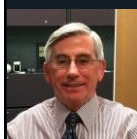




Army West Point Wrestling

ALUMNI QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



From the Editor in Chief

By LTC (R) Larry Baltezare '72

Greetings, fellow alumni, and welcome to the fourth edition of our Army West Point Wrestling Alumni Newsletter! Army completed another highly successful season—where we dominated Navy, achieved a national ranking of 23rd, garnered a 3rd place EIWA finish, and sent 7 Wrestlers to the NCAA Championships. The team is heading into postseason Olympic style competition, ready to accomplish even more.

Turning to this newsletter, we bring you the blockbuster news that Kevin Ward stepped down from the Head Coaching position and has headed to Oklahoma State University to become an assistant coach. Though we are sad to see him go, we thank him for the tremendous job he did with the Army Wrestling Program. We are in great shape for whoever takes his place. Coach Green has been designated Interim Head Coach and is spearheading the effort to prepare our wrestlers for national and international Freestyle and Greco competition.

Other newsletter items include coverage of the WPWC Spring Gala and Awards Banquet, a look at the new wrestlers from the Class of 2029, WPWC news and events, the recruiting impact of NCAA Revenue Sharing Policies, and a few interesting Alumni news items.

We hope you enjoy reading this publication as we continue to strengthen the Army Wrestling brotherhood and keep our wrestling community informed and connected.

Do you have Alumni Related News To Share?

Please send contributions to:

Alumni.newsletter@westpointwrestlingclub.org

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Coaches Corner

By Former Class Of 1972 Head Men's Wrestling Coach Kevin Ward

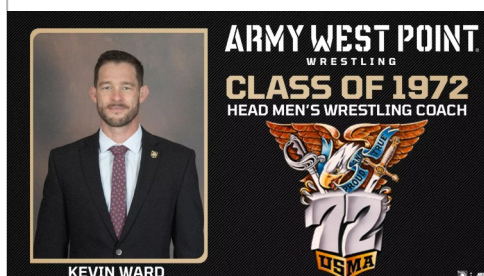
For the past 11 years West Point has been my home, and the wrestling program has been my passion. I can't possibly put into words how much this program, and all the people this program has brought into my life, have meant to me and my family. I have poured my heart and soul into this program and have given Army Wrestling everything I have, and in return, the program has blessed me with unforgettable experiences, irreplaceable friendships, and relationships I will cherish for the rest of my life. West Point, and its people, have had a profound impact on my life in every imaginable way.

Saying "thank you" doesn't seem like enough to express my gratitude for all you have done for me and the support you have shown the program. I know it's business, but I take this program personally - most times it's almost impossible to distinguish where the Ward family ends and the Army Wrestling Family begins - which is what makes this transition so difficult. But I know the program will continue to Chase Greatness and will continue to help produce the next generation of leaders for our country. I know the program is as strong as it's ever been - because I know the character of the people in the program, and I know the program will continue to climb to new heights.

To the athletes - thank you for making this the best job in the world. Together, we accomplished some amazing things and shared experiences we will never forget. And while I had the pleasure of being called "coach" I assure you that I learned far more from you than you did from me.

To the alumni - thank you for your continued support of the program and of the young men in it. Your passion for the things that make Army Wrestling great enables the current generation to achieve new levels of success. Your love and support are the backbone of the program. And thank you for welcoming me as one of your own. I didn't attend USMA and I never served, but you made me feel like a true West Pointer.

I will forever be indebted to everyone who made my tenure at West Point possible and to those who helped me sustain it. I am leaving with nothing but gratitude and appreciation for you all.



The Legacy of Army West Point Class of 1972 Head Men's Wrestling Coach Kevin Ward

By LTC® Todd Messitt '87 and Staff Writer Eric Bantz '72

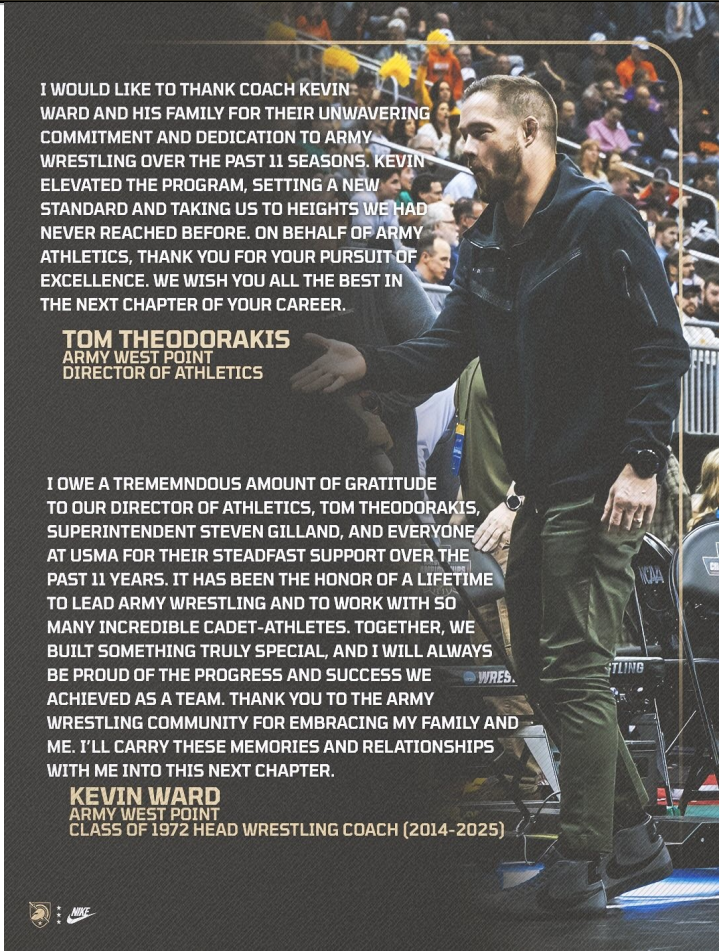
Our entire Army Wrestling Family wishes to say "THANK YOU" to our Class of 1972 Head Men's Army Wrestling Coach Kevin Ward and to wish him and his family the very best as they depart West Point for a new opportunity at Oklahoma State University. We will certainly miss them.

