrestling. Spizuoco retired to private business in 1966 but remained in close contact with the squad assisting at practices. He returned to coach for one season in 1973, and in the expanded format that included 21 teams, took Dexter to a fourth place finish in the state tournament. Dave Gudrow, a freshman at the time, won the state title at 138 and was voted the award as the tournament's outstanding wrestler.

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GARY KENT

Gary Kent has been without a doubt one of the most innovative coaches in Maine and New England wrestling circles. His career has spanned more than two decades and includes participation as a wrestler and official. The Auburn native attended Ithaca (NY) College where he first learned wrestling fundamentals, and later at the University of Maine at Orono. It was while at Maine that Kent became an intramural participant in the program headed up by Frank Spizuoco and Ian MacKinnon.

After graduating from Orono, Kent took over the reigns of the fledging mat program at Lisbon High School, and within three years had taken the Grayhounds to the state class B championship. That 1963 state title has been the only state wrestling championship at Lisbon. A three-year coaching stint at North Reading (MASS) high school was followed by one year at Rumford and two years at Sanford. His first year at Sanford saw the Redskins win a head to head confrontation with Keith Lancaster's Skowhegan entry for the state crown.

In the fall of 1969 the new Massabesic High School opened their doors at Waterboro. The students were former Sanford enrollees and it seemed only natural that wrestling be included in the varsity sports program. Not one to pass up a challenge, Kent went to Massabesic as varsity football and wrestling coach. Opting for class A status immediately Massabesic wrestled a full schedule against top teams like Sanford, Rumford, and Traip. Although they finished in last place in the state A tournament, it was apparent to everyone there the Mustangs were for real and a contender for the future.

During the next two seasons, giant strides were made as Massabesic finished sixth in the 1971 tournament and second the following year. That 1972 squad ran away with the Southern Regional with six champions, and lost the state title to Rumford by only three points. Representing Massabesic in the championship circle were Don Moreau (105) and Dan Ouellette (155), the first two Mustang state champs. The following year was also a Rumford-Massabesic finish, but this time more than 60 points separated the two teams. Harold Tuttle (132) was one of the few non-Rumford winners that day. A week later Earl Boyes (185) was to win the first of his three New England titles with a variation of the freestyle salto which would become his trademark. There lay the essence of the Kent genius. His ability to adapt various techniques from the international styles to scholastic wrestling. Later that spring, Kent took a group of wrestlers to New England AAU freestyle and Greco-Roman championships. To no one's surprise several medals were won and with the new found expertise, Kent returned to indoctrinate the State of Maine. Freestyle champions at Lowell

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were Boyes (192), and brothers Phil (154) and Fred (UNL) Smith, both of Kennebunk, Greco champs were Boyse again (192), Sandy Rollins (178) and Art Tuttle (106) all of Massabesic.

Kent's trip to the National AAU Junior Olympic Tournament in St Cloud, Minnesota, was not without its fruits of victory. Boyes became the first Maine wrestler to win a national title by taking the Greco championship at 192, while Tuttle and Frank Gagnon both finished sixth. Boyes also participated at the Junior World Championships in Alabama that summer.

Working closely with the National AAU office in Indianapolis, Kent was able to gain one of the eight national sites for the visiting Soviet National Junior team. That meet between the Soviet all-stars and the Maine freestyle champions marked the arrival of international wrestling in the state. And Gary Kent was the moving force. The meet became a state-wide media event. Pre-meet festivities, the actual meet, and the post-meet gathering became front-page news. The Gannet papers were foremost in the list of sponsors. The Soviets crushed the Maine stars, but it really didn't matter, because wrestling in Maine had come of age. And Gary Kent had seen his dream come true.

Two seasons at Hyde School followed, and the freestyle seasons saw national teams from Poland and Austria wrestle at various sites in the state/. Again Kent provided much of the impetus to the programs and most of the actual coaching of the teams. The 1975 Junior Olympic champs were the first Maine wrestlers to travel to Europe to compete in a series of duals in Austria and Switzerland.

After a two-year hiatus from education, Kent returned to coaching in 1978 and initiated a wrestling program at MCI. Primarily concerned with the post-graduate program, Kent took three wrestlers to the New England Prep Championships and came back with three titlists: Don Fryson (105), two-time State and New England interscholastic champ Bob Eon (145), and former New England champ Evans Brantley (UNL). Eon also won the National Prep Championship at Lehigh that season. The next season Kent returned to Hyde to again head the wrestling program.

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