

Edinboro Fighting Scots Dressed To Kill To Promote Touted Wrestling Program

Poster Showing Grapplers In Kilts Is Serving As Popular Fund-raiser

EDINBORO, Pa. (AP) — Dennis Rodman isn't the only skirt-wearing man in sports. Bruce Baumgartner's nationally ranked Edinboro University's wrestlers are also dressed to kill.

Actually, they're dressed in kilts — plaid ones, fashionably below-the-knee length with cute little pleats. Just the thing for the cover of *Vogue* or *Cosmopolitan*, but hardly a suitable look for *Sports Illustrated*.

Not to skirt the issue, but how did some of the most macho men in college athletics end up dressing for their team picture in, well, dresses?

"We were looking for a catchy poster to sell as a fund-raiser, and my assistant, Tim Flynn, came up with the idea," said Baumgartner, a two-time Olympic champion and four-time medalist. "They shot the guys bare-chested and in sweatshirts, and we liked the bare-chested look best."

The quickest way to make his Fighting Scots fighting mad is to suggest they look pretty in pink — and red and green — and

Baumgartner said none of his athletes are grappling with their gender.

"The poster is on more walls in northwestern Pennsylvania than Pamela Anderson Lee," Edinboro sports information director Shawn Ahearn said.

It also has brought unaccustomed publicity to one of the most overlooked of sports and a relatively small state university that takes on, and regularly beats, the big boys of college wrestling.

How the Scots wrestle — in singlets, mind you, not skirts — would rate second glances even if there were no poster. Check the latest NCAA Division I rankings, and it looks like the Big Ten against the Big Little: Oklahoma State, Iowa, Minnesota, Penn State, Illinois — and Edinboro.

The Fighting Scots, 11-0 before Thursday's night match at West Virginia, also are the uncrowned Rose Bowl champions of wrestling, beating Ohio State and Arizona State.

"We downplay the national ranking in the wrestling room, and it's

great to have undefeated and nationally ranked wrestlers, but you have to perform every night," Baumgartner said. "So far, the guys have. They're not afraid of working hard."

Baumgartner has benefited from geography and meteorology while systematically building one of the nation's best wrestling programs in a small town.

Located 15 miles south of Erie 100 miles north of Pittsburgh and a Tiger Woods tee shot away from eastern Ohio, Edinboro is ideally located in a region populated by some of the nation's best high school wrestlers. Not surprisingly, many are eager to be coached by the nation's best-known and most successful amateur wrestler.

"I don't know if they (his gold medals) have opened some doors. ... The guys don't come here to say 'Hi' and hang out with Bruce," Baumgartner said. "They come here to accomplish something."

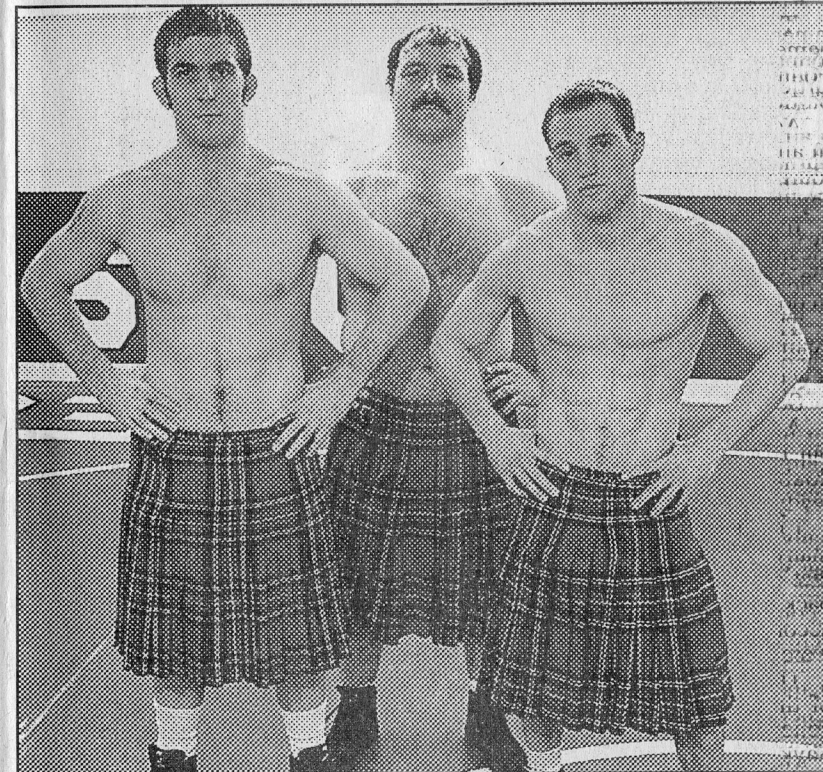
Edinboro's wicked weather, worsened by relentless lake-effect snow

that regularly piles up at the rate of 8-12 inches, leaves few wintertime diversions in the community of 7,700. As a result, home matches regularly draw 2,000-3,000 spectators, or more than many Division I basketball teams attract.

Unlike Iowa's fabled Dan Gable, Baumgartner still cannot sign virtually any wrestler he chooses. But he and his assistants, including Lou Rosselli, another U.S. Olympian, recruit meticulously — and well.

Three Scots, 190-pounder Jason Robison (28-0), 158-pounder Tony Robie (27-4) and 118-pounder Kevin Saniga (22-9), are nationally ranked and should challenge for NCAA titles. All are from western Pennsylvania.

"Oklahoma State and Iowa obviously have an advantage over us — a down year for them is No. 2 or 3, a down year for us is No. 24 or 25," Baumgartner said. "In a good year, we can be in the top five. It's like any other sport — the team with the best talent usually wins. And we try to recruit winners."



Edinboro wrestling coach Bruce Baumgartner, center, with nationally ranked wrestlers Jason Robison, left, and Tony Robie.

AP photo