

NCAA Championships and Olympic Trials

The NCAA Championships and the U.S. Olympic Trials are two highly entertaining and exciting events! Our wrestling community has established a tradition of packing arenas for the NCAA Championships, and I encourage you to make plans to travel to other major events. When I was in high school and college, the 1984 and 1988 Olympic Trials were very exciting but they were not well promoted. This has changed over the past decade and the U.S. Olympic Trials have become huge, spectator friendly events. The 1992 Olympic Trials in Pittsburgh, 1996 Olympic Trials in Washington, and the 2000 Olympic Trials in Dallas were all very well-attended and the level of competition and excitement was incredible.

I also encourage you to attend other major events during the years to come. Some of my personal favorites include the NHSCA Senior Nationals, NWCA National Dual Meet Championships, and the U.S. National Open.

I will touch on some technique details from the 2004 NCAA Finals. It was good to see so many back points scored in the NCAA Finals. Jason Powell was impressive in his dominance using a 2 on 1 tilt variation with a leg hook. Using tilts and/or legs are typically the two best ways to turn a tough opponent. Jesse Jantzen, Troy Letters, and Chris Pendleton all scored back points in the first period of their matches. Though Pendleton caught an "arm turk" off of a "split the middle" single leg takedown, Jantzen and Letters were making conscious efforts to ride and turn when they scored. I have watched Jesse and Troy often throughout their high school and college careers, and they have always worked hard to score from the top position using a combination of tilts, legs, spiral half, and the claw. Many high school kids are tough on top but are not able to continue their dominance in college. Jesse and Troy are two exceptions as they have consistently turned opponents in many college matches including their NCAA Finals Victories. They use a variety of skills and have a "tough on top" attitude. Another very tough wrestler on top is Jake Percival from Ohio. He broke onto the national scene at the 2002 NCAA Championships with a thrashing of Mike Zadick, and he has been excelling on top ever since. Percival was in position to win in the finals with a rideout or turn, but Stanford's Matt Gentry wrestled aggressively from the bottom and was able to score a reversal with 30 seconds left to secure a victory.

Iowa State's Zach Roberson used not one but two head shucks to score takedowns on Penn State's Josh Moore. He also used his head shuck in the semi-finals victory over defending NCAA Champion Travis Lee. I was impressed with his timing! The head shuck is an excellent, high percentage scoring technique that most wrestlers do not drill regularly enough. My Olympic Teammate John Smith had a great head shuck. The timing and level change coupled with the actual elbow shuck motion are the keys to the move. Many of my wrestlers use the head shuck effectively in combination with the slide-by, another very important technique.

Congratulations to Stanford on their first ever NCAA Champion and Harvard on their second ever NCAA Champion. I often tell my students that it takes both brains and brawn to excel at our sport. Some wrestlers excel largely on athletic ability, but those who excel at the highest levels use a combination of great technique and tactics with superior concentration, poise, intensity, and mental toughness to find ways to win consistently. It is also good to see top recruits choosing strong academic schools to further both their education and wrestling careers. Jantzen and Letters for example could have gone to any school in the nation, but they chose to stay relatively close to home and attend private schools. Personally I chose to attend Penn State for it's great combination of wrestling tradition and academics, and it worked out very well for me. I may not have made the Olympic Team during college at many other schools. I think Jesse and Troy would have thrived in my alma mater's blue and white, but unfortunately for Penn State they chose a different direction.

Recruiting is more important than ever in college wrestling. The wrestlers are better than ever coming out of high school and are ready to make an impact faster. There are many top recruits scoring big points at NCAA's as freshman and every year thereafter. Look at Tommy Rowlands for example. It usually takes time for heavyweights to mature into outstanding college wrestlers, but Tommy was in the finals as a freshman. Congratulations to Tommy Rowlands on his outstanding career. He is Ohio

State's first ever 4x NCAA All-American. He is also the first wrestler to grow up attending my Gold Medal Training Camps regularly and become a 2x NCAA Champion. As a 3X NCAA Finalist and 2x NCAA Champion, I consider Tommy to be one of the most outstanding college heavyweights ever. It will be interesting to see if he can follow in the footsteps of Lou Banach and Kurt Angle and add an Olympic Gold Medal at light heavyweight to his long list of accomplishments.

Editors Note: To learn more about Ken Chertow's Summer Camp Schedule, videos, mats, or merchandise, call 814-466-3466 or e-mail supergold@kenchertow.com.