

UB's Ed Michael: A Wrestling Whirlwind

By JIM KELLEY

You don't have to look very far if you want to find Ed Michael.

You might find him teaching one of his four classes in physical education at the University of Buffalo.

Or perhaps you could catch up with him during his daily three and one half-mile run among the buildings of the Main St. campus.

But more often than not, you'll find him down in the basement of Clark Hall, a tired

Sportraits

stone structure that has long been the home of UB athletics.

That's where the UB wrestling team trains and that's where you'll find Ed Michael, doing what he does best — coaching.

MICHAEL, 35, has been coaching college wrestling teams for 12 years, the last eight spent at UB. During that time he has compiled a record that most coaches with twice his experience would be hard pressed to match.

While at UB, Michael's teams have won 101 matches, suffered through 29 losses and three ties.

Couple this with a 42-5 won lost record while at Corning Community College in Ithaca, N. Y., and you have an impressive 143 victories against just five losses.

But the won-lost column tells only part of Michael's story. Four of his teams have been ranked among the top 20 in the nation. His present squad is ranked second among New York State Schools, and has never been pegged lower than fourth.

THE COACH takes modest pleasure in his team's success, but is more difficult to pin down when pressed to explain it.

"Any success I may be enjoying as a coach is due to the athletes I've worked with," he says. "There are a lot of good coaches out there and all coaches are basically alike. I've just been a very fortunate man."

That's true, as far as it goes. What Michael fails to mention is how much time he spends working for that success, usually up to 10 hours a day.

That kind of workload generally indicates a man who is unable to delegate authority. Not so in Michael's case, at UB the wrestling program is a one-man show.

MICHAEL IS the coach, recruiter, schedule maker, and number one team booster. He does everything but drive the team bus. Though he has driven some team members to tournaments in his own car.

He does have an assistant coach, Steve Stever, who helps handle the younger team members.

The shortage of staff points up the one problem that has plagued the program since its inception — money.

There are no scholarships available for wrestling at the University which is a definite recruiting hardship. Michael doesn't see it as an insurmountable obstacle and is quick to point out that the university has always supported his efforts in less tangible ways than money.

TO GET AROUND the money problem he has built up a strong rapport with area high school coaches. He was one of the first to recognize the talent available at the junior college level.

Once he locates a prospect, Michael uses a recruiting approach that is virtually unheard of in this age of big business athletics.

"We have a good program that is well known, we wrestle a very tough schedule and that helps," he says. "But what I try to stress is the quality of education here."

"This is a major university with a wide range of educational programs. I try to impress upon a student athlete that when he is through here he will be prepared for a life beyond athletics."

"By the time they graduate from here they have the tools they need both educationally and physically to compete in the world."

"If a kid is interested in nothing but an athletic scholarship and four years of good times, well we can't compete with that. But, if he wants to com-

bine athletics with a first rate education, we can compete."

THE OFFICE of Admissions and Records bears him out. In eight years over 95 per cent of his wrestlers have graduated with degrees. That's an impressive statistic in which Michael takes an understandable amount of pride.

"People can see the results of our program," he notes. "We don't exploit athletes here."

Michael's interest in wrestling goes back to when he was a student at Ithaca. After an outstanding career in both wrestling and football he went on to Maryland University where he obtained a Masters degree in physical education.

IRONICALLY, during the time he was at Maryland he had always assumed he would concentrate on being a football coach as well as a gym teacher.

However, the realities of the job market brought him to Corning Community College where the school had a wrestling team but no football program.

"It was an ideal situation, except for no football," he recalls. "I want to teach and they had an opening, they also needed a wrestling coach. I accepted and decided right then that I would build my coaching skills around wrestling, not football."

When the opening at UB came along, four years later, Michael was already well known. His record was an enviable one. His junior college teams had been ranked as high as 13th nationally, and had already sent six grapplers on to UB.

He replaced Gery Gergley who had accepted a position at Florida Tech.

IT'S DIFFICULT for the layman to understand what motivates someone to want to be a wrestler. Wrestlers labor in relative anonymity. No matter how talented or talkative a wrestler is, there is no pot of gold awaiting his signature as there is in basketball, football or boxing.

Wrestling is a physically and mentally demanding sport. To go eight minutes on the mat, a wrestler must be in top condition. They usually work out every day during the school season, exercising or practicing against other team members.

In the off season there is running as well as exercises and an occasional summer tournament.

THE DEMANDS a wrestler puts on himself are immense, "Michael says." The training is similar to boxing. You push

yourself beyond the limits of pain."

"Just making weight, (wrestlers must meet stringent weight requirements before a match) is often an ordeal. You have to reduce your caloric intake and often dehydrate yourself just to be able to go out and compete."

"The mental conditioning is just as tough. You're out there by yourself. If you have flaws in your character, are weak willed or in poor condition, it's apparent immediately."

WHY DO they do it? Michael believes wrestlers compete for personal reward. "It's a feeling that goes back to gladiator days. There is a great sense of satisfaction when that official takes you to the center of the arena and raises your arm in victory."

Michael gets the same feeling each time one of his athletes is out there. "I wrestle every match along with them," he says. "Over the years I've learned to try and not let things I can't control affect me. I'm not every successful but I try."

Even when he's not working Michael's thoughts are never far from wrestling or athletics in general.

In the moments he has set aside for his personal life he finds time to be a husband and father of two children. His family shares his interest in the sport.

MICHAEL IS an advisor to the town of Amherst's wrestling council, a group formed in part by his wife Connie in an effort to introduce the sport into the town's recreation program.

