



July 10, 2009

Sharpshooters learn from a legend

*BY JARED HASTINGS
JHASTINGS@DNJ.COM*

It's a akin to hitting batting practice off of Roger Clemens. It would be similar to throwing passes to Jerry Rice, or a practice round with Jack Nicklaus.

All college legends, all some of the best to ever grace their sport.

That's what a group of area wrestlers are getting this weekend as they rub elbows — and trade mat burns — with wrestling legend Pat Smith.

It's the second year in a row Smith has conducted a camp for the Sheriff's Sharpshooters Wrestling Club at Blackman Middle School.

During his college career at Oklahoma State, Smith made history by becoming the first wrestler to win four individual NCAA national titles. Smith now spends part of his time teaching at camps across the country and helping guide the next batch of wrestling standouts.

Smith's list of accolades and accomplishments are numerous. He won NCAA championships at the 158-pound weight class in 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1994. He was part of NCAA championship teams in 1990 and 1994. He was named NCAA Most Outstanding Wrestler in 1994 and is a member of the Oklahoma State Sports Hall of Fame.

"I usually spend two months out of the year, in June and July, and I go around the country and put on two and three-day camps," said Smith, who spent 11 years as an assistant coach at Oklahoma State. "I'm trying to do it, especially in a lot of the states in the South where maybe wrestling isn't as big as football or baseball and try to get wrestling that exposure and build the sport."

To that end, Smith has had immense success.

After moving to Arkansas to teach the sport two years ago, Smith has helped build the sport state wide. Wrestling is now a sanctioned sport within the state, and with 51 teams now competing, had its first state tournament this past season.

"I want to let these kids know that this is a great sport," said Smith, who conducted a camp in Montgomery, Ala., last week. "This is the kind of sport that's going to build character. It's going to build a mental toughness in kids and teach them how to work hard."

"I played baseball for 11 years and I played football for 10 years, and I'm going to tell you, there's nothing harder than wrestling."

The 40 wrestlers attending the camp learned just how tough that is. In the Intensive OSU Practice portion of the camp — named after Smith's alma mater — wrestlers were pushed to a higher level of practice and competition, something intended to prepare them to take the next step.

"It's hard," said Blackman rising junior Michael Kennedy, last year's Tennessee runner-up in the 189-pound weight class. "He's tough, he pushes us."

While the camp may be a physical strain, it's a price the campers are willing to pay, for both the improvement to their skills and because they know the instruction they receive is top notch.

"It's pushing everybody here," said Drew Heath, also a rising junior at Blackman High School. "We've been drilling a lot before this, but not this hard. But, everybody knows Pat Smith and you know it's only going to make you better."

That's why Major Bill Kennedy, the head of the Sharpshooter's program and the camp's organizers, believes Smith's presence is important in more ways than one.

"I think (the campers) understand and know how hard it was for (Smith) to get to where he was," said Kennedy, Michael Kennedy's father. "But for him to be here, for that one-on-one instruction, I don't know if they understand how valuable that is."

"This is the second year in a row we've had him here, and we've been lucky to have that. Pat's a fantastic coach."
