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Still a Champion for Wrestling

At age 75, legendary wrestler and coach continues to preach about what's right and wrong with the sport

Editor's Note: Bobby Douglas, the former coach at UC Santa Barbara, Arizona State and Iowa State, recently did an interview with Bill Barron of Rocky Mountain Nationals Events.

"Legendary wrestler and coach Bobby Douglas is just getting started talking about his (our) sport," said Barron. "After 75 years, there burns an unquenchable fire. As a coach and official myself for 44 years, I am more than a willing scribe ... Always a man willing to say what's on his mind, Bobby continues: In order for wrestling to survive, we have to promote diversity — women, ethnicity, handicapped, seniors. Wrestling is the oldest organized sport in the world, with the richest history. Wrestling is good for America and for the world."

One day I will come from the grave screaming: "WRESTLING!" It's the greatest thing that happened, especially for guys like me who are 5-foot-9. "The Soul of American Wrestling" — that's me — and the title for a new chapter in my book. It is for all who are in the minority ... minority by race, gender, or circumstance. Diversity is not only key to our survival as a people, but also for the sport of wrestling.

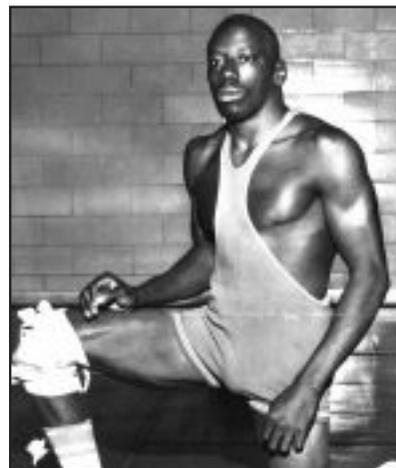
American athletes are now rising to the top because high school and college wrestling adapted the rules to create more action and interest. We are also succeeding because Americans are in shape. When I was first asked to join the National Wrestling Board, I told the other directors that in order to win at the international level, we needed to pay our athletes and we needed to change the rules to help us be more competitive. Those rule changes — such as no longer allowing a wrestler to step out of bounds without penalty — are now showing in our positive results on the world stage. America is back.

Unlike the days of no risk-taking in 15-minute matches, modern wrestling requires action. One of the reasons why my books, "Wrestling, The Making of a Champion: The Takedown I & II" and "Take It to the Mat" are still relevant and popular is that I wrote them with the future in mind. I knew that one day they would change the rules to "take wrestling to the mat."

I am very pleased to announce that Ed Gutierrez, CEO of RMN Events, will

By Bobby Douglas

be partnering with me to make all my wrestling coaching books available again at an affordable price. It is exciting to know that today's generation will have access to what are still the key teaching points of successful wrestling, whether on your feet or on the mat. However, there



Bobby Douglas first made a name for himself as an NCAA champion at OSU and elite freestyle wrestler before coaching at UC Santa Barbara, ASU — leading the Sun Devils to the 1987 title — and Iowa State.

is one book, which I would like to locate, "Sunkist Kids Takedown Book." If you have a copy that you would be willing to part with, please send your contact information to info@rmnevents.com.

I am proud of what the books have accomplished. Every wrestler who ever competed for me received one of those (takedown) books. With the grid system, an athlete can see what to do and when to do it. The book helps a wrestler visualize, literally writing a roadmap to success. Taking the book with him, the wrestler can visualize and practice what he is being taught. For example, the book shows how to use your hands to penetrate, and how to throw your opponent's body forward. When you get the opponent to move toward you, it helps your penetration as well as your set up.

As an athlete, I would have trained differently — gotten proper rest, avoided alcohol. Back then we did not have the resources of other countries. Frankly, I resented the fact that I had to work and train harder; it was a waste of energy when I

had to feed my family, too.

I had grown up wrestling against friends on the grass long before I was introduced to my Bridgeport High School (Ohio) and West Liberty State College (West Virginia) coach, hall of famer George Kovalick. We were poor. Wrestling was our recreation, but it was also popular in our mostly black, Polish, Russian and Slavic community. Sundays after church, we would gather and



wrestle. Through hard work that journey eventually took me to the stars.

To know Coach Kovalick is to never forget him. I had the privilege of being coached by one of the finest men to walk the earth. If not for him, I would have never been part of the great tradition called wrestling. Through him I learned how to work hard, how to never give up, and the importance of getting an education. It is because of his influence that I became a teacher and a coach.

I learned from greats like Myron Roderick, Bill Farrell, Fred Lett, and Bill Wick, along with World and Olympic coaches Tommy Evans (freestyle — Oklahoma University), Dean Rockwell (Greco — Michigan Wrestling Club), and Rex Peery (freestyle — Pittsburgh University).

