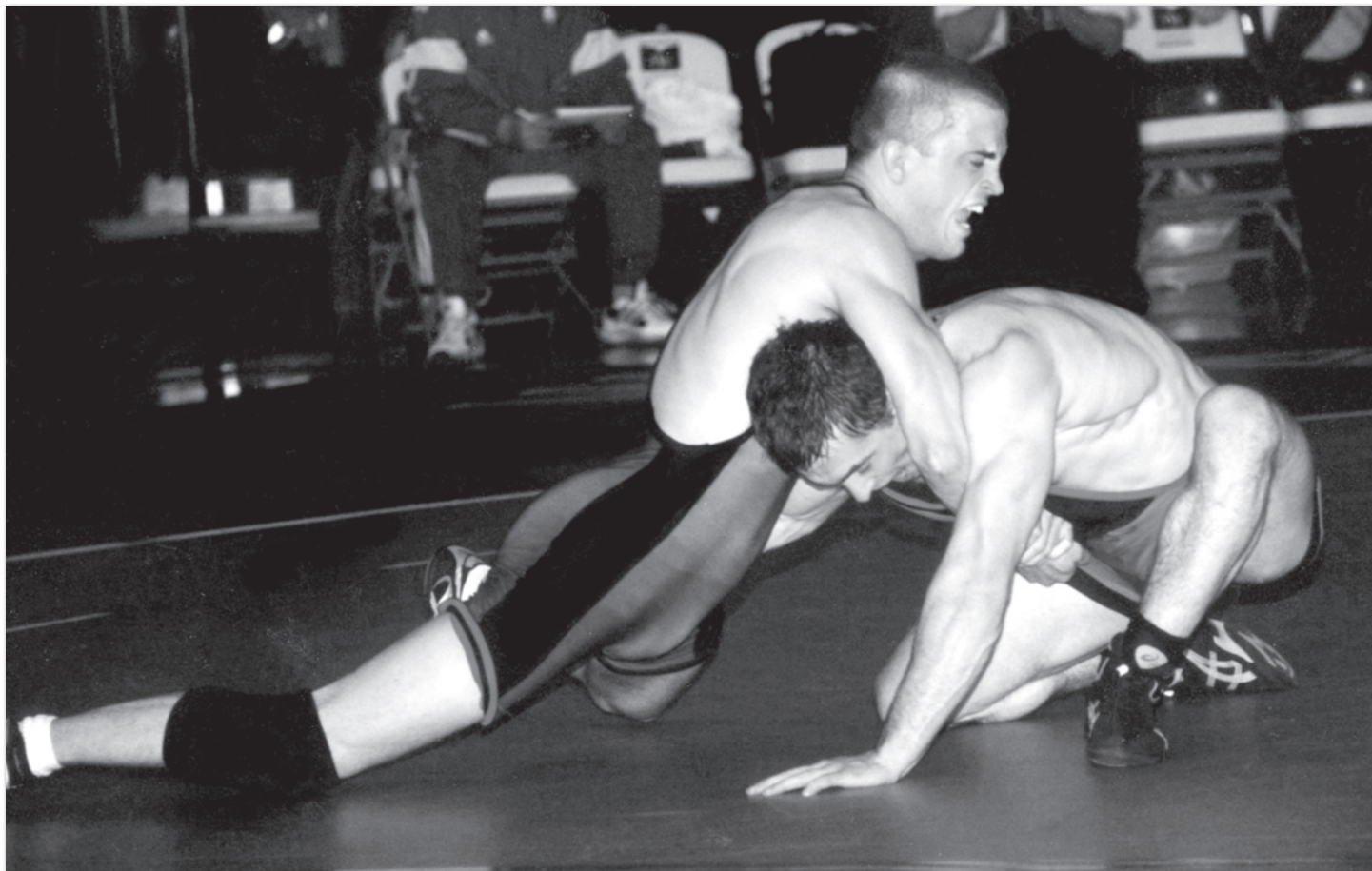


INDUCTEE PROFILE



Jason Kutz co-captained the Lehigh University wrestling team as a senior and won the Eastern Wrestling Association title.

Mano-a-mano

Kutz liked individual challenge and responsibility of wrestling

By John Hartsock

Altoona Mirror

Altoona native Jason Kutz made his mark on the world in the sport of wrestling, but he'd be the first to maintain the sport of wrestling made its mark on him as well.