Coach Ward came to Army with previous head coaching experience gained at Division II Ouachita Baptist University. As the first head coach of Ouachita Baptist's wrestling program, Ward led the Tigers to top-15 finishes at the NCAA Tournament in each of the program's first three seasons. He coached 10 All-Americans and had two NCAA finalists.

On August 1, 2014 Kevin was named Army's 10th head wrestling coach. Baby-faced and full of energy, he started the next era for Army West Point Wrestling by establishing a new set mindset of "Chasing Greatness" which paired nicely with existing Team mantra BHAW (Brotherhood, Heart, Attitude, and Warrior). He emphasized that greatness is a journey, not a destination and there is always more road to travel and more work to get done. Hard work and resilience leads to improvement every day as you Chase Greatness not just in wrestling but throughout life.

He also changed the mindset against Navy. In the past, the theme around Navy was "maybe" we could beat them this year. Under Coach Ward, the team approached the match expecting to beat down the squids ... in every single match and in every single dual. In his first year, Army defeated Navy to snap a 17-year winless drought. His tenure at Army includes seven wins over Navy and four-consecutive Star Series victories from 2016-17 to 2019-20. He became the first coach in program history to accomplish that feat. His leadership, hard work, and vision for our program resulted in outstanding success both on and off the mat for our Army Wrestling Team. His hiring of assistant coaches who share his character, hard work, and goals has also been a blessing to our wrestlers. Together they established Army as a top 25 college wrestling team over the past two seasons.

Coach Ward chased greatness for 11 seasons at the helm of the Army West Point Wrestling Program and while doing so, he led the Black Knights to a 59-53 dual record, coached 54 wrestlers to the NCAA Championships, garnered the program's first All-American since 2008 and piled up many accolades that he would be the first to say that they truly belong to the team and coaching staff.



I WOULD LIKE TO THANK COACH KEVIN WARD AND HIS FAMILY FOR THEIR UNWAVERING COMMITMENT AND DEDICATION TO ARMY WRESTLING OVER THE PAST 11 SEASONS. KEVIN ELEVATED THE PROGRAM, SETTING A NEW STANDARD AND TAKING US TO HEIGHTS WE HAD NEVER REACHED BEFORE. ON BEHALF OF ARMY ATHLETICS, THANK YOU FOR YOUR PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE. WE WISH YOU ALL THE BEST IN THE NEXT CHAPTER OF YOUR CAREER.

TOM THEODORAKIS
ARMY WEST POINT
DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS

I OWE A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF GRATITUDE TO OUR DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS, TOM THEODORAKIS, SUPERINTENDENT STEVEN GILLAND, AND EVERYONE AT USMA FOR THEIR STEADFAST SUPPORT OVER THE PAST 11 YEARS. IT HAS BEEN THE HONOR OF A LIFETIME TO LEAD ARMY WRESTLING AND TO WORK WITH SO MANY INCREDIBLE CADET-ATHLETES. TOGETHER, WE BUILT SOMETHING TRULY SPECIAL, AND I WILL ALWAYS BE PROUD OF THE PROGRESS AND SUCCESS WE ACHIEVED AS A TEAM. THANK YOU TO THE ARMY WRESTLING COMMUNITY FOR EMBRACING MY FAMILY AND ME. I'LL CARRY THESE MEMORIES AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH ME INTO THIS NEXT CHAPTER.

KEVIN WARD
ARMY WEST POINT
CLASS OF 1972 HEAD WRESTLING COACH (2014-2025)

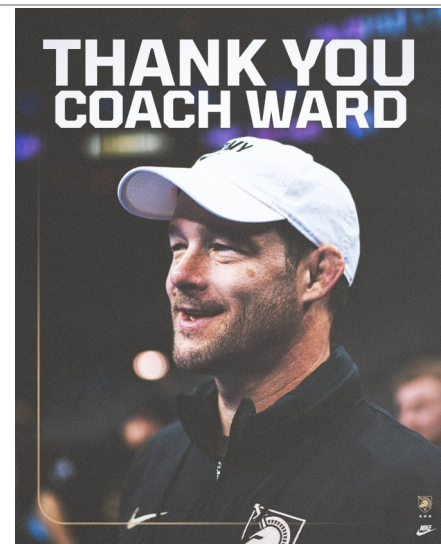
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The Legacy of Army West Point Class of 1972 Head Men's Wrestling Coach Kevin Ward (cont'd)

By LTC ® Todd Messitt '87 and Staff Writer Eric Bantz '72

Coach Ward Accolades and Army Wrestling Achievements under Coach Ward:

- Top 25 Team ranking in 4 of the last 5 years
- 2 Collegiate All-Americans
- 80 EIWA Conference Placers
- 13 EIWA Conference finalists/3 Champs
- Four EIWA Team Trophies
- First ever Southern Scuffle Team Champions 2025
- 2X EIWA Coach of the Year
- Receptient of the Coach Mike Krzyzewski -Teaching Character Through Sports Award
- National Wrestling Coaches Association Division I National Coach of the Year Finalist
- National Wrestling Coaches Association President



Off the mat, his impact on Army wrestlers has been noteworthy. His leadership and mentoring have helped to develop our wrestlers into warriors and leaders with character who are destined to become outstanding Army officers, citizens, husbands, and fathers. We sincerely thank Coach Ward for the blood, sweat and tears he invested in Army West Point Wrestling, and wish Kevin and his family the best in Stillwater – except in head-to-head matchups!

