

# Brighton wrestling coach puts team above all

*He wants students to be good athletes and good people*

By **Urla Hill**

Our Towns

BRIGHTON — It seems that almost everyone has shared a funny experience with Mark Hoyt, the Brighton High School wrestling coach. But, unfortunately, no one is willing to share any funny stories.

Junior Alex Croog wouldn't share a practical joke Hoyt had played on him.

"It was just something I never expected," said Croog, who has wrestled under Hoyt for the past four seasons.

Senior Otha Davidson, a Division I college football prospect, feared sharing a story because he knew it could catch up to him.

Said former Irondequoit wrestler Tony Gentile, now Hoyt's assistant: "Everyone knows that if you let anything out, it could come back to haunt you at the team banquet."

But what Croog, Davidson and Gentile weren't afraid to share about Hoyt is that he teaches his student-athletes to be good wrestlers as well as good people.

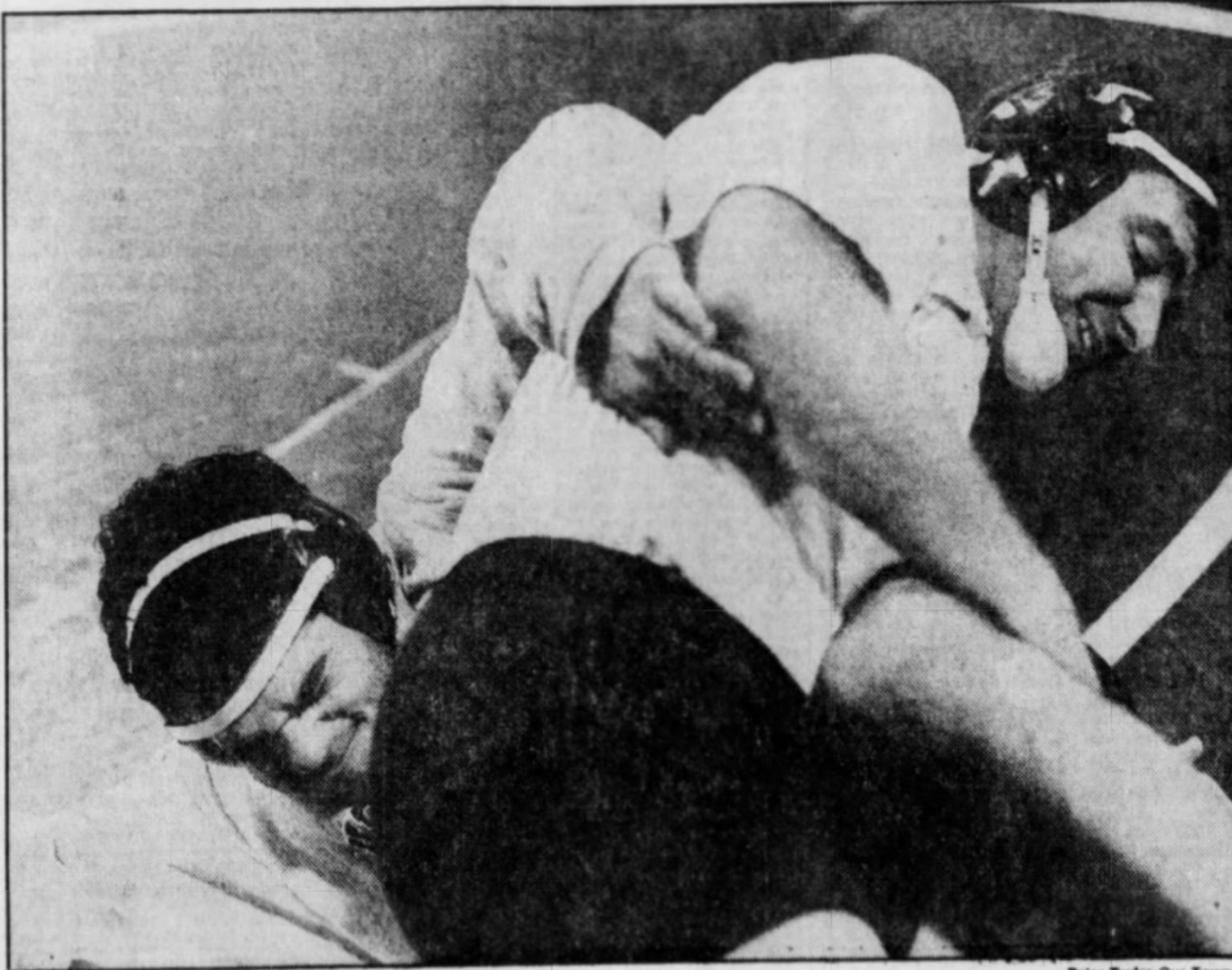
"He's what makes the team do well," Croog said.

