

# FUMA's Coach Hall is teaching more than wrestling

By Bill X. Barron

While competing in college for Gardner-Webb University (NC), where he was a national qualifier, Dean Hall's coach asked him: "What do you want out of life, not just wrestling?"

It was a life lesson that Hall was never to forget. Currently the head wrestling coach at Fork Union Military Academy (FUMA) in Virginia, Hall is now in his third decade molding young men to take on the challenge of living well.

Because the military academy is a place where middle and high school students mostly come to improve structure and discipline as well as restructure their lives, Hall usually has a maximum of two to three years to develop these young people for the rigors of manhood inside and outside the 28-foot circle.

Just the same, most of these wrestlers place in the league championships and annually at least six earn all-state honors at the VISAA State Championships. As



Coach Dean Hall (right) has spent the past 30 years coaching wrestling, including the past five at Fort Union Military Academy in Virginia. The 2019-20 FUMA team finished undefeated (13-0) and won the Prep State Dual Championship.

as a result, in the five years Coach Hall has been leading the program, FUMA has also

qualified a total of nine wrestlers for the National Prep School Championships.

When he first arrived, the Blue Devils had finished last in their conference and the state tournament with only approximately 8-10 members on the team. In just his first year in 2016, FUMA took second in the Virginia Prep League conference; with six All-State place-finishers, Fork Union placed eighth as a team in the state tournament.

In the next three seasons, his Devils steadily rose from sixth to fifth to third in team standings at the state championships. The 2019-20 team finished undefeated (13-0) in duals and won the Prep State Dual Team Championships held at FUMA. Even with the cancellation of the 2020-21 season, Coach Hall anticipates this year's team will continue its ascension to the top of the Virginia prep wrestling ranks.

"The greatest myth I have heard about military academies," relates Coach Hall, "is that they are overly disciplined. To be sure, there is solid structure, but the sameness in clothes and haircut is a great equalizer. I find that it helps students focus on what is important.

"As a military prep academy, our goal is to mold young men in mind, body, and spirit while they are immersed in a

single-sex, Christian environment which minimizes distractions and helps them find the right path for their best future."

At Fork Union, the wrestling program further demonstrates these values as it helps shape wrestlers to be student-athletes who possess identifiable character traits to the highest of standards. Coach Hall's program has won multiple Team Sportsmanship Awards; he is equally as proud of his team for winning in that arena as well as on the mat.

When Dean first entered coaching in 1993 at Radford High School in Virginia, he was 20 years old. Too young to be a head coach in title, as co-head Dean's initial team won the school's first district title.

In persuading the Radford athletic director to hire him, he asserted: "I know how much this sport has meant to me."

In a statement that has come to define Coach Hall's growing legacy, he stated: "No one will give you as much as I will."

Ultimately, he promised — and delivered — on the district championship. Two years later, Radford also won its first wrestling team state title.

Hall is an athlete's coach who talks with students after study hall in the board-

See Page 54: DEAN HALL

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-ter going down a stream. If it helps you, visualize a river in your mind. See your thoughts pass by. Not only will this calm the mind and body, but it will show you the endless chatter that runs through us each day. It is a fantastic mental activity to refresh and recharge.

**9. Make a commitment to go 100%, 100% of the time.** It is a declaration you make with yourself. 100% doesn't always mean going full bore. It means to be engaged and focused on the task at hand.

If you are conditioning, you will work your hardest. When the coach is showing technique, you are dialed in on what he is saying and doing. When drilling, it is conscious of hitting the moves correctly and effectively, not going through the motions. There is a time and a place to chill and relax. It shouldn't be in the wrestling room during practice.

**10. Enrich yourself.** Like writing in a journal, find ways to enhance your wrestling experience. Listen to podcasts

on mindset. Read books. Watch YouTube videos that fill you with positive motivation. Some days, something as small as a two-minute video can distinguish between a great practice or a lackluster day.

**11. Expect highs and lows.** Good days and bad days are a part of life. Some days you wake up loving life. Others, you are uninspired and wish you could lay in bed all day, especially during wrestling season. It is normal for your emotions and energy levels to go up and down. It is

part of being human. There is no reason to worry or question things. Know it will happen and use it as an opportunity to get a little tougher by physically and mentally grinding through it. If you get out of the way, your low mood and motivation will pass like bad weather. It always does.