The good news is that Army Wrestling will continue the tradition of 'Chasing Greatness' that Coach Ward established while he was here. A national search is ongoing for the 11th head coach in program history. Associate Head Coach Scott Green has been named the interim head coach to keep Army Wrestling moment going forward.

Thank you again Coach Ward, and God bless you and your family.

2nd Annual WPWC Gala and Awards

By Interim Class of 72 Head Men's Wrestling Coach Scott Green

The 2nd Annual WPWC Gala and Awards was held on May 3rd at the West Point Club. Nearly 200 supporters and athletes gathered to celebrate a successful season for all involved. It was good to welcome alumni and parents back to West Point to share in this event. A full slate of awards were given to our athletes that really showcased the BHAW spirit and provided recognition for upholding the program's values. Cadets not only were recognized for on the mat accomplishments, but also for excelling in the classroom and displaying qualities such as resilience, courage and leadership.



While each award is special, the most impactful moment the past few years has been listening to Coach Ward talk about CJ Morgan and present an award in his honor. Nothing exemplifies West Point Wrestling more than being a good teammate, and KW always hits the right chord when talking about CJ's many strengths in this regard. Congrats to Daniel Uhorchuk, this year's winner, for continuing that legacy.

Download the [Spring Gala Slide Show](#) to see a complete list of honorees or watch the [2024-25 Wrestling Highlight Film](#) for an interesting look back at the season as an Army Wrestling Insider.

Many thanks to those who supported the Gala. As I said at the presentation- we are charged with doing something COMPLETELY different than what our peers are doing in this transfer portal/ NIL era, and that is our superpower. Core values like loyalty, persistence and sacrifice for the greater good are hard to come by these days, but they are abundant at West Point and they are the exact thing our guys need as wrestlers and as they move into leadership positions after graduation.

This event is poised to grow because it is a great opportunity to share fellowship with likeminded individuals and to enjoy a night out with some of your favorite people. I anticipate it becoming a strong partner with our fall golf event in terms of both fundraising and friend raising. We hope you circle the first weekend of May on your calendar moving forward. We would love to have you join us next year as this becomes an important benefit event for the program and a time to share fellowship.

- TUNE IN TO BHAW ARMY WRESTLING RADIO SHOW -

All Things Army Wrestling—Interviews, Match Recaps, Catchups with Old Grads

Available on Spotify, YouTube, Apple Podcast, and Facebook



The Dirty Baker’s Dozen Plus Two—West Point Class of 2029 Wrestlers

By Dan Ciccarelli ‘03

With the conclusion of our Gala and the arrival of June, Army wrestling alumni reflect on the Firsties who graduated and begin to consider the incoming recruits set to join the program. The challenge, of course, lies in determining which recruits will enter directly and which will go through prep. This summer, Army Wrestling welcomes 15 incoming recruits from eight different states, including six direct admits, seven USMAPS wrestlers, and two transfers.

Direct

133 Ian Akers: Peoria Notre Dame, IL
133 Devin Ryan: New Milford, NJ
165 Joey Antonio: SJB, CA
165 Frankie Florio: Cardinal Gibbons, FL
174 Draven McCall: Tampa Jesuit, FL
184 Hayden Hochstrasser: Southern Regional, NJ

USMAPS

133 Damien Resendez: Mt Carmel, IL
141 Shane Reilley: Malvern Prep, PA
149 Casper Stewart: Batavia, NY
157 Kellen Smith: West Hancock, IA
184 Gage LaPlante: Starpoint, NY
165/GR Arvin Khosravy : Chaminade, CA
157/GR Owen Hicks : NYMA, NY

Transfers

133 Jake Crapps: Cass, GA (Mizzou). Top 20 overall recruit out of HS. Participated in Army ROTC as a redshirt at MIZZOU.

53kg Clare Booe: Wyoming Seminary, PA. 2024 U20 Pan-Am Champ. 2022 & 2023 Fargo Champ. 2023 Super 32 Champ. 2024 NCWWC Runner-Up.

Direct Admits

Six direct admits will step onto the mats at Arvin Gym for the first time this summer:

- 133 – **Ian Akers** (Peoria Notre Dame, IL) – 3rd State
- 133 – **Devin Ryan** (New Milford, NJ) – 7th State
- 165 – **Joseph Antonio** (SJB, CA) – S32 Finalist; CA 3rd, 2nd
- 165 – **Frankie Florio** (Cardinal Gibbons, FL) – Frosh state champ; 4x placer
- 174 – **Draven McCall** (Tampa Jesuit, FL) – 16U Greco AA
- 184 – **Hayden Hochstrasser** (Southern Regional, NJ) – 2024 NJ 3rd; 2024 ETR 8th

Among the standout prospects, **Joseph Antonio** leads the pack. A finalist at S32 in 2023, he is already college-ready with four-time All-American potential. Despite a loss in this year’s state finals, Antonio competed in a weight class stacked with nationally ranked contenders.

