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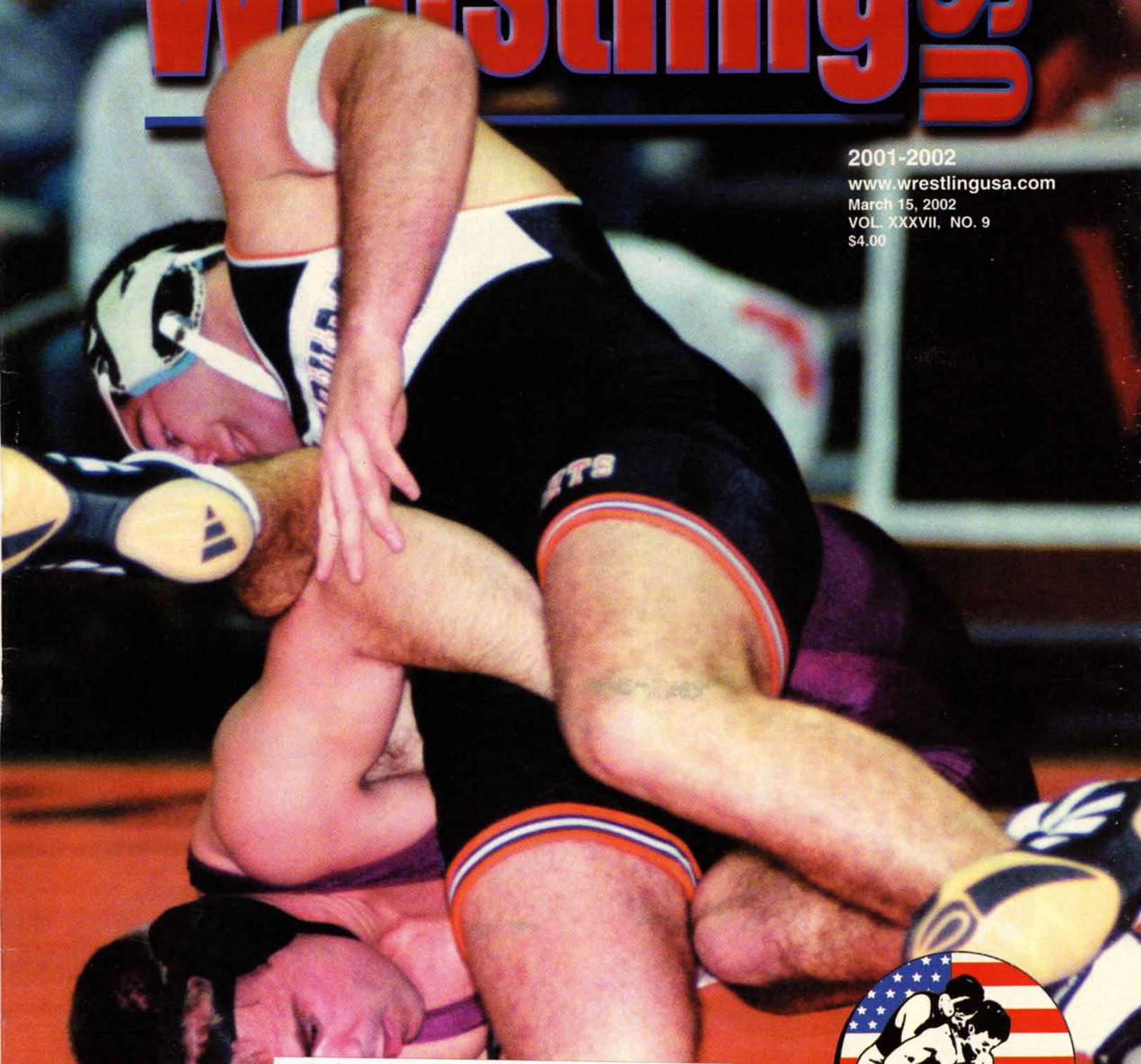
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I Know What You Did Last Summer

By Matt Brzycki

A number of years ago on a September afternoon, a collegiate wrestler who was entering his senior year came into the weight room for a workout. I hadn't seen him since he left campus in May, so I was quite anxious to learn how much progress he had made over the summer. His first exercise was the leg press in which he did about 20 repetitions to muscular fatigue. Immediately following this, I assisted him with several "negatives" in which I lifted the weight (the concentric part) and he lowered the weight (the negative part). Less than a minute later - without doing another exercise - he vomited. Over the years, I had seen many highly conditioned athletes lift weights with so much aggressiveness and intensity that they vomited at some point during their workouts. Needless to say, it was unusual for someone to do so after the first exercise. I asked the wrestler if he was sick and he said, "No, I just didn't train all summer." This was as unfortunate as it was incredulous since he essentially gave his opponents a four-month head start on the upcoming season. A Division I athlete cannot afford to do that and expect to be competitive. When wrestling against this unprepared athlete early in the school year,

a teammate who had trained religiously for the upcoming season might think, "I know what you did last summer" followed quickly by "nothing."