He has also initiated talks with the City of Buffalo in an attempt to foster a wrestling program for its youth.

Aside from wrestling, Michael enjoys watching all pro sports as well as college. He does confess to a weakness for the Washington Redskins football team because he feels he can still relate to the "old guys" on the club.

"I ENJOY all spectator sports, but I do feel that more people should get involved in participation," Michael says. "If you want to be active and alert you have to make it one of your top priorities."

"Like your job or your home, once you make it a priority in your life it becomes easier to obtain as well as maintain."

The man many of his athletes call "Coach" keeps close ties with his old students. Often he will look out for their interests even after they graduate.

"You could always call on him and he would do whatever he could for you," says Roy Guarino, 26, a 1973 graduate who wrestled under Michael at both Corning and UB. "He was always concerned about his athletes both personally and academically."

GUARINO, WHO is now the wrestling coach at Williamsville East High School is grateful to Michael for giving him a start. "I've patterned most of my coaching style after him. He got me into coaching, recommending me to jobs I never knew existed."

If I have a question or problems — coaching or personal — I could always call on him."

Things are changing in sports at UB. Budget restrictions have brought about a reduction in the athletic program from Division

I to Division III in the National Collegiate Athletic Association. This will in turn force UB out of the Eastern Wrestling League, a league in which it was a charter member.

UB's elimination from the league will automatically discontinue some competition against nationally ranked schools. As an independent school with a history of top caliber competition, Michael is cautiously optimistic about UB's future.

"WE WILL do what we can do," he states. "We never tried to be something we couldn't be. We'll schedule top schools."

Would he consider leaving UB if the program faltered? "I can't project beyond today, as a person matures his priorities and values change. At this point in time I enjoy what I'm doing. I'm happy to be a part of this community. I think Buffalo and the University have a lot to offer."

"I emphasize that when I recruit, and I wouldn't be here myself if I didn't believe it."

Despite his success, Michael feels there is still a lot left for him to accomplish and he feels his goals still are within reach.

He is still searching for an NCAA individual champion, and although he has had seven seasons with just one loss, he has never had an undefeated one.

He ranks these as disappointments but of the kind that keep him motivated.

MOTIVATION AND intensity, two qualities that build winners, are easily recognizable in Michael's character. He is aware that there is even more pressure placed upon a winning coach than a losing one. And he knows the importance of maintaining a proper perspective toward winning.

"As a coach, it's easy to have tunnel vision as to what an athlete can do for you or your program. You can self destruct."

"While you are trying to win it's not always easy to keep other things in perspective."

That's why he is a firm believer in academic standards for athletes, and has a commitment to his teaching that is on par with the one he made to coaching.

"EVERY TEAM, every class, has a different personality," he notes. "When you get a group of students who have no skills and you see them acquire skills and become a different person because of it, it's quite a thrill."

"You watch them grow as people as well as athletes."

"I consider myself a very fortunate person. I like what I do and I've never dreaded coming to work. I'm pleased with my profession. I believe in it."



News Staff Artist Richard Kline

Basketball Ratings

ASSOCIATED PRESS POLL

The Top Twenty teams in The Associated Press college basketball poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, season records and total points.

Team	W	L	Pts.
1—Kentucky (45)	8	0	900
2—North Carolina	7	1	820
3—Arkansas	8	0	614
4—Notre Dame	7	1	560
5—Marquette	5	1	519
6—Indiana State	7	0	455
7—Louisville	6	1	449
8—UCLA	8	1	399
9—Nevada-Las Vegas	11	0	270
10—Syracuse	8	1	229
11—Cincinnati	6	1	213
12—Holy Cross	6	0	146
13—Providence	6	0	132
14—Maryland	7	1	160
15—Indiana	6	1	55
16—Virginia	5	0	49
17—Kansas	7	2	38
18—Florida State	8	0	37
19—San Francisco	6	3	11
20—Detroit	6	1	28

UNITED PRESS POLL

NEW YORK — The United Press college basketball ratings with won-lost records through games of Sunday, Dec. 25, and number of first-place votes in parentheses:

Team	W	L	Pts.
1—Kentucky (36)	7	0	378
2—North Carolina	7	1	259
3—Notre Dame	7	1	217
4—Arkansas (1)	8	0	230
5—Marquette	5	1	189
6—Louisville	6	1	174
7—UCLA	7	0	163
8—Indiana St. (1)	7	0	130
9—Holy Cross	6	0	65
10—Syracuse	8	1	47
11—(tie) Cincinnati	6	1	34
12—(tie) Indiana	6	1	34
13—Providence	6	0	19
14—Maryland	7	1	15
15—Florida St.	8	0	13
16—Utah St.	8	1	12
17—Virginia	5	0	9
18—Kansas	7	3	8
19—(tie) San Fran	6	3	7
20—(tie) Nebraska	9	0	7

Connors Qualifies

For Masters

NEWMARKET, N.J. (UPI) — Jimmy Connors qualified for the 1971 U.S. National Tennis Championships by winning the first round match at Madison Square Garden on Tuesday, December 22, 1971. Connors, 27, defeated the richest player in the world, Bjorn Borg, 6-1, 6-2, 6-1. The match was the richest in the history of tennis, with a prize of \$100,000. Connors is the first American to qualify for the U.S. National Championships since 1957. He is also the first American to qualify for the U.S. National Championships since 1957. He is also the first American to qualify for the U.S. National Championships since 1957.