The Dirty Baker's Dozen Plus Two -West Point Class of 2029 Wrestlers (cont'd)

By Dan Ciccarelli '03

Other notable direct admits include **Draven McCall**, a 16U Greco All-American and three-time Florida state champion, and **Hayden Hochstrasser**, a highly regarded recruit from Southern Regional High School in NJ. Injuries limited Hochstrasser's progression in his final season, but his addition strengthens our 184lb ranks—a critical need in recent recruiting cycles.

Florida continues to supply strong recruits, including **Frankie Florio**, who trained alongside the Mocco family and medaled every year at the state tournament. He enters a competitive field at 165, where ambition and toughness will be key. Rounding out the direct admits are **Ian Akers** (Illinois) and **Devin Ryan** (New Jersey), both state place-winners who bolster our lightweight lineup. Devin, notably, was selected to represent Team NJ at the Pittsburgh Wrestling Classic.

USMAPS Recruits

Coach Scott Green & Jeff Breese have crafted a strong USMAPS class, emphasizing New York talent—a shift made possible by Cornell's evolving recruiting strategy. Among the seven Prepsters, three hail from the Empire State:

133 – **Damien Resendez** (Mt Carmel, IL)

141 – **Shane Reilley** (Malvern Prep, PA)

149 – **Casper Stewart** (Batavia, NY)

157 – **Kellen Smith** (West Hancock, IA)

184 – **Gage LaPlante** (Starpont, NY)

165/GR – **Arvin Khosravy** (Chaminade, CA)

157/GR – **Owen Hicks** (New York Military Academy, NY)

Casper Stewart stands out as one of the most decorated recruits in this group, with multiple top-15 wins his senior year. His pinnacle performance came at the Grappler's Fall Classic, where he pinned then-#2 Vince Bouzakis in the finals. Other New York prospects include **Owen Hicks**, who has shown steady improvement, and **Gage LaPlante**, a former 165-pound national bubble candidate who has since moved up to 184.

Iowa's **Kellen Smith** comes off a strong prep season with a 15-5 record, highlighted by victories at the Rocky Mountain Collegiate Open, the New York State Intercollegiate Open, and the Messiah Open. Rounding out the group, **Arvin Khosravy**, nicknamed "The Notorious Iranian," brings a fierce Greco pedigree to the middleweight ranks, while **Shane Reilley** ensures continued talent from Malvern Prep. Lastly, **Damien Resendez** joins from powerhouse Mt. Carmel, IL—a proven battleground for elite lightweight wrestlers.

The Dirty Baker's Dozen Plus Two -West Point Class of 2029 Wrestlers (cont'd)

By Dan Ciccarelli '03

Transfers

The transfer portal has historically seemed inaccessible to Army sports, but this cycle, two transfers join the program:

Clare Booe – 2025 NCWWA Tournament Finalist; U20 Pan-Am Champion; Formerly of King College

Jake Crapps – Former top-20 recruit; Originally committed to Navy; Transferred from Mizzou

Clara Booe's journey is particularly unique—she arrives at West Point despite the school lacking a collegiate women's wrestling team. Her decision aligns with long-term goals, including development through WPWC, a commission, and potential future involvement with WCAP.

Meanwhile, **Jake Crapps**, a Georgia native and former top-20 recruit, initially committed to Navy before spending last season at Mizzou while participating in Army ROTC. Now at USMA, he seeks a fresh start—an uncommon yet admirable decision, demonstrating his commitment to experiencing the full Cadet journey.

Looking Ahead

While the casual fan might not see this class as immediately impactful, it addresses long-term needs and provides depth in key weight classes. The meteoric rise of our current starters plays a role in shaping expectations, yet this incoming group will benefit from development through prep and military training. Strong academic preparation will ensure they avoid playing “catch-up” academically, allowing for greater focus on wrestling. **This class understands the challenges ahead—and yet, they run toward the fight**

Locker Naming Opportunities

Sponsor a locker in the Army Wrestling room

- Show your support to the next generation of Army Wrestlers
- Celebrate your connection to the team and its storied tradition
- Mark your locker with a personalized locker dedication

Reserve your locker now

- 30 lockers available
- Naming rights secured with a \$10,000 donation
- Individual and group options are available

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The EIWA in Retrospect and Future Possibilities

By Former Class 1972 Head Men’s Wrestling Coach Kevin Ward

As most of you know, the EIWA is the oldest wrestling conference in the country, having just completed its 120th year of competition. Throughout that time, the conference has undergone many changes in both composition and size. The conference once included teams like Syracuse, Boston University, City College of New York, Rutgers, and Penn State (to name just a few) – so as the saying goes.... The only constant in life is change. Even in my 11 years at West Point we have seen more than a half dozen teams come and go.

And recently the EIWA experienced a pretty massive shift when the Ivy League schools left to form an official Ivy League Wrestling conference. The move better aligned those wrestling programs with their athletic departments and they now compete in an official all-sports conference. And although it’s usually just semantics, the EIWA is actually not a conference at all; it’s an association. This is important because, unlike actual conferences, the EIWA doesn’t really have any bylaws that mandate scheduling, competition calendars, exit fees, eligibility rules, etc. This makes sense when you look at the makeup of teams and the conferences those teams’ schools belong to.

