

Auburn wrestlers angry as program dropped

By BOB MAYES
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Auburn University wrestlers reacted angrily Friday afternoon after learning the program, along with women's golf, had been dropped by the school.

Three sports — the other is women's volleyball — have now been dropped by Auburn in the last year.

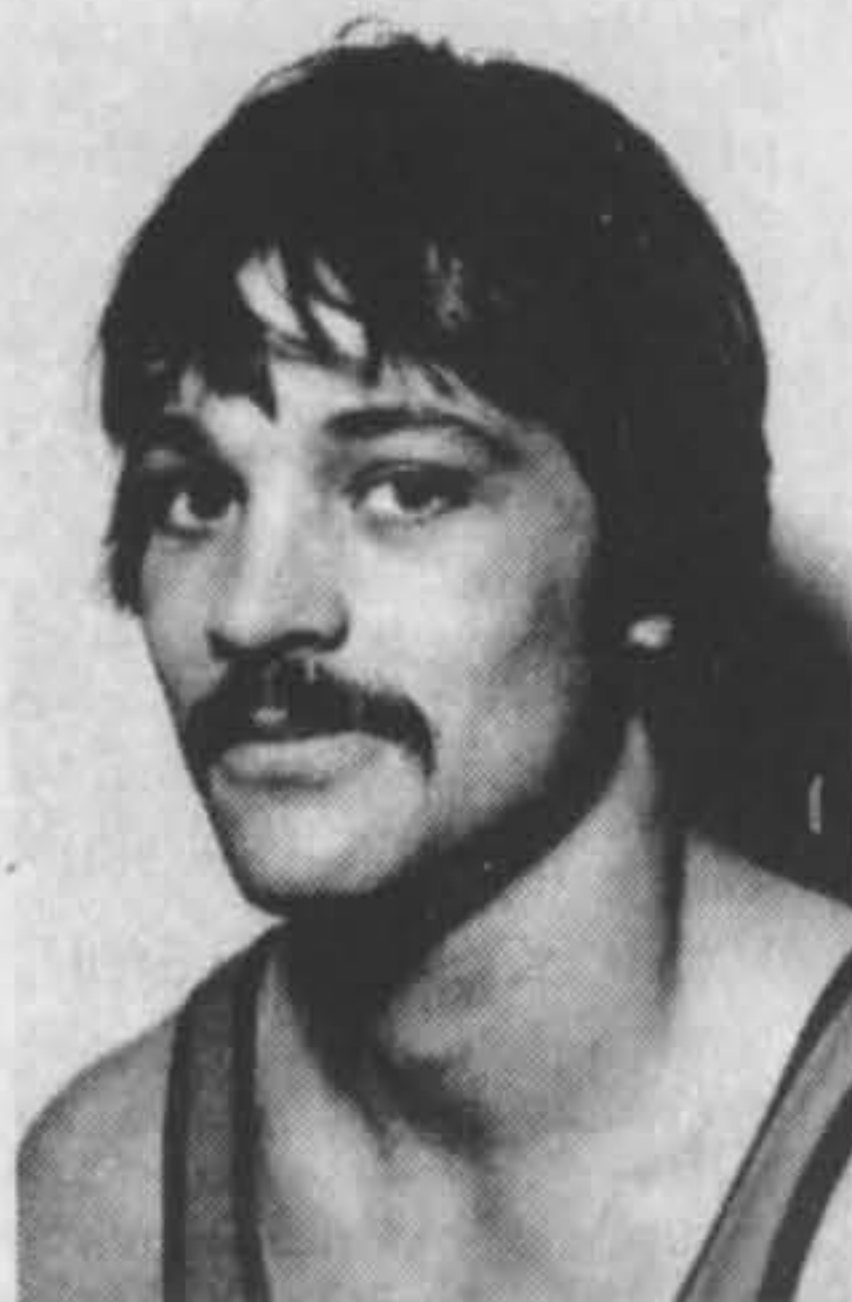
"I don't understand this at all," said junior Bob Klein, who transferred from Georgia after it dropped wrestling in 1980. "We finished ninth in the country this year and the only other sport on campus to do better was swimming (fifth)."

"I could understand it a little bit better if they had said we weren't going to have it at the beginning of the spring. But they'll be starting school in a month. It's a really bad situation for those of us who would like to continue competing."

"I understand Coach (Tom) Milkovich was supposed to talk to them (athletic director Pat Dye and associate athletic director John Cochran) this morning to see what can be done about this."

"It's not settled yet. At least I don't think so."

Milkovich could not be reached Friday night, but Cochran acknowl-



TIM WELCH

...uncertain future

edged a meeting had taken place and said the decision is final.

Dye said eliminating wrestling and women's golf would save \$130,000, which would be allocated to other non-revenue men's and women's sports.

"The decision is irrevocable," Cochran said. "The only way would be for someone to come forth and endow the program, and that would

take an awful big commitment. We just need the money in other areas at the university."

"We feel very badly about it. We talked with Coach Milkovich this morning and he's a fighter — he has to be or he wouldn't have been as successful a wrestler and coach as he has been. I think he understands the decision has been made."

"We have a commitment to the athletes. We will continue their scholarships or help them find a place to compete this year if they wish. They won't have to sit out a year because NCAA rules state that if a sport is dropped by a university an athlete can go to another school without having to sit out a transfer period."

"Coach Milkovich's contract will be honored for this year. We will find other duties for him at the university if he wishes to stay."

With Auburn's decision to drop wrestling, only three Southeastern Conference schools retain the sport — Tennessee, Kentucky and Louisiana State. Alabama dropped its program three years ago and the SEC quit recognizing it as a conference sport when less than six schools had programs.

