

## The Wall

The Wall. Not the great big one that runs almost 9000 miles across China to keep the invaders out. Not the tiny ones that surround each cell of our beings. Not the walls of our houses or your bedroom. I am talking about one wall in particular. One wall that I have seen many people look at and ponder. Many people look at and dream and imagine. I have seen young and old gaze at it. They think about what was and what could be. They remember the past and think to the future. Some wish they were a part of it and some dream they will be a part of it. One wall that explains a lot about why we work so hard when we are in the room where you find it. You have looked at it nearly every day for the past 4 months. Our wall of champions is a pretty cool thing and now I get to make some additions and that is one of my favorite things of all time.

Freshmen, you have the best chance to end up on our wall. You have tasted what it is like to be a competitor at higher level and now it is time to invest even more time and effort. Find the time to make that investment, find the time to study the best, find the time to wrestle the best, find the time to work for the wall.

Sophomores, its half over with, just like that. But that is not to say you are out of time, there is still plenty of time to make the investment. Spring is for Olympic wrestling, summer is for camps and clinics and if you really want it there are state teams and national competition. There is one way that leads to improvement and that is competition. Find your way to the mats, find your way to practice, find your way to camp, find your way to be on the wall.

Juniors, time is growing short, there needs to be an urgency in your stride. You need to find the time for working harder, find the time for honing skills, find the time to seek out the guys that can make you

reach your peak, find the time for summer competition, find the time to put yourself on the wall.

Seniors, high school wrestling is now in the past. Only one of you made it to that wall but the other three have left your mark on your teammates and coaches in other ways.

Hannah, you spent many hours in the corner as you charted our successes and failures. You kept the book and documented our journey and you did it well. We will miss you on the bench and in the corner. Thank you for your dedication to our guys, we will miss you.

Zach, those big guy weight classes are filled with 2 different types. There are guys like you who are still on their way to a man's body and there are others who are already in the bodies of the men they will become. From being a freshman running the video camera to being a wrestler who surprised more than a few guys with that left handed headlock you will be part of our memories when we are near that wall.

Marshall, I think you befuddled your dad a little with your love of this mat game and its' lack of a ball. But you worked hard and consistently found ways to improve and your impact on our team grew. Your senior season was certainly your best and but for a couple of points you nearly found your way to move deeper into the post season. Watching you get better and enjoy our sport will often cross my mind when I sit at the base of that wall.

Now it is time to talk about what I need to do to bring the wall up to date. I had a discussion with a great Hornet Alumni at the state finals. Most of you do not know Mark McClenathan who was the head of officials at the state finals for many years. If you were there you saw him standing near when our boys were on the mat and saw him honored at the final session as this was his last in that role. He was a

part of the early years of wrestling at Williamston graduating in the class of '61. He went on to a very distinguished career as an official at both the high school and college level. As we talked I discovered that there are Hornets from those early years who are not on the wall, as many as 4 state place winners that we did not know of. We are working to get those wrestlers identified and we will make sure that they are part of the wall.

So that is the past and we always honor it but now in the present I get to add a name to the place winners on the wall but there is a problem. We are out of space; the All-State boards are full. So when the weather breaks and I am ready to spend some time out in the shop I will build an extension to make room for more names and it will be my pleasure.

Jared Fleming you are more than just a State Place Winner for our program. You are an excellent example of how hard you have to work to put your name on the wall. You are excellent at leading a team and making them improve by your example. You are a great leader in the wrestling room, the classroom and our community. We all look forward to see where you are going and what you will accomplish as you move on to the next chapter of your story. All of the coaches will smile and think of you when we hang that new place winner board, attach that new name plate and see your name on the wall.

Now it is time to talk about the guy that just quietly grinds away over in the big man corner. You could see him there intently listening to Coach Demand and those that mentor him. You could see him slowly grinding his teammates into the floor. You could almost watch him absorb the things that he needed to guarantee his place. I have never heard him complain, I have never seen him not trying to do the things that must be done. All I see is him working the grind and working to the end game. After the first match on that Thursday afternoon I wasn't too sure of what the outcome would be, I think the other coaches were

having the same thoughts. It was a win but only by a 4-0 score on a guy who had been easily pinned in their meetings before. Maddox assured us that we should not worry and that he had it all in hand. I think we were relieved that he felt that but we were still a little uneasy.

The tensions eased little by little as he worked through the rounds but they did not go away. A fall in the quarter finals and a 3-2 victory in the semis and there he was, our first finalist in 9 years, our first finalist since we had come together as a coaching staff, our first finalist since Coach Weber became the head coach...the tension was back.

Tim Smith was the opponent from Benzie Central. He was a northern Michigan kid and that made us feel a little better as we knew we saw a better level of competition. He had to go to the sudden victory tie breaker to get past the boy from Richmond who we had beaten 3-0 in regulation, that made us feel a little better. We just thought we looked better on the mat and that helped some more. But this was about the Final, at the Finals. Once again that tension was there but Maddox had told us not to worry, that he had this. I am sure that we all did our best but I know that I was just a little concerned. We controlled the match from the opening whistle and held on to a 2-0 lead going into the third period. All we had to do was hold on to that lead. I think I am not alone when I say I would have been much more comfortable had we come to our feet, scored a point and grappled to the finish. I know I am kind of big guy, I carry a few risk factors and I would have felt a little less likely to have a myocardial infarction had we come to our feet. I know the rest of the staff was having those same feelings along with parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, teammates, classmates, teachers and even some strangers. But we should have not been concerned; it was like Maddox had told us, he had this. After the clock had crawled through 2 of the longest minutes I have ever experienced near the mat it was over. He came to his feet, neatly placed the ankle bands on the starting lines at the mat's center and had the ref raise his

hand. With a hand in the air and big grin he pointed to the faithful and took it all in. With a mighty, mighty bear hug Coach Weber hoisted him in the air and Coach Demand was right behind. There were handshakes and reporters and hugs, it was quite the scene. There was the medal stand and the official pictures, there was a hike up to the concourse and more pictures. Then there was family and friends, more Makis and Wilberdings than at a family reunion. There were teammates and classmates and people no one knew and it was cool. Once everyone arrived back on home turf there were more gatherings and more celebrations. Everyone likes to be with the champion.

Well that time for celebration is drawing to a close, there is just one more thing to finish up and then it is time to get ready to defend that title. Very soon when you climb the stairs to the wrestling room there will be a new picture to check out and it will be of Williamston Wrestling's 26<sup>th</sup> Individual State Champion Maddox Maki. It will fill the final available frame on the wall.

Big man don't look for a name plate just yet because you are not finished yet, your mission is to add another year before we invest in having one made. Team, make it your mission to put me back in my shop to build another champions board and back at the photo processor to pick up another 8x10.

Guys we came a long way this season; we picked up our first district title since 2008, qualified 5 for the Individual Regional, sent 3 to the big show, and brought home a place winner and a champion. That makes for a lot of fun. You now need to invest in yourself and your team, you need to do the extra and pay the price. Gather up and hit the road. Wrestle practice with guys better than you. Go to all of the camps and clinics that you can. Compete at the highest level that you can. Do the things that most of the others aren't. This kind of fun comes at a price

and there are not a lot of things that are much more fun than cashing in for your place on The Wall.