

ALOHA!

Handshake is just as important as the win for Hawaii's RMN Terminator champ Labuanan

By Bill X. Barron

To wrestle in this current environment, one must confront opponents, both those seen and unseen. Unseen is the warrior of one's conscience: should I shake hands before and/or after we do battle?

More than a simple act of sportsmanship, a handshake is an equalizer. But in today's sensitized climate, the act of shaking hands is sometimes viewed as a potential source of infection, a disease of the spirit where we are uncomfortable acting naturally with friends and foes alike.

However, when Mikah Labuanan steps on the wrestling mat, he is both a reflection of the person he is and of the culture he represents.

"It is natural for me to thank the referee and to welcome my opponent into the arena," said the Hawaii native. "So, I shake their hands before and after the match."

To Mikah (pronounced "me-ka"), "every time I step on the mat, I am representing my culture. Where I come from, we are always loving toward and respectful of everyone."

"Mikah shows compassion to every-

one both on and off the mat, and he is always willing to help others," said his father and coach Mike. "His display of respect to his opponent and officials is a reflection of his Hawaiian culture, always spreading the



Mikah Labuanan of Hawaii won a RMN Terminator championship at 116 pounds.

Aloha spirit and living according to Pono (Do What Is Right)."

Hawaiian wrestling received overdue recognition when the National Wrestling Hall of Fame named Nanea Estrella the nation's most outstanding female high school senior wrestler for 2020. Her cousin, Waipuilani Estrella-Beauchamp — a freshman at Midland College (Texas) — won the 2021 NAIA Women's national championship at 143 pounds.

Since regular competition and practice were on hold for a year in Maui, Mikah welcomed the opportunity to travel to Arizona for the RMN Terminator, where the bridge-back bar-arm series that he learned from dad brought home a championship belt in the 13U, 116-pound division and a third-place medal in 15U at 116.

Mikah enjoys the "super-cool, always-different and special" RMN events.

"Here, the level of competition in my weight and age group is much more challenging," he said. "At home, I am mostly training with a couple of teammates on a mat in my father's garage that he turned into a gym."

If you were to meet Mikah away from the mat, you would know he is a wrestler. As he states: "Wrestling teaches me a lot about how I should act and how to push through tough situations. It also serves as a stress reliever, since the private school I attend, Kamehameha, assigns a lot of work."

At Kamehameha, Mike is the high school coach where he has "seen Mikah grow into a natural leader, always eager to learn new things. He splits time during the week with wrestling, soccer, strength training, and bodyboarding. On some days, he will do two to three training sessions, on top of all of his schoolwork."

"Surfing (bodyboarding) has really been his release from all the stresses the world has thrown at us over the past year."

Out on the ocean waters, Mikah relishes "the good company of friends," where he can be "relaxed one moment, then scrambling the next before a wave breaks."

Watching Mikah's calm, poised dis-

position in the midst of a wrestling match, you can relate to his description of surfing.

"There's a feeling you get when you are on a wave," Mikah said. "Waves change on you. So, you're always ready for the moment when you have to adjust. Then you have to make the right decision with little time to do so."

And if you thought this Hawaiian was just vacationing with his favorite pastime (other than soccer), Mikah reminds us that "body-boarding every day builds endurance, strengthens leg muscles, helps with balance, and prepares me to recognize what is different about situations."

Why is wrestling worth the sacrifice and investment of time, travel, and training?

"Wrestling makes me happy," he said. "It relieves all the stress and helps build my overall health. All around, it's just super fun to do!"



With the pandemic stopping wrestling in Hawaii, Mikah Labuanan was able to get matches in an event in Arizona.

Before and after each grappling bout, we all embrace the unique experience of our shared humanity. Then camaraderie steps aside for three to eight minutes, allowing competition to proceed as other emotions take hold.

Yet afterward, we are called upon to revisit the Aloha spirit which connects us across continents and oceans. In the balance of life, the natural acceptance of a 14-year-old from the Islands centers us around what we love about this unpredictable but beautiful sport.

In this time of uncertainty, we turn our thanks to Mikah Labuanan, a son of Maui whose spirit, love, and humanity reminds us of who we are. Let us all meet, as before, in the middle to shake hands. ■

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