*(John Klessinger is a teacher and wrestling coach at South River High in Maryland. Follow him on Instagram @coachkless and like his Facebook page "Coach Kless".)* ■

**DEAN HALL, From page 38**

-ing school they call home. At lunchtime, it is not unusual to have several wrestlers sharing their meal in his classroom or to see them sitting together in the dining hall. Voted by students as Teacher of the Term, Hall teaches sociology, English, history, and sports psychology. He also serves as the department head for FUMA's social sciences department.

"For me, teaching and coaching share similar values and emphases," Hall elaborates. "I teach my student-wrestlers to work hard and to be focused, then you have time do what you need to do with grace and respect. Nothing other than God and family is better than wrestling for teaching life values."

Hall attributes his family's support as

a key to his success.

"My family has always been there for me," Hall said. "Nowadays, my wife and children put up with a lot. While growing up, my parents and siblings accepted my frustrations along with celebrating my accomplishments."

"Most wrestlers and athletes in general know we would not be where we are — or be able to do what we do — without family."

It is that sense of family that means most to Coach Hall and to his wrestlers. He doesn't even call his program a team. During our time together, Hall only referred to them as his "family."

Now the VISAA chair for the state's wrestling executive board and the Virgin-

ia Representative for the Prep National Wrestling Committee, Hall has the position and the passion to make a difference for high school wrestling in the state.

The seasoned coach said the biggest lesson he has learned: "You want kids to wrestle for you because they know you care about each of them. You coach because you love them, and you believe in what the sport can do for them."

Fork Union wrestlers are "hard-nosed, hard-working kids who give you everything they have; I let them know that giving their best is in sum the true 'win.' They are dependable kids with evident character. For them, competing is 'go' time, but afterwards they shake hands, accept a win or loss in stride, and show the ultimate respect for the other guy."

Coach Hall does not accept anything less than the best of his wrestlers.

"The standards are high at FUMA," said Hall about his program. "Our wrestlers take their leadership role with a seriousness of purpose. In my heart, I can say no one brings the same passion to the mat

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as a FUMA wrestler."

"The easiest thing to do is to motivate the kids; keeping them motivated is the true challenge," states Coach Hall.

"Kids trust you when you stand by what you tell them. They come to realize you are there for them. Be there for them, especially when you know they need you. It really is that simple." ■

**TOP-25 MOMENTS, From page 33**

17. Dan Hodge of Oklahoma winning three national titles in the span of one month, all with pins (he was in college at the time. He won the NCAAs in 1956 with four pins, the AAU freestyle with five pins and the AAU Greco-Roman title with four pins).

18. Dan Hodge appearing on the cover of Sports Illustrated on April 1, 1957 — still to this day the only amateur wrestler so honored.

19. Dan Gable of Iowa State pinning 24 in a row during the 1969-70 seasons.

20. Chris Taylor recording 44 pins in 48 matches in 1973, setting the NCAA record for pins in one season.

21. Though such records are hard to verify, Wade Schalles is credited with 106 pins for Clarion State (1974 was his final year) and Al Sears of Southern Illinois-Edwardsville had 110 pins (through 1985). Either mark is worthy of acclaim.

22. John Smith of Oklahoma State winning the NCAA title the same year he won the World Championships, 1987.

23. Kyle Snyder of Ohio State and Gable Steveson of Minneapolis win-

ning the NCAA title and the Olympics while still in college, Snyder in 2017 and Steveson in 2021.

24. The very first Dan Hodge Trophy presented in 1995 to T.J. Jaworsky of North Carolina. Over one million fans have seen "the Heisman Trophy of wrestling" awarded in person at wrestling banquets and football games.

25. Spencer Lee of Iowa winning the Dan Hodge Trophy and the Sullivan Award as the nation's top athlete in the same season, 2021.

I'm sure many of you can add to this list or subtract from it. Have fun doing so and discussing wrestling's rich heritage with friends.

It's very important to remember the great wrestlers and historic moments that help make wrestling one of the greatest of all sporting activities!

*(Mike Chapman is the founder of WIN Magazine, the Dan Hodge Trophy, the National Hall of Fame Dan Gable Museum, author of 30 books and was named to the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in 2007.)* ■

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