That is seven different Conferences that span schools with vastly difference resources (Franklin and Marshall is a Div III school, for example!) interestingly, the EIWA is the only remaining “wrestling-only” conference in the country. So why this history lesson.... I think it’s important to understand some of these things to better understand what the situation is today, and to be able to better predict where the EIWA might go in the future. But first, let’s talk about how the EIWA qualifies individuals for the NCAA Tournament.

School	All-Sport Conference
American University	Patriot League
Army West Point	Patriot League
Binghamton University	America East Conference
Bucknell University	Patriot League
Drexel University	Coastal Athletic Association (CAA)
Franklin & Marshall College	Centennial Conference (Division III)
Hofstra University	Coastal Athletic Association (CAA)
Lehigh University	Patriot League
Long Island University (LIU)	Northeast Conference (NEC)
Morgan State University	Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC)
Navy	Patriot League
Sacred Heart University	Northeast Conference (NEC)

The EIWA in Retrospect and Future Possibilities (cont'd)

By Former Class 1972 Head Men's Wrestling Coach Kevin Ward

The qualification process for the NCAA tournament is done through the eight wrestling conferences. The conferences are: Big 10, Big 12, ACC, MAC, Pac 12, SoCon, EIWA, and Ivy. Obviously, these conferences aren't all equal in terms of competitiveness on the national level or in size. The Big 10 has fourteen schools, and the Pac 12 has only four – the EIWA is one of the largest groups with 12 members.

Due to the varying sizes and competitive nature, in 2009 the NCAA implemented a qualifying procedure that “pre-allocated” (an important term!) a certain number of spots to each weight class in each conference, determined by each individual wrestler's success that season. The criteria taken into account in determining pre-allocated spots is: coaches panel ranking, RPI ranking, and winning percentage above 70%. An individual who is in the 28(ish) of two of those rankings earns a pre-allocated spot for their conference at their weight class. This is why you see a different number of qualifiers at each weight within a conference. The basic idea is to reward individuals for a full season of work and not place so much emphasis on one tournament placement. This has been universally accepted as MUCH better than the previous qualification system that had a predetermined number for every weight in a conference. Bear with me, I promise this is leading somewhere...

OK, so back to where I started – the Ivy teams departed the conference and started their own thing. All of us were curious about what that might do to the total allocations earned by the EIWA, given that Cornell, Princeton, and Penn are historically strong programs. And when allocations were announced prior to the EIWA tournament this year, we were all pretty bummed. Only 22 pre-allocated spots. Down from 53 the year before. So yeah, it hurt. Especially when you look at how those 22 spots were earned, and that Army earned 6 of them. I think our allocations will increase going forward – this season was a combination of multiple factors coming together: several teams had down years compared to their history and several teams with plenty of talent just didn't meet the benchmarks in either/or RPI, winning percentage, and coaches panel. It's not my place to comment on other program's or how other coaches choose to operate their programs, but I will say that some more thoughtful scheduling would benefit almost every team in the EIWA. When me and my staff sit down to map out our schedule for the coming season we do our best to find a good balance of “marquee win” opportunities and matches we are heavily favored in. In the past I've made plenty of mistakes making our schedule too ambitious, or not the right mix of teams, and I've tried to learn from those. Of course, no matter what you put on your schedule, you have to coach your team hard, develop their skills and mental toughness, and perform when the lights are on. Some good luck never hurts either.

What would I want to happen in an ideal world? I would like to see the EIWA split even further (don't worry its not going to happen!) – combine the Patriot League schools with Drexel and Binghamton - then have FM, LIU, Morgan State, Sacred Heart, Hofstra all in a separate conference. The competitive equity would be way better, and more schools would have a legit chance to get individuals through to the NCAA tournament. But that's just my opinion and it's probably not worth much, and here is why something like this is extremely unlikely to happen...

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The EIWA in Retrospect and Future Possibilities (cont'd)

By Former Class 1972 Head Men's Wrestling Coach Kevin Ward

If the Patriot League were to bring wrestling in as an official sport in the Patriot League Conference, there would be some big changes for a couple programs, namely Lehigh and American. The Patriot League has strict policy regarding redshirting and graduate transfers being able to compete – basically, they don't allow it. And that would be a big time change for Lehigh and American and would be an obstacle for us to reach out and invite any other programs to join the conference. Why do we need to invite other teams? Because the NCAA currently has two very strict rules that impact wrestling: 1) a conference is required to have at least 6 teams to be considered a qualifying event (Pac-12 received a waiver this season to compete with only 4 teams), and 2) there is a moratorium on sport-specific conferences like the EIWA. So you can't just create a conference out of thin air, even if it would make perfect practical sense. This is why you see teams like Wyoming and Northern Colorado join the Big-12 as "affiliate members", when it would make way more sense to create a new conference with all the non Power-4 teams in the West.

So that leaves us where we currently are, and our focus needs to remain on making the current EIWA teams as strong and competitive as possible. Actually, my focus needs to remain solely on making Army West Point as strong and competitive as possible. We have worked extremely hard to raise the bar for our program and 6-7 NCAA Qualifiers is something we expect every year. It won't be long till we start sending 8-10 every year, and when we do, we will start to see Army Wrestlers standing on the podium at the NCAA Championships every year. I've made an intentional choice to build a strong team as priority 1 and I believe the strength of the team will help elevate individual performances in March. I've never wanted to coach a mediocre team with an All-American wrestler – I want to coach a great team with multiple All-Americans. And I believe the way to do that is build a strong team first, then focus on individuals. After a decade of building I feel we are at that tipping point where it will become expected to see Army Wrestlers standing on the podium in March. I appreciate you being along for the ride – GO ARMY!