"My favorite aspect of wrestling is that it stresses self-reliance," said Kutz, 39, a former Altoona Area High School and Lehigh University wrestling standout who now lives in Colorado Springs, Colo., where he is the head freestyle wrestling coach with the United States Army World Class Athlete Program. "I think my favorite thing about wrestling is that you can't blame anybody else

if you lose. It's all on you.

"The bottom line is whether you got your hand raised (in victory)," said Kutz, who is just the third wrestler — joining Hollidaysburg's Wade Schalles and Altoona's Johnny Orr — to be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

"Wrestling teaches a lot. As a kid, it teaches you how to learn to deal with defeat, and it teaches you not to make excuses. If you lose, the other guy was better than you. There's no way around it."

During a long and illustrious scholastic, college and freestyle wrestling career, Kutz was better than the guy that he faced on the mat the great

majority of the time.

He was a two-time PIAA Class AAA state tournament medalist during his high school days at Altoona, placing sixth at 103 pounds as a junior in 1991, en route to earning the Altoona Mirror's Wrestler of the Year selection for the 1990-91 season. Kutz followed that up the next year with a third-place finish at states as a senior at 119 pounds.

He went on to Division I Lehigh, where he was co-captain of the team as a senior — when he was 33-1 in dual meets and won the Eastern Intercollegiate Wrestling Association championship at 126 pounds in 1996.

Kutz carved his biggest niche in wrestling as a freestyle competitor following his graduation from Lehigh. He joined the Army and wrestled for the United States Army team, finishing fifth, third and second at the U.S. World Team Trials from 2001-03 and sixth at the 2004 Olympic Team Trials.

Kutz won a gold medal at the World Military Freestyle Championships in 2003 in Istanbul, Turkey, and represented Team USA on the national team at 60kg (132 pounds) from 2001-04.

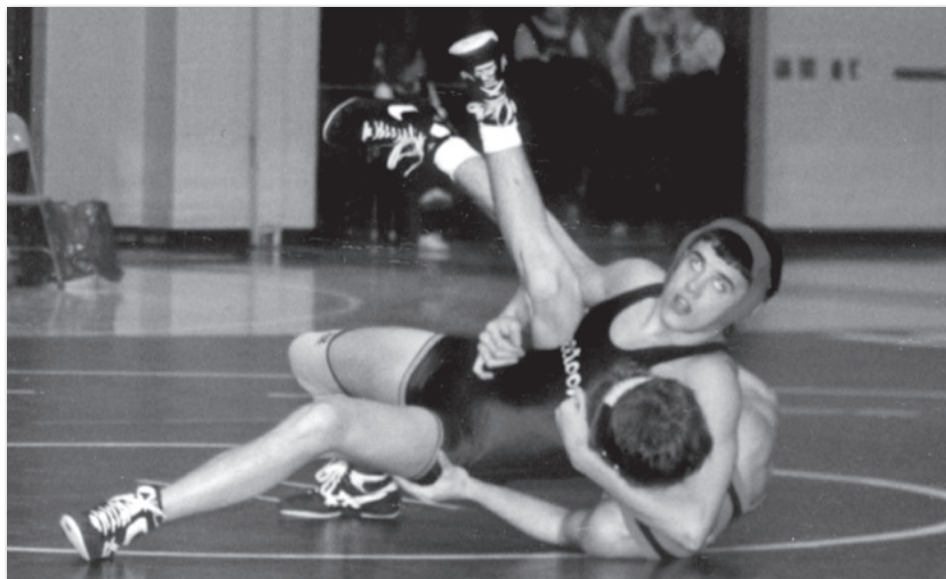
Kutz counts his gold medal in 2003 as one of his top wrestling accomplishments.

"Making the national team was a good feeling, but for me to win that (2003 World Military Freestyle) tournament while representing the United States and the United States Army was a big accomplishment because of the caliber of competition there," Kutz said.

Like anybody who has achieved success on a career path, Kutz has plenty of people to thank along the road.

First and foremost are his parents, Sharon and Ken, and his older brother, John, a football standout who played at Rutgers University.

"I always looked up to my brother," said Kutz, who would run three miles five days a week at the crack of dawn while John rode along on



Jason credits the Rusnak family for his development at Altoona.

his bike. "He was always into football, but he taught me a lot about how to react in certain situations, and he taught me that nobody was going to win a title of any kind without giving that something extra.