A good student, I did what I was taught technically — then I shared what I learned with my athletes, such as pay attention to the basic fundamentals. I learned and taught the importance of having a plan. Control the tie up. Apply pressure at all times. Study your oppo-

nents. Watch a lot of film. From World teammate Tadaaki Hatta, I learned how to use my hands, increase my speed and the way to step. World Team workout partner Yojiro Uetake Obata, as well as Oklahoma State teammates Bill Harlow and Joe James, pushed me to the limit.

Wrestling technique has evolved in order to keep pace with the rules. Take-down wrestling now requires wrestlers to stay inbounds. Mat wrestlers now apply more pressure. It was Gable who reinforced the concept of pressure. For him, it worked well due to his superior conditioning. He wore his opponents down. Good technique works better when your opponent is tired.

What worked for me is movement . . . both moving my opponent and moving my feet. Pressure enhances speed and speed is a key aspect of being successful in applying pressure. If you can get your opponent to lean on you, it is easier to break his balance. The new rules reinforce this concept by forcing wrestlers to remain in contact. You can no longer go out of bounds or wrestle on the edge. You have to wrestle against pressure.

Fortunately, the international officials are not as corrupt as they once were. Russians and Iranians can no longer buy or sell matches. They also cheated with performance-enhancing drugs. The only high-performing athletes that did not cheat were the Japanese and the Americans. Americans did not take bribes or

“I have lived my life by the ‘right’ principles: Do the right thing at the right time to get the right result. Do the right thing: help wrestling retain its rightful place in our history.”

bribe officials. We did not cheat on the scales. We fought for the flag and for one another. We were better conditioned than the Europeans. We understood our place in the history of the sport.

That history will keep us from hurting a sport we once screwed up. Back in my day, matches were scored according to the black-mark system. But they were also fixed. One time a Russian purposely laid down for a Bulgarian to prevent an American from advancing. However, the American delegation directly appealed to the World Federation president who, after reviewing the match, disqualified both the Russian and the Bulgarian. Thereby, Fred Fozzard rightfully became America’s first World champion, earning freestyle gold

in 1969. Not many know that story, but it is true.

Being black and an American, I had two strikes against me. Now we are taking corruption out. Our better-conditioned athletes are winning out. Another key factor is that athletes are being paid, so they can focus on being wrestlers. With a superior development program, American wrestling at all levels is at the top of the world. Now the governing board is made up of former wrestlers who better understand the sport; we have developed women, promoted diversity, and welcomed the handicapped. They have also modernized the rules to keep matches reasonable in length and in order to create more action. We need to continue these changes to attract the public.

Just the same, we need to do what we can to help American wrestling. While the world’s richest and oldest tradition is making a comeback, we have lost so many, many college programs.

People ask why I preach; I preach in order to stop the bleeding. American wrestling is unique. Seven U.S. presidents were wrestlers, including the father of our country — George Washington — and the greatest humanitarian of all time: Abraham Lincoln. Because of wrestling and Coach Kovalick — who saved me from the fate of my classmates, some of whom went to prison — I got an education and became a teacher and a coach.

This September, I will begin work on a film chronicling my wrestling career. We will shoot the bridge at Route 40 on the Cumberland Trail in Ohio, where the first white man to walk there was George Washington. In Akron, where LeBron James is establishing a new school to ensure that those who follow him have the opportunity for education, I am working with Ray McDonald (point man) and Justin “Harry” Lester (an Akron native and a two-time World bronze medalist) to make wrestling part of their curriculum.

At my home in Ames, Iowa, I have many of my books, which fill my basement. I make them available to whoever asks. One has a seal on it and I wonder where I will leave it when I die. People still want the books since they are clear and precise. They are in demand because they focus on the basics: penetrate, set up and finish. The grid design helps coaches and wrestlers better understand technique. Mastering technique is the key to success.

I have lived my life by the “right” principles: Do the right thing at the right time to get the right result. Do the right thing: help wrestling retain its rightful place in our history. Respect the basic fundamentals on the mat and how you live your life. The soul of American wrestling lies within what makes each of us unique from one another. Diversity is the key to our survival as a sport and in our humanity. ■



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UPCOMING EVENTS

2018-19 USA Wrestling Folkstyle Series

Oct. 27-28, 2018	USAW Preseason Nationals	Des Moines, IA
Nov. 16-18, 2018	Folkstyle Tour of America: Bigfoot Battle	Spokane, WA
Nov. 30 - Dec. 2, 2018	Folkstyle Tour of America: King of the Mountain	Castle Rock, CO
Dec. 14-16, 2018	Folkstyle Tour of America: Roughneck Rumble	Carleersville, GA
Jan. 4-5, 2019	Folkstyle Tour of America: Salt Lake Slam	Farmington, UT
Jan. 18-19, 2019	Folkstyle Tour of America: Southern Grind	Spokane, WA
March 8-9, 2019	Folkstyle Tour of America: Dominate in the Dells	Wis. Dells, WI
TBD, 2019	USAW Folkstyle Nationals	Cedar Falls, IA

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