KW

West Point Wrestling Club News

By LTC ® Todd Messitt '87

The West Point Wrestling Club and Regional Training Center enjoyed historic success in 2024 in Freestyle and Greco Roman competitions with two National Champions, multiple national placers and the icing on the cake - two Pan-Am Champs and a 5th place finisher at the World Championship.

We started 2025 right where we left off - Lucas Stoddard dominated the field and defended his U23 Pan-American gold in Mexico in early April. In late April, we traveled to Vegas for the U20 National Championship and the US Senior Open. Lucas Stoddard and Sofia Macaluso both entered their first Senior Open, after some solid successes at the U23 level. Both made the podium and both qualified for the World Team Trials in Kentucky in mid-May. Sofia won the bronze medal with multiple come from behind wins over former world team members. Lucas stepped up amongst the best HWTs in the nation and fought his way to a 7th place finish. His freestyle resume grows as he adds to his two age group Pan Am Championships.

In the Greco Roman disciplines, we had All American finishes at the senior level from Fabian Gutierrez (5th), Arvin Khosravy (6th) and Taylor LaMont (7th). Two U20 athletes made the podium as well with Tristan Hitchcock placing 6th and Owen Hicks securing 8th. Outside of the above results, we had a lot of guys go deep into the U20 division in freestyle, and several Army Wrestling incoming and committed recruits were doing big things, including making World Teams.

Following the Senior World Team Trials, about a dozen wrestlers will tackle the U23 Nationals in Ohio. Providing training and competition at the national and international levels continues to aid the development of our Army wrestlers as we Chase Greatness.

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15TH ANNUAL
WPWC GOLF OUTING

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2025

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Lucas Stoddard Repeats as U23 Pan American Champion

By Staff Writer Eric Bantz '72

Lucas Stoddard '27 won the 125 kg freestyle gold medal at the 2025 United World Wrestling (UWW) U23 Pan American Wrestling Championships held in Queretaro, Mexico from April 10-12. He previously won first place accolades at the 2024 UWW U23 Pan American Championships in Colombia South America a year ago. This year the Burton, Ohio native went 3-0 in Mexico. After a 4-0 win over Ethan Vergara (Puerto Rico) and a 13-4 win over Gabriel De Sousa Silva (Brazil), Stoddard defeated Canada's Roger Li by fall in the gold medal match. We were recently able to catch up with Lucas for an interview with the Army Wrestling Alumni Newsletter.



NL: Hello Lucas, thank you for taking the time in your very busy schedule to talk with us today.

LS: Glad to do it Sir.

NL: Lucas, congratulations, or I guess I should say congratulations “AGAIN” for representing the United States and bringing home a Gold Medal from the Pan Am Championships two years in a row! As an Army wrestler, your results are unprecedented!

LS: Thank you Sir.

NL: What do you attribute as being the major reason(s) for your success?

LS: My coaches have been incredible. They did everything they possibly could to make me better. I always felt like they would “give me the shirts off their backs” if it would help me. All my teammates have been just great as well. Especially the guys who could wrestle HWT with me such as Brady Colbert, Tristen Hitchcock, Sam Sorenson, and Austin Kohlhofer. They all made me better. I truly appreciate all of them.

NL: I know that last year you had limited Freestyle experience prior to the U23 tourneys. Were you able to get more experience this past year prior to the PAN AMS?

LS: Absolutely. Again, thanks to my coaches, I was able to train at the Olympic Training Center (OTC) in Colorado for an entire week with the best heavyweights in our country! OTC Coaches Zadick, Cox, and Russell all poured into me.

NL: Lucas, having competed in two different Pan Am tourneys, did you notice any significant differences between the two?

LS: Yes. In 2024, it was the first time that Colombia had hosted an U23 Tourney and it definitely was not as organized as this past year’s tournament in Mexico was.

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Lucas Stoddard Repeats as U23 Pan American Champion (cont'd)

By Staff Writer Eric Bantz '72

NL: What do you remember most from this year's Championships in Mexico?

LS: I remember I was losing in several bouts before I came back to win. In my semifinals match against Brazil, I was losing 4-2 at the break and came back to win 13-4. Again, I had great coaching. I also love hearing them play the "Star Spangled Banner!"

NL: Is getting proper food and nutrition a problem when you compete in a foreign country?

LS: Not like I imagined it might have been. The Host country puts ALL the wrestlers in the same hotel with the same food. They serve it on a timely manner knowing what the wrestlers' schedules are for competing.

NL: Did the foreign travel present a problem with respect to flights, time change, logistics, etc?

LS: No. The flights were pretty good. There was also never more than a 1 or 2 hour time change so it was not difficult getting acclimated to the local time. When I previously had wrestled in Europe, it was a bit of an issue.

NL: Did you start practicing Freestyle this year as soon as your Folkstyle/Collegiate season finished?

LS: Absolutely.

NL: Do you prefer Folkstyle or Freestyle wrestling now?

LS: Freestyle. I like pushouts. I also like it when the ref signals one point for me with his thumb. It makes me feel like he is telling me "Good Job!"

NL: Would you like to wrestle after you graduate?

LS: Definitely. I would be very interested in the WCAP Program.

NL: Would you like to try out for the Olympics in Los Angeles in 2028?

LS: Yes. The WCAP Program would help me prepare for it.

NL: Lucas, in addition to wrestling, you have done very well academically at West Point. With your many time demands, how are you able to manage to be successful in both areas?

