

The Gifts of Wrestling

Well it's hard to believe another year has passed since we all gathered here last. A year of change in the world and in our lives, so much the same, yet never the same. I'm going to talk tonight about the gifts of wrestling. Because our sport truly gives us so many things. As athletes, as coaches, as parents, as supporters we are all gifted with important things that last well after the mats are rolled and the lights are out. They are things that we learn through our experiences but they seem more vivid in the classroom of wrestling.

First I'll tell you of the gifts I get from wrestling. The most important to me is I get to be with all of you. I get to be with my guys, and girls that means you too, you too are my guys. I get the gift of being able to mentor, I get the gift of having a little window into your lives, and I get the gift of your affection. I also get the gift of your families. Parents, you always make me feel welcome in your homes and in your lives, and you trust me with your most precious possessions, your kids. I get the gift of being a coach. It took me a very long time to be comfortable calling myself that but it finally seems to fit. I get the gift of being part of a staff that always tries to do the best things for kids. I get to be a part of a great fraternity of coaches guiding kids down the right path. I get to watch you learn all of the great lessons on and off from the mat. I am gifted with your victories and I am gifted with being able to comfort you when you have lost, and finally I am gifted with the knowledge that maybe I helped you to be better people.

Next there are the gifts that your parents get from our sport. They get the gift of knowing that wrestling teaches great life lessons. They get the gift of watching their kids develop into better, stronger, and faster athletes. They get the gift of joy when you are successful and the gift of being the people who love you unconditionally when you fail. They get the gift of getting up at 5:00 AM to wake you so you don't miss the bus. They get the gift of making pasta salad at midnight, just the way you like it (you know, without the cucumbers that found their way in there the last time and you had to pick them out). They are gifted with paying five bucks to sit on an eight inch wooden plank for twelve hours to be there for you. But mostly they are gifted with the knowledge that

you are becoming better people and that you love them unconditionally as well.

That leaves the gifts that wrestling gives to you. You get all kinds of gifts. It's better than Christmas and your birthday rolled into one. You get skills you need to live your life. You get self-reliance, work ethic, teamwork, drive, hustle. You become stronger and faster. You get to reach for your dreams and meet your goals. You get the gift of knowledge from your coaches, friendship from your peers, and that unconditional love from and for your families. But mostly you get to be better people for the rest of your lives. Remember like Coach Mooney always said...you need wrestling more than wrestling needs you.

Now it's time for me to say thank you to all of you for the gifts they you bring to my life.

Supporters, we couldn't do it with out you. When we need you all we have to do is ask and you take care of what we need. You are there when we need your bodies and your minds. You keep the score and run the time, you serve the hot dogs and sweep the floors, and when we ask you, you help pay for it as well. Thank you for all that you do.

Coaches it is a gift to part of this staff, and to thank you for letting me play a part I want to share some of what I love to do with you. Here are just a small part of the pictures that I shot this year. I hope they fill you with good memories when you look at them in the years to come.

Missy Erwin, you are a gift to any wrestling coach. All of our trainers have been good but to have someone who knows wrestling, it seemed too good to be true. Then to hear you were from a high school that I knew of from it's wrestling tradition. Then that your brothers were wrestlers, and your boyfriend wrestled division 1 in college. You must be a gift. Then to watch you put a rehabilitating wrestler on the bike and push him so hard he wanted to get back to the mat because it was easier, WOW! You truly are a gift. So here is a picture of the team to remind you that you helped them find the gift of success.

Mika and Whitney, you too are a gift. Mika it seems like you have crawled around nearly every gym floor in the lower peninsula. Either with a video camera, or under the bleachers to retrieve many a lost article. For your dedication I award you the Golden Kneepad, that is my gift to you. Whitney you are becoming a stat girl extra ordinaire. I really had to look but I found you some new pencils. Now these aren't just ordinary pencils, I think they might be magic pencils. These are the last six unsharpened pencils from the 1999 State Championship team. Save them for next season and I think they may play a part in getting us to Battle Creek again.

Parents you went out of your way to take care of our kids and our coaches and we are truly grateful. The only problem we may have found is one day Coach told me he thought we might be eating a little too much at our Saturday tournaments. I wasn't sure so I asked Mrs. Young to look into it for me and I think the Coach was right. Over the season we consumed; 80 pounds of pasta salad, 40 gallons of Gatoraide, 36 pounds of oranges, 40 pounds of veggies, 3 gallons of ranch dressing, several bushels of bagels, crockpot after crckpot full of sloppy joes, enough Jello to make the whole state jiggle, and enough Rice Krispie Treats to use up 19 pounds of marsh-mallows and 180 cups of cereal. Coach is a pretty smart guy.

Like I said before you people are a gift in my life and know that you share in the gifts I'm giving your kids.

So guys now it's your turn. I have a little something for each of you. Some of them are funny and some of them aren't, but if you look they all carry some meaning it moving you along on the road to being better wrestlers.

Tyler Sharp - You are like a minuteman, we called and you came. I respect you for the decision making process you went though in deciding whether to wrestle or not. I also respect you for wanting to be sure your late arrival didn't compromise anyone who had worked for their place. You are a stand-up kid. However, I still want you to be one of my guys, full time. Don't plan on me giving up anytime soon. So my gift to you is a picture of the team, it's a picture of the team

smiling. They're smiling because they are holding a District Trophy. They are holding that trophy because you are a part of their team. Without you they probably wouldn't have it. They like having it, they like you, they aren't going to give up either.