"My brother went to college on a full ride for football, and when I was going through the recruiting process for wrestling, he knew everything about it, and he sort of guided me through it."

John Kutz is eight years older, but he said that the bond between he and Jason has always been strong.

"My parents would give me the credit card, and I would take him to freestyle tournaments in places like Erie," John said. "I had a hand in helping him grow up. Wrestling was a natural fit for him, and he just always wanted to be good. There was a big age difference between us, but we were always close, and we still are."

Other positive guides for Kutz were his uncle Tim Marlett, who indoctrinated him into the sport of wrestling during informal workouts at the old Altoona YMCA, and longtime Altoona Area High School coach Marty

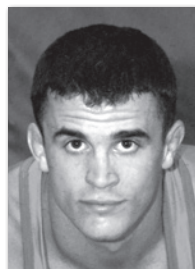
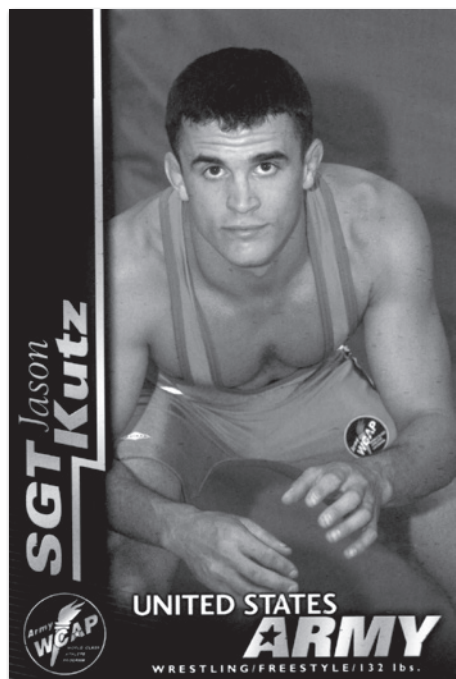
Rusnak, whose unwavering support helped Kutz to reach his potential on the mat.

"Tim got me into it, and Marty was a great coach who was always behind you 100 percent," Kutz said. "He did everything a coach needs to do to develop not only the wrestler but the human being."

Kutz expressed gratitude to Rusnak and his late wife, Mary Ann, who invited the Altoona wrestlers over to their home for pancake breakfasts and treated each of them like they treated their own sons.

"It was a matter of them taking care of us," Kutz said.

At Lehigh, more devoted coaches helped Kutz blaze his wrestling trail. Current Lehigh coach Pat Santoro was an assistant during Kutz's career there, and he — along with head coaches Thad Turner and Greg Strobel — helped to shape the wrestler that Kutz



Kutz bio

Sport: Wrestling
High school: Altoona Area
College: Lehigh
Hall of Fame achievement: Lehigh co-captain won Eastern Wrestling League title in 1996 and medaled several times while wrestling for U.S. Army team in national military competition.
Current residence: Colorado Springs, Colo.

would become.

“Pat Santoro showed me what you have to do in order to become the best, and Greg Strobel was one of the best,” said Kutz, who went on to be an assistant wrestling coach at Lehigh himself before becoming a head coach for one season at East Stroudsburg University. “Thad Turner coached me and taught me a lot about how to approach the sport.”

Strobel, who served as head wrestling coach at Lehigh from 1995-2008 and is now an assistant athletic director there, had high praise for Kutz.

“I coached him during his senior year, and he was a great kid and a pleasure to have on the team,” Strobel said of Kutz. “He was one of our two team captains that year, and he was really, really talented. He was a complete wrestler who could shoot, throw and do a lot of different things, and I allowed him the freedom to explore those things.”

As a result of his hard work, and the positive influence of his many mentors, Kutz now enjoys a life in the



Jason (left) represented Team USA from 2001-04 and won a gold medal at the World Military Freestyle Championships in 2003.

mountains of Colorado with his wife, Christen, and their two young daughters that leaves him pinching himself about his good fortune.

“Colorado is drop-dead gorgeous, and there’s a panoramic view from

my house that enables me to see for 150 miles,” Kutz said. “It’s great to have the opportunity to work with Olympic-level wrestlers day in and day out. And wrestling has done all this for me. I consider myself very fortunate.”

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