

# VomBaur has Bear Cave WC reaching 'Kodiak' level

Some scientists believe that possibly thousands of years ago, the Ice Age genetically separated an Alaskan subspecies, the Kodiak, which weighs up to 1,500 pounds and is North America's most massive brown bear.

Utilizing a unique system that maximizes individualized technique, those wrestlers who train in the Bear Cave Wrestling Club's 6000-square foot den in Greeley, Colo., have become that state's Kodiak. In the 2021 Colorado Boys High School State Championships, Bear Cave wrestlers wore many different team singlets, yet the end results were much the same.

For those who trained with the club, 16 athletes from 13 different high schools — representing all levels 2A-5A — stood atop the 2021 final championship podium. Another 10 club members earned state runner-up, for a total of 26 finalists and 44 state place-winners who had come from all over the nation's eighth largest state, often following their school or other club practices on the same day, just to learn more from Coach Ben VomBaur.

After coaching Wasatch to two consecutive Utah high school team championships, then working eight years at the



(Bear Cave Wrestling Club photo)

Ben VomBaur (center back) heads up the Bear Cave Wrestling Club in Greeley, Colo.

collegiate level with Wyoming and the University of Northern Colorado, Ben VomBaur felt a calling to “connect with the community and build up the area wrestling programs.” With coaching his only business and full-time occupation, “we built a year-round facility through careful financial planning.”

A three-time Washington high school undefeated state champion (102-0) and two-time NCAA All-American for the discontinued Boise State (Idaho) wrestling program, VomBaur has guided two sons to multiple Colorado state titles for 4A team champion Windsor. Will is now a 125-pound sophomore at the U.S. Air Force Academy, while two-time champ Vance is a freshman at the University of Minnesota.

Despite this level of excellence, Ben VomBaur's utmost pride is “developing people more than building wrestlers at Bear Cave. Foremost is the development of character, inspiring youth who strive to become difference-makers. Wrestling gives kids the confidence to do great things with their lives.”

Inherent to his philosophy that values the process more than the product, Ben allows each wrestler to discover and invent the moves which work best for an individual's body type, experience, and age.

“A coach needs to allow an athlete to build upon his or her instincts, not rob them of what comes to them naturally,” elaborates the head coach.

For his part, Ben strives to “balance between being a coach and a parent, never letting coaching interfere with our relationship. Performance is always more important than the result. If they want feedback, they must initiate that conversation with me. Once they take ownership for a loss, we can break down why they lost and how they can prevent a reoccurrence.”

For Vance, “it's been an honor to be part of this program. Dad was always laid-back, no pressure, but still won me a lot of big matches. I have a ton of respect for him; he truly knows what he's doing. He recognized that Will and I are not alike, so he coached each of us completely different.”

By Bill X. Barron

Indeed, what sets Bear Cave apart is “developing wrestlers to do what they each do best,” cites Coach VB. “Each wrestler has a particular set of talents. To make everyone into one type of wrestler would be to let them all down. A great coach enhances what an individual naturally does well.”

This developmental process is illuminated in the development of the state's first brother and sister champions, the Johnsons, who have trained with Ben since BC's beginnings in 2007. Wrestling for Loveland High, Junior Kobi is a two-time boys titlist, while 10th grader Morgan just captured her second girls title.

“My life would have been very different if I had not wrestled,” she said.

Initially, Morgan had to convince her parents to wrestle, but when she began to hold her own as Kobi's unofficial training partner, she earned dad/coach Luke's go-ahead. She was the very first girls state champion at 100 pounds in this year's inaugural CHSAA-sanctioned event.

How do you know a BC wrestler even when he or she's wearing another singlet? For Cody Ginther, a Cave-trained kid is “tenacious and doesn't give up until the last whistle is blown.”

“Just look who's in the finals,” Vance said. “No question that many have trained with our club.”

“In practice, Coach VomBaur prepares wrestlers to excel in elite matches by “teaching a position, then putting them in a rolling start or live scramble. It's creative, not situational. We allow our kids to explore getting in and out of situations. There's drilling, then there is sparring: where they are already into an action, then have to fight their way out of it.”

Watching Oran Huff wrestle, who only started in sixth grade but is now a three-time state champ for 2A Lyons, you can tell that he trained with Ben VomBaur.

As Oran says: “All Bear Cave wrestlers know how to ride the legs, mix attacks with re-attacks, then hit go-behinds to take advantage of an opponent's mistakes. You will see us dictate the action, but we are also good at countering; we are bold but play both hands.”

Loveland state champ Cody Thompson, one of the original club members who has remained with Ben for a decade, persevered through four years in high school before earning the top step.

“Coach Ben helped me realize that I had to change my mentality,” Cody declares. “Ben taught me to wrestle the best way I can wrestle. Instead of holding onto a lead, I now blow it open.” ■



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