Jeff Kane and Corey Alchin. You both had a challenging season, you got thrown into the line-up as freshman and that makes for some hard lessons. But you learned, you got better, and you worked to not be discouraged. The one thing you both need to do is grow. Jeff I would love it if it were necessary for you to weigh-in wearing less than you jeans, sweatshirt, hiking boots, winter coat, and book bag. So for you I got a can of spinach. Eat your spinach, lift a little, wrestle if we can get you away from your fishing pole, and next year you might wrestle on the last weekend. Corey the same advice applies to you, lift, wrestle if it doesn't cut into your baseball schedule too much, and try to grow a little. On the mat you do a lot of things right, you just need a little more beef, so along those lines I got you a New York Strip, I hope it helps.

Joe Bloom. What did I ask nearly every time before you took to the mat? I believe I asked if you were awake. Of course every time you replied that you were and promptly went out and gave up about 9 points before you really did wake up, hit a great move, and pin the kid. Like I told you I'm a big guy. I don't know if my heart can take much more of this, so I got you an alarm clock. Just set it for a few minutes before every match and maybe the life you save will be mine. It also can be used for lots of things like getting to practice on time, not missing the bus, making it to first hour.

Bradley Tyler Simmons, that's a pretty unique name, and you're a pretty unique guy. I can honestly say I have never met anyone like you, that's why I'm giving you your own wrestling shoes. Not new shoes but ones that I had your mom bring in. They're yours. You need to wear your shoes. You don't need to fit into Nick's shoes or Andy's. You don't need to wear your Dad's shoes either. You need to be that unique person that you are and find your place in the wrestling world, because once you do everyone better watch out. I also got you a bag of pizza rolls and a box of fruit snacks, cause man I know if you run out

you get a little cranky.

Aaron Hitchcock. For you I got a stopwatch. It seems like this year was all about time for you. You had to wait before it was time for you to wrestle and then once you could you were making up for lost time. A little summer wrestling, some more knowledge from the coaches, hard practice, and I think you're gonna be something to see.

Steve Smith. It's hard to be a young guy at an upper weight. It's hard to be a new guy at an upper weight. But you worked, you improved, and I think I saw a smile on your face nearly every day. It takes a big heart for anyone to step on the mat but, you need one that's even a little bigger in your position. So here's a box of candy hearts, because I think yours is the biggest one on the team.

Adam Pease. We got you to play our mat game. You found out a lot about yourself and now you want to become a student of the game. So here's a video of last years NCAA finals so you can study a couple of great Heavyweights and learn a little more about the game.

Sarah Bartig. One of my guys. I know you're a girl but in the wrestling room everyone is the same. We don't change our style because of you. I am sure it takes a big heart to put up with a room full of heathens everyday so I got you some tiny heart earrings just to remind me you are a little different than the rest of my guys.

Dusty Stiffler. Another unique guy. There are so many things I could say about you but since we are in mixed company I'll stick to wrestling. You made a 215 pound man fly, that was cool. You pinned a guy that put the best high school wrestler in the country on his back twice, that was impressive. You like to talk, sometimes that was naughty. So I got you a little bar of soap. Just take a little nibble before you take to the mat to make you think about that rule book.

Tim Grant. Some days you have great focus and you hear every move you coaches yell and bang, you do the move. Then there are the other days. I really worked hard on a solution to the problem. First I thought we could get you a wireless earpiece and coach could just feed you

the plan, but alas, when I checked with our rules expert, Dusty, I found out that is strictly forbidden. So I looked high and low for another solution and I think I may have found it. It looks a little awkward but you can get use to it over the summer and I think it will really help.

Now we're down to two. Devin Young and Jeremy Bloom. You are the heart of my guys. You are great Captains and fine leaders, just like I knew you would be. We started a journey together and we have traveled thousands of miles. From the Dapper Dan to Fargo and a lot of stops in between, we made it to the place you were aiming for. And while the goals are still not quite attained you both made to a place you have never been before and you made all of us very proud. Devin you faced a lot of challenges through the year and you proved that you could rise to the occasion, I hope I helped a long the way. From our Sunday chats to our night at the hotel when you were still stinging from one of those challenges. I found you a poem that I think helped and we read it together. Then the next day you were trying carefully not to bend the poem. I told you I would get you another, that you should just fold that one up and carry it with you. Well here it is and I even found another verse. I hope it inspires you to finish this thing and I look forward to sharing in that gift. Jeremy you didn't seem to need as much help along the way, you found a quiet determination and just kept moving toward that goal. You almost did it. The brass ring was there, you touched it and then it slipped away, but I'm sure it will be there again next year and it will be yours. For you I have a couple pictures. They are the moments that helped to define your season. The first is you waiting on the medal stand in Howell. Third place is maybe the last place you wanted to be because you knew you were better than last year. The second is you sharing the gift of victory with your dad at Quincy, that was when you knew you could go with anyone and you were right. Thank you guys for your gift of trust and friendship.

Everyone also gets to take home your picture and a CD with all of my photos from the year.

So there you have our team, a pretty special bunch. A bunch that still has lots of unfinished business ahead. I think it's time to set our

sights on Battle Creek. We can do this thing, that ring is there for all of us to grasp. But for it to happen we need to all focus on it from here on out. The first thing is to increase our numbers and that is up to you guys. Everyone needs to recruit one more person. If we double our numbers we will make this happen. It isn't a long shot, it can happen and man is it a great trip, you all deserve to go. Let's make that the next gift we all get from wrestling.

Thank You