

GARY VENTIMIGLIA



Gary Ventimiglia known in wrestling circles as simply "Venti" had a wrestling career that spanned 21 years and was cut short by his unexpected death at the age of 42.

Gary a prodigy of Ted Petersen wrestled for Island Trees High School from 1965 to 1968. He won the Nassau County 157 lb. Title in 1968 and finished in second place in the New York State Tournament behind the legendary Carl Adams. He began his college career at Orange County Community college, where he finished second in the Junior College Nationals and then went on to Lock Haven University where he finished his personal wrestling career as Pennsylvania State College Champion.

His coaching career began at his roots assisting his former coach, mentor and friend Ted Petersen. Together they coached several Nassau County Champions, three State champions and produced two county championship teams. It was during this time that Gary learned that coaching was far more than wins and losses. It was the best way to impact the lives of others. Personally, he gained so much from his coach and father figure, Ted, that it became his mission to pay it forward. He too would develop relationships with the athletes he coached that went beyond wrestling or football. He also was a friend and mentor to his fellow coaches. He knew that sports would build character and discipline that would later

translate to a superior work ethic. He would help students plan for and apply to college. He would always stress that sports will shape you as a future leader and instill in you the discipline necessary for insuring a successful future. He would say celebrate your achievements but never live in the past.

Leaving Island Trees he had a short stint coaching at North Shore High School. Gary moved on to East Meadow where he ended his career coaching and building a strong wrestling program. Through the years Gary had many winning teams and coached many champions, but his last team at East Meadow made a profound impact on Gary and he on them. Gary often spoke of this team as a special group of guys that were like sons to him. They would often run to the house and drop by as a routine part of their workouts. Each of them had a special place in his heart and as they graduated and went off to college he watched them with great pride.

Gary was an enthusiastic coach with an incredible sense of humor and was a prankster at heart. He loved creating crazy rivalries with his fellow coaches at other schools to add another element to the competition for his athletes. He would encourage spectators to bring pots and pans to matches to raise the level of enthusiasm from the student body. He would hire volunteers to sing the National anthem live at matches and introduce the wrestlers under spotlights to the theme song of "Rocky". All of this was to create interest in the sport and create an exciting atmosphere for his wrestlers and the fans.

He loved being a coach, a mentor and a friend, but nothing made him happier than his wife Nancy and two daughters Linda and Lauren who if they weren't working a clock or keeping score were on the sidelines cheering.

Today four of his East Meadow wrestlers fund a scholarship that is awarded each year in Gary's name. One of them said that he became the man he is because of Gary. Since he can't pay him back he will pay it forward and that is a legacy Gary would be so proud of.

Gary (center) on the victory stand in 1968 as the 157 lb. Nassau County Champion