Others who had been under Hoyt's direction had good things to share as well. They often return to the school to see how the program has progressed since their departures.

"When I went here, we weren't the best athletes. It was the program," said Steve Salzman, a 1983 graduate of the high school.

Salzman was one of the state's top high school wrestlers under Hoyt. He went on to become Yale University's winningest wrestler.

Dan Sobol now wrestles for Cornell University. "Even though we haven't had the best athletes, we did



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*Mark Hoyt, above, play wrestles with team member Aaron Gabay. Above right, he watches his Brighton wrestling team practice. He focuses on team goals, not individual ones.*

what it took to be good. Coach Hoyt teaches the value of hard work," Sobol said.

"We'd come back after winning a tournament, and he'd put us through a hard practice so our heads wouldn't swell."

Hoyt, 42, who lives in Henrietta, is an assistant coach for football and softball. He said he bases his coaching on the team concept. He's borrowed concepts from his high school and college coaches.

Hoyt said he was most impressed by his coaches because they were teachers first, coaches second.

"What I got from my high school coach was that wrestling was more

than just a sport. It's about discipline and individuality," Hoyt said. "Then when I got to college, my coach was really my mentor. He taught wrestling as a way of life."

Hoyt also has borrowed concepts from some of the top area coaches. "I watch people who do things right. Whether they win or lose, the kids are still winners," said Hoyt, who wrestled for Springfield College in Massachusetts.

"We spell it out for the kids — always make sure the team comes first. I tell them that they can make a contribution to the team even if they don't win.

"If they make it to the sectionals

or the supersectionals, that's just extra for them."

Davidson likes the way Hoyt makes the team work together. "He makes us make each other work hard," he said.

"Coach always says, 'You're only as good as the program you leave behind. Your success is their success,'" Davidson said.

While wrestling for Irondequoit High, Gentile wrestled against Hoyt's team. As his assistant, Gentile has picked up Hoyt's strategies to coach other sports.

"If you're just around the guy, you'll learn," said Gentile, who is the head softball coach at Brighton.



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— Mark Hoyt  
Brighton wrestling coach

"I use his way of motivating my kids by not yelling, but instead talking and reasoning.

"People have to want to get better, but not by having the coach yell at them."

Hoyt took over the Brighton wrestling program in 1972. He didn't inherit a lot of talent his first season.

"Originally we drew kids who couldn't play any another sport or who were cut from some team," said Hoyt, whose coaching record was 4-12 that year.

But Hoyt soon discovered a way to get kids who really wanted to participate in the sport. Since he had taught at French Road Elementary School, he recruited a group of sixth-graders who wanted to wrestle.

Hoyt worked with the boys for the next several years. His first win-

ning season came during the 1977-78 year. The team went 9-5 as juniors. During the 1978-79 season, Hoyt had 16 seniors and a 12-3 record.

Hoyt also has sent many boys to the state tournament, including Salzman, Sobol, Davidson, Todd Maribella, Ben Weinthal, Greg Lechtner, Mike VanHorn and Brian Kurlander.

Now Hoyt has to fear what he has taught some of his former wrestlers. Rob Thomas, head coach at Penfield, and Kevin Heilbronner, an assistant at Webster, once his students are now his opponents.

"I always feel compelled to see if they're doing things right," Hoyt said. "They are. They have great programs."

Why not? They learned from one of the best.