LS: I truly try to focus on my time management.

NL: Any final words you would like to share?

LS: First, a "SHOUT OUT" to all my teammates and coaches. Secondly, even if you do not succeed initially, keep on trying and you will likely see different results.

NL: Thank you Lucas for spending time sharing with us. We have truly enjoyed it. God bless you.

NCAA Revenue Sharing (Part 2) — Impact to West Point Recruiting

Contributed by Douglas Williams '90

The February edition of the Army Wrestling Alumni newsletter included an article that examined the significant changes within NCAA Athletics following the landmark rulings in *O'Bannon v. NCAA*, *Alston v. NCAA*, and *House v. NCAA*. These cases challenged the NCAA's longstanding restrictions on athlete compensation, ultimately allowing student-athletes to receive financial benefits for their participation in college sports. While much of the discussion has centered around revenue-generating sports like football and basketball, the impact on collegiate wrestling—a sport with a dedicated but niche following—warrants closer examination.

Competitive Imbalance Among Top Programs

Historically, powerhouse wrestling programs such as Penn State, Iowa, and Oklahoma State have thrived due to their ability to attract top-tier talent. With the introduction of financial incentives, these programs—already benefiting from strong alumni support and fundraising capabilities—are likely to widen the competitive gap. Schools with robust financial backing will have the means to offer attractive compensation packages, further solidifying their dominance. This shift could result in a scenario where only a handful of elite programs consistently contend for national titles, making it increasingly difficult for mid-tier programs to compete at the highest level.

The Rise of the Transfer Portal Over Traditional Recruiting

Another significant impact of these rulings is the shift in recruiting strategies. Historically, Division I programs have heavily invested in scouting and recruiting high school talent. However, with financial compensation now a factor, many programs may choose to focus on the transfer portal rather than traditional high school recruiting. The ability to acquire proven collegiate wrestlers—who have already demonstrated their ability at the NCAA level—may be more appealing than investing in untested high school prospects. This trend could lead to fewer scholarship opportunities for incoming freshmen, forcing young wrestlers to reconsider their paths to Division I competition.

Roster Caps and Scholarship Adjustments

One of the most significant changes stemming from the settlement is the introduction of roster caps. Previously, Division I wrestling programs were limited to 9.9 scholarships, but under the new framework, schools can offer unlimited scholarships while adhering to a roster cap of 30 wrestlers. This change presents both opportunities and challenges. While more athletes may receive financial aid, programs with historically larger rosters—such as Iowa, Penn State, and Oklahoma State—will need to make cuts, potentially reducing opportunities for walk-ons and developmental wrestlers.

NCAA Revenue Sharing (Part 2) — Impact to West Point Recruiting (cont'd)

Contributed by Douglas Williams '90

Impact on Walk-On Athletes

Walk-on wrestlers have traditionally played a crucial role in building depth within programs. However, with roster caps in place, many walk-ons may lose their spots. Coaches will likely prioritize scholarship athletes, making it harder for non-scholarship wrestlers to earn a place on a Division I team. This could lead to a decline in participation at the highest level, forcing talented wrestlers to seek opportunities at lower divisions or club programs.

A New Path for Aspiring Division I Wrestlers

For high school wrestlers aspiring to compete at the Division I level, the evolving landscape necessitates a more flexible approach. Rather than securing a direct path to a Division I program, many athletes may need to consider alternative routes, such as competing at the Division II or Division III level before transferring. This approach allows wrestlers to prove their abilities in collegiate competition while positioning themselves for potential financial incentives at a Division I program later in their careers.

Financial Strain and Program Elimination

One immediate consequence of these rulings is the financial strain placed on athletic departments, particularly those at schools with smaller budgets. Wrestling programs, which often operate with limited funding compared to high-profile sports, may face difficult decisions regarding their future. With universities required to allocate financial resources toward athlete compensation, some Division I wrestling programs may struggle to justify their existence, leading to potential program cuts, exemplified by the recent elimination of wrestling at Cleveland State University. Schools lacking strong donor bases or lucrative media contracts may prioritize sports with higher revenue potential, leaving wrestling vulnerable to elimination.

Potential Opportunities for Army Wrestling

Army wrestling and the United States Military Academy have unique opportunities to capitalize on these changes. As mentioned above, many budding high-school wrestlers will find it increasingly challenging to secure coveted recruitment opportunities across the Division I wrestling landscape. Army Wrestling, with its holistic environment combining high-level athletics, outstanding academics, and world-class leadership training, can be a strong selling point for these high-level recruits who may fall just outside the radar of rival programs. Furthermore, the 30-man roster cap limit implemented at many Division I programs will not apply to Army Wrestling. Over the past few years, Army Wrestling has maintained a roster strength of approximately 50 student-athletes, one of the largest rosters across Division I wrestling. The ability to do so will remain in place and provide opportunities for Army Wrestling to recruit a deep talent pool for its program. Although numerous wrestling programs nationwide face

NCAA Revenue Sharing (Part 2) — Impact to West Point Recruiting (cont’d)
Contributed by Douglas Williams ‘90

challenges related to top-talent transfers, the Army Wrestling program can significantly reduce this risk by fostering a unique culture and instilling a strong sense of purpose in cadets throughout their experience. A strong foundation already exists, as exemplified by the team’s motto “BHAW” – Brotherhood, Heart, Attitude, Warrior. Finally, Army wrestling can continually explore innovative marketing and product placement strategies to reinforce and expand brand recognition across its target recruiting market. Investments made to improve social media content have already begun to yield positive results. Maintaining these marketing efforts, coupled with a well-designed mix of competition within select markets, will enhance the programs visibility and attract interest from top-caliber athletes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the shifting dynamics of collegiate wrestling present both challenges and opportunities for programs nationwide. While financial pressures and roster limitations threaten the sustainability of many Division I teams, Army Wrestling is uniquely positioned to thrive in this new environment. By leveraging its unparalleled resources, robust roster structure, and commitment to fostering a strong sense of purpose among its athletes, the program can continue to attract top talent and set itself apart. Strategic investments in marketing, coupled with the core values embodied by BHAW will further solidify Army Wrestling’s reputation as a premier destination for aspiring wrestlers navigating the evolving landscape of collegiate athletics.

