

Passion

Here we are, gathered once again to look back on the season that was and here I am again lost for a topic to reflect upon. I have spoken about our sport as a trip on a school bus, I have talked about the gifts that wrestling gives us and the dramas that it creates. I have told stories about wrestlers who have affected the places that they live in and the people that they meet and I have told of my three families. My biological family who gave me life and began shaping me into the person I am today. My brothers and sisters in the fire service with whom I trust my life without question and then all of you and the other people in my wrestling family who have become a such huge part of my life. I thought of what it is that ties these parts of my life together. Why am I willing to spring from my bed in the middle of the night and put myself into harms way? Why has there never been a Christmas in my life when I didn't gather with every member of my family and why do all of my vacation days seem to revolve around anyplace with a mat on the floor?

The common thread that I found is "Passion" and I probably should define that before anyone jumps to any premature conclusions. The dictionary first talks about love and lust, not exactly what I had in mind. It spells out the religious connotations, again not what I was looking for. I finally found the definition I was looking for: Boundless enthusiasm. That is what it is. I enjoy almost all of the things in my life but I have the greatest passion for those three things: family, the fire service, and our sport. Without that special kind of enthusiasum

none of these things would be the same, the passion I feel makes them special.

I looked for quotes about passion and sport and this one seemed to sum it up the best: "To win the game you don't need to be the most athletic or talented. To win, you must have passion for the game, determination and complete faith in yourself and your team." Passion for the game, that's what I'm talking about.

Wrestling is overflowing with passionate people. The people who compete in our sport, the people who coach our sport, and the people who watch are sport all seem to have some level of passion. The ones with the most passion are the easiest to spot. For those of us who were at the state finals last weekend we saw that passion expressed in many different ways. Those come from behind victories and the anguish in the eyes of the losers; the explosions in the crowd of joy and of anger are all caused by passion.

Underclassmen, you are just starting to recognize the passions in your lives and I hope our sport becomes one of them. You all must have some passion because you are here tonight and I don't think that it is possible to complete a year of practice and competition on the mat with a least a little passion. As you have discovered our mat game is probably one of the hardest things that you have ever done. From all of the time in the room to those 6 minutes on the mat, nothing comes easy but if you feel it in your heart it isn't nearly as hard, that's passion. The days that you really don't want to practice but work hard anyway, that's passion. When your buddy drops a close one and you feel as bad

as he does, that's passion. When you decide you want to spend your entire summer bouncing from one wrestling camp to another, that's passion. So as you move through the seasons to come keep looking for the passion and it will serve you well.

Jeffery and Cory at your freshman banquet I gave you both a little gift. If I remember right I gave Jeff a can of spinach and I gave Cory a New York strip. Those things were a little joke about growing a little bit. Well you must have taken it to heart because you both grew as wrestlers and as people and you both found the passion. Things may not have ended in the way that you had planned and dreamed but you fought the good fight and we all have a little more passion because of you. You helped lead a team that had a lot to learn and you did the job admirably. The rest of these guys will look on you as examples as they take over the leadership of this team and I hope they find some of your passion, I know that there is a little of it that you left in me and I love you for it.

Bradley Tyler Simmons, if anyone has experience in passion for wrestling it must be you. There is more than a little passion in your household. Now everyone in the house has a little gold metal except your mom and I know that if girls could have wrestled back in the day she would have whooped someone's, well you know. My first memories of you are at wrestling tournaments, under the bleachers with your cars or if need be Lindsey's Barbies. As I watched you grow up I saw that you wanted to a part of the things that you saw and the places that you went. I know that the transition to high school was hard, but you were up to the challenge and

you never gave up the fight. After your freshman season do you remember what it was that I gave you at that banquet? I gave you your own wrestling shoes and I told you that you needed to find a way to try and fill those shoes instead of everyone else's. Well over the next three years I have watched you grow into those shoes. As we traveled the country together to wrestle with your best buddies I saw you fill them more and more. From time to time you would still try and put your feet into those other people's shoes but you soon found that maybe they didn't fit so well and you wore your own shoes more and more. Well Champ, this weekend you got them laced up, double tied and you taped the laces. It's time to get out the mat paint and print the 8 x 10. You showed your passion this season as you lead your team, had a very nearly unblemished season, and Got-R-Done, bringing home that little gold medal. Most importantly you used those shoes to walk your own path and now you don't need to spend much time looking back. Things around here will definitely never be the same and I know I'll miss you in the room. I love you Champ.

Finally there is the passion that is Williamston Wrestling, Coach Mooney. Your passion has lead the way for hundreds of young people and now it has produced a new generation of coaches to lead us forward. They have learned much of what it takes to be great coaches from you. Toby told me the other night that he often wonders why did the Moon have us do this, how come we did that, only to have you bring it up weeks later explaining how it fit into the plan. I've seen Pat answer parent's questions and he always seems to give the same kind of answer that you do. You gave

them both the passion and they will serve us well. As for me, you always reinforced the things that I feel passionate about and you have made me a better person. Don't think that because you left your shoes beside the mat on Saturday night that that excuses you from all of your duties as our Coach. You filled the shoes you left behind with some pretty good feet but they will still need guidance from time to time as they move from those shoes into their own. Your passions have inspired us to be better at everything that we do. We all love our families a little more, our country a little more, and our sport a little more because you. You always said Williamston Wrestling is about the people that came together to make it happen, well it never would have happened without a passionate leader to show us the way.

So when everyone leaves here tonight think about the passions in your life and how you can become better because of them. Remember hug your parents, hug your kids, hug your buddies, hell even hug a stranger every once in a while, that too will make you a better person.

I want to thank everyone for being a part of my passion and I hope I am a part of yours.