

Jackson hammers down the best message

Whatever you learn in school and sports, always reach for the sky. That is the lesson imparted by Larry Jackson, who is a physical education instructor at Carver Elementary School in Des Moines, Iowa.

Jackson knows what he has learned in life and why “each and every day of my life” he appreciates the role of key individuals and Christ in shaping his life. That in turn has allowed him to touch many other lives in his 32 years as an educator, wrestling coach, and founder and director of Track Iowa through which he has taken kids to compete all over the country.

Jackson can retire next year, “but these kids mean something to me and I love what I am doing now as much as I did back then.” He relates that early in life “I never felt loved,” yet that has not deterred him from a life of sharing. “Through my life journey, I hope I have helped people and given them my love.”

Humble and unassuming, Jackson radiates a loving spirit and whose presence immediately welcomes you into his heart. While recognition may be of surprise to Larry, a chorus of voices emanate from this challenging community.

One of those success stories is stepbrother Albert Winfrey, for whom Coach J came into his life at ten. Larry has not only been his mentor, but through his track club he’s guided Albert’s older daughter to championship levels and coached young 8-year old Amir to be the 8-&-under RMN D-Day on the Midway champion.

What distinguishes Larry is that “he treats every single kid, from best to worst, as all the same,” said Albert. “He’s that guy, if you want your kid to become a champion in life as well as sports.”

Although the D-Day tournament was his Hammer Time Wrestling Academy’s first RMN event, “we are now loading up our schedule with RMN,” exclaims Larry: “In all my four decades in the sport, I had never ever been to an event like that. Absolutely remarkable! Never imagined!

“And the people ... when Amir needed someone to warm him up for his final match on the ship deck, Stephen Groce (local San Diego coach and tournament helper) jumped out of the stands. Smooth, well run, a place for Christianity, a family-run business. While we will still go to other events, RMN Events is now on top.”

Through he never knew much about his father until several years after he had passed, Larry learned that his people-centered teaching approach has its genetic roots. From his mother, “I learned never to be led by hate. I have lived my life learning how to turn a negative into a positive. I ask myself every day: ‘Are you living right? Do you treat people the way they deserve?’”

Rocky Dhabolt, a former wrestler and the first assistant coach Larry sought out after he formed Hammer Time, is living witness to the power of Larry’s loving spirit.

“While he always treated me with the ultimate respect, I only learned later that Rocky had learned prejudice in order to survive on the streets,” Dhabolt said. “Larry totally changed my life. I bring my life to bear as proof that with the right person anyone can do it. My parents were drug addicts and I was hanging out with the street gangs. When I met Larry, I had returned to school my sophomore year after being suspended for a hate crime.

“I had to join a sport, so I chose wrestling. I was blessed that the wrestling coach was Larry Jackson. You will never be around anyone in this community who doesn’t know Larry. He’s been their driving teacher, their track or wrestling coach, or their spiritual guide.”

The two share mutual respect. Larry remarks: “I have asked Rocky to speak at my funeral one day. Rocky is always there by my side, at any and every time of the day. All I can say is that Rocky is a fantastic coach and human being, with that ‘X’ factor that I knew was important for our club to have.”

Rocky and Larry agree that the safety of the wrestlers comes before winning. In the finals of a recent Corncob Nationals, Rocky’s son had his opponent’s leg in a precarious position. “When the referee did not stop the match, I ran out onto the mat,” says Rocky. “It cost my own kid a reversal and he lost the national championship by a point, but I know I did the right thing.”

Larry gives thanks to many mentors in his formative years, including his high school wrestling coach, Phil Henning, who was a national collegiate runner-up for the University

By Bill X. Barron

of Iowa and author of “The Predicament Wrestling Scoring Book,” which in early editions featured examples of Larry competing for Marshalltown High School in 1977-1981.

Jackson coached at Des Moines East High for 16 years. Now in his fifth year of leading

Hammer Time as well as 11 seasons coaching the East Des Moines Jr. Wrestling Club, Larry relates: “Our school gets a bad name in our neighborhood, but we have some fantastic kids and top-tier educators.

“I believe in the saying that ‘iron sharpens iron.’ When you are practicing with tough kids, you become a hammer. Four kids from our club placed in the 2019 Iowa State Championships, leading East High to a ninth-place team finish.”

Coach Jackson insists on sportsmanship from all his protégés. “Win, lose or draw, you look your opponent in the eye and shake his hand as well as the coach. How you present yourself means the world to me. Treat people the way you want to be treated.

“Wrestling teaches toughness so you can persevere, even when things in life may not always go your way,” concludes Coach Jackson. “Wrestling gives you the opportunity to improve through hard work and dedication. Giving up is not an option. There are no shortcuts – in wrestling or in life.” ■



Larry Jackson (center) celebrates with members of the Hammer Time Wrestling Academy at the RMN D-Day on the Midway event.

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 2018 World Champion

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