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Alumni News

Advancements and Career News

Nate Lukez '24 Upon graduating from West Point, reported to Marine Corps' The Basic School (TBS) in August 2024. For those unfamiliar with the Marine Corps, all second lieutenants must attend TBS in Quantico, VA, for six months to ensure all Marine officers are capable of serving as provisional rifle platoon commanders, regardless of their MOS. Training begins at the individual level with rifle marksmanship progresses to platoon-level operations, including a platoon-level live fire and maneuver exercise.



Nate graduated from the US Marine Corps The Basic School in March 2025 as his Company's Honor Graduate. Nate also received the Leadership Award and the Military Skills Award. He received a Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal for his performance during the 7 month course. Nate is currently assigned to Naval Air Station Pensacola as a Student Naval Aviator.



Class 2025 Graduates Welcome to the newest West Point Wrestling Alumni from the Class of 2025. Say hello to 2nd Lieutenants Thomas Godbee, Dalton Harkins, Zach Keal, Mark Metz, Jake Staud, Kyle Swartz, Richard Treanor and Daniel Uhorchuk. May the Wrestling Brotherhood continue as they head off to BOLC for Infantry and Field Artillery.



Alumni News (cont'd)

Class of '72 Proud and True Award

The Class of 1972 selected the Class of 1972 Head Men's Wrestling Coach Kevin Ward to receive the 2025 Proud and True Award. The award was presented to him during the Class of '72 Mini-reunion held in San Diego from May 5th thru the 8th. This award is given to someone that the Class sees as having made a significant contribution to enhancing an Academy program and had a direct impact on development of Cadets in terms of leadership development, character, and the capability to be resilient in the face of adversity.



Former Army Wrestlers from the Class of 1972 join Coach Ward as he receives his award. Row 1 from L to R Eric Bantz, Jerry Hamilton, Coach Ward, Larry Baltezzore, Ray Ritacco. Row 2 Paul Burton, Bob Powers, and Will Webb.



Although Coach Ward never served he fully appreciates the values that West Point embodies. He understands how the Wrestling Program contributes to the development of these values in every Cadet Wrestler. Senior military leaders in Army Special Forces and the Infantry, most notably Army Rangers, have told Coach Ward to keep sending them more Army Wrestlers to lead their soldiers.

Alumni News (cont'd)

Wrestling Involvement & Other Accomplishments

Tommy Thompson '65 presented his 3rd annual "memorial" scholarships to two Kaua'i High School Wrestlers at the Wrestling Awards banquet. He initiated this scholarship award to help in the development of wrestling programs in Hawai'i. This is the first year in which the award was presented to both a male and a female wrestler. Wrestlers were selected by a vote of the coaches based on demonstrated outstanding performance in the sport of wrestling, academic achievement, and leadership. This award also contributes to the overall West Point AOG program of supporting student achievements in Hawai'i.

This year Julius Naanep and Bella Kellerman were selected as Kaua'i High School's Most Outstanding Wrestlers of 2024-2025. This award includes a \$5,000 scholarship to use in furtherance of their education.

Julius will attend Army boot camp upon graduation and then attend the University of Wisconsin to pursue a degree in Kinesiology. He will also be a Walk-On to their D1 wrestling program. Julius also plans to join the Army ROTC program at University of Wisconsin.



Bea (Bella) will be attending University of Segovia in Spain to study International Relations and Government. Bea is a 4 year wrestler who started her freshman year. She placed 5th at the Pa'ani challenge this year and is a 4-time state qualifier. She is also interested in wrestling in college and has an opportunity to do so at a college in Utah.

Alumni News (cont'd)

NETWORKING AND MENTORING SUPPORT

- ATTENTION ACTIVE DUTY ARMY WRESTLING ALUMNI -

Have a need to network during your Army Career?

Seeking advice on Branch/Post Experiences, Future Assignment Networking, Post Command Mentoring, General Army Career Mentoring, Transitioning from Service.

Then leverage the **Brotherhood of Army Wrestling!!**

***Fifty of our current active-duty** Army Wrestling Alumni have volunteered to serve in an informal networking capacity, available to all current and former Army Wrestlers.*

Take advantage of their collective experiences, knowledge and willingness to connect.

Check your personal email inbox for a Career Networking & Mentoring Program Announcement that provides additional details, list of advisors/mentors and their respective contact information.

If you didn't receive or cannot locate that program announcement, then contact doug.williams@westpointwrestlingclub.org to get plugged-in.



- Next Issue of the Army Wrestling Alumni Newsletter—August 2025
- Suggestions/Ideas for Content?? Please Let Us Know What You Think!!
 - Alumni News should be sent to Larry Baltezore
@ Alumni.newsletter@westpointwrestlingclub.org