The wrestlers point out Auburn is

steeped in wrestling tradition dating back to the Swede Umbach days, and was among the nation's elite last season.

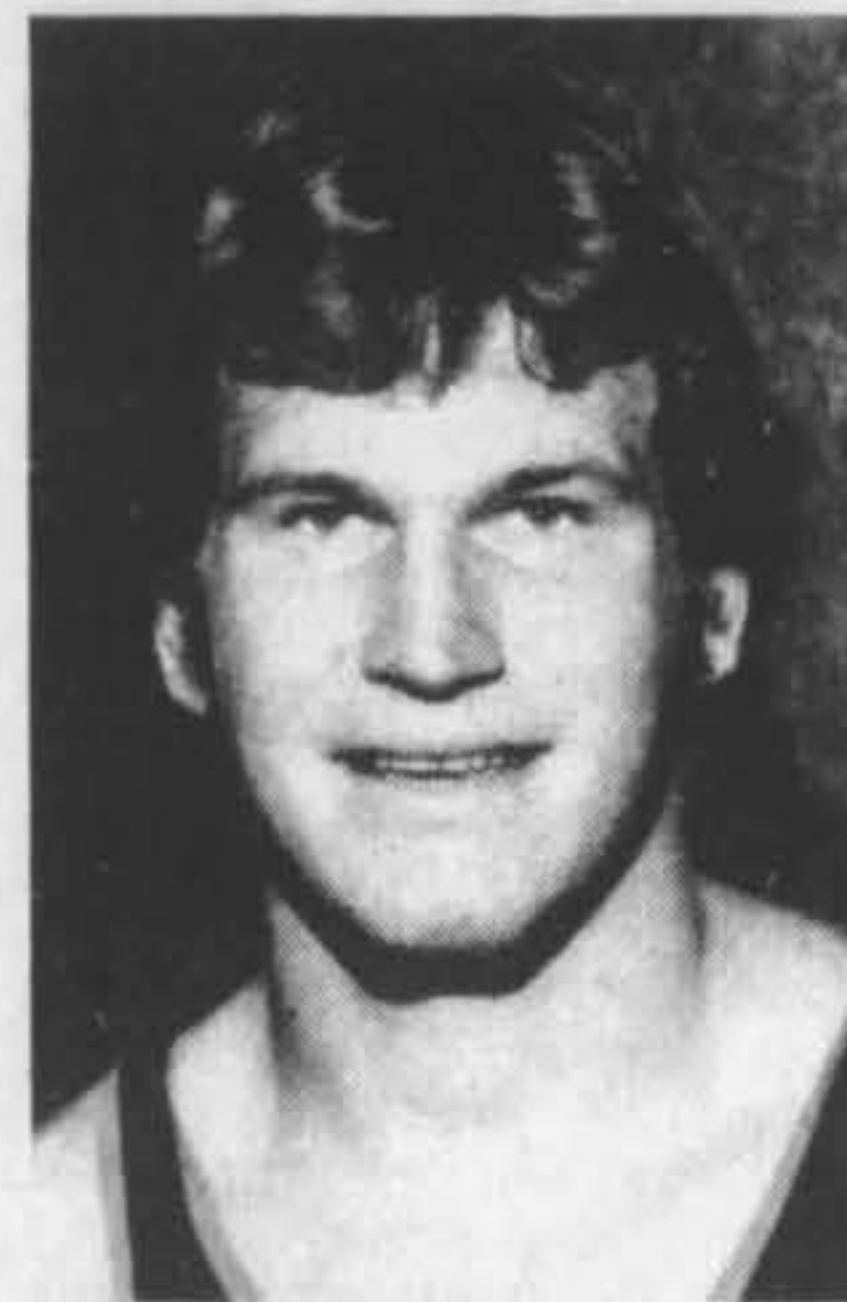
"I'm greatly disappointed with the decision," said Tim Welch, redshirted last season after going 29-7 two years ago. "They didn't give us any time to do anything about next year. I don't know what I'm going to do."

"Even if they honor the scholarships, that isn't much consolation if we want to continue to compete. My first inclination is to transfer to another school and use the year of eligibility I have remaining."

"This really hurts, especially after the kind of season we had last year. I hope Coach Milkovich can fight this decision, but I guess it would take a miracle to keep it alive. I just wonder if there's some alumnus out there who's willing to give us the money it would take."

Chris Gardner, a past SEC Wrestler of the Year and now a graduate assistant, said it would take an "act of God" to keep the program going.

"It doesn't really come as a big surprise to me," he said, "but it's definitely a disappointment. I mean, it's no big deal to me personally



CHRIS GARDNER

...sorry for younger guys

since my career is over, but I really feel for the younger guys who are still competing."

"Why didn't they drop it in the spring? If they'd done that our guys would've had a chance to find someplace to go. But that's next to impossible now. We've got two All-Americans who are going to have to go somewhere and walk on."

"I really feel sorry for the younger guys and the guys who have signed this year. They don't have any chance to do anything about next year now."

Dye, who became athletic director in May succeeding Lee Hayley, said the economy had painted Auburn athletics into a financial corner.

"We hate to take this action," he said, "but in our judgment it was the thing to do at this particular time. This is in no way a reflection on the coaches or athletes in those sports. It is a comment on the economic times in which we live."

"Auburn's tradition of good wrestling teams and our recent success makes it doubly painful to have to take this action, but we have to do what we think is in the best interest of our overall sports program."

"We have dropped our wrestling program, but we have not dropped our commitment to the people who are affected by the decision."

Women's golf coach Ron Murphy said he understood the decision.

"Schools are being forced to make these decisions everyday," he said, "but you don't seem to notice until they affect you. I'm sure it was a difficult decision for all involved."