Compare this to the dedicated effort of Princeton University's Ryan Bonfiglio, a senior co-captain of this year's team who wrestled at 165 pounds. Ryan was not exactly a "blue chip" wrestler when he came out of high school. In fact, his greatest wrestling accomplishment as a senior was finishing second in districts (in Pennsylvania). But a few summers ago, he raised his commitment to the sport of wrestling to a new level. In Ryan's case, the follow-up to the statement "I know what you did last summer" was "You prepared for wrestling." The changes that he made - both physically as well as mentally - were simply staggering. Ryan's muscular strength and cardiovascular conditioning improved dramatically as did his lean-body (muscle) mass. To put it bluntly and succinctly, he became a complete stud. Ryan was also much more focused on the mat, becoming a real student of wrestling. This past season, he was rewarded for his efforts by finishing second in the Eastern Intercollegiate Wrestling Association (EIWA) tournament - losing by a score of 4-2 in the finals - and being one of three

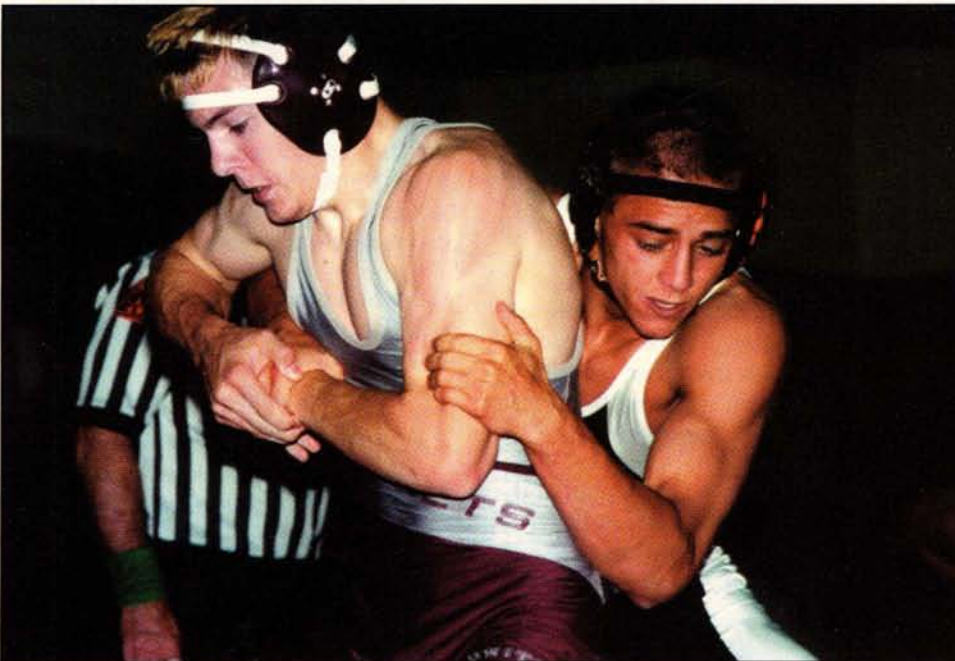
Princeton wrestlers to qualify for the NCAA Championships. (The other two were junior Juan Venturi at 133 pounds and sophomore Greg Parker at 174 pounds.) Ryan's wrestling portfolio for this season also includes a victory over a tough Matt Lackey of Illinois at the North Carolina State Duals by a score of 3-2. (An outstanding athlete and two-time state champion in high school, Matt placed third at the 2001 NCAA Championships.)

WHY THE SUMMER?

I cannot overemphasize the fact that in order to realize your potential as a wrestler, it's an absolute necessity that you continue your training over the summer months. But why is the summer so important in this regard? In general, it's arguably the best possible time to prepare for the upcoming season. Michael New - the fiery Wrestling Coach at Princeton University - states, "The summer is a low-key time to begin healthy nutritional habits and lifestyle changes."

More specifically, you can increase your level of strength and conditioning a considerable amount over the course of the summer. And this can help you significantly on the mat. Case in point: Ryan's newfound strength and conditioning that he developed during the summer months allowed him to do things on the mat that were previously difficult - if not impossible - to accomplish.

In addition, consistent training during the summer can help you to manage your body weight at desirable levels. Hey, it's not in your best interests - or that of your team - to return to school from the summer at whatever body weight the scale happens to read. One of the most important things that Ryan did over the summer was to take the discipline required in making weight and use it to his advantage. How? Simple. First, he improved his nutritional habits by consuming a moderate amount of calories and low-fat foods. Second, he coupled this



Brant Sheets, Tolono, Illinois, vs. Anthony Panico at the Prairieville Open Tournament. Panico won the bout by a 7-4 decision. Sheets won third place. Photo by Bob Case.

with an extremely intense and demanding regimen of strength training and conditioning. The result was a decrease in body fat and an increase in muscle mass. In 1997-98, Ryan wrestled as a small 142-pounder; in 1998-99 - after a summer of dedicated effort - he wrestled as a strapping 165-pounder. This remarkable physical renovation was underscored in October 1998 when one of our athletic trainers measured Ryan's body fat at less than 6% at a body weight of about 170 pounds. (One other quick note of interest: As a 142-pounder, Ryan's record was 13-14; in his first season as a 165-pounder, he recorded more than 30 wins.)

What else can be done during the summer? One of the biggest things that you can do is to practice and perfect your skills and, perhaps, compete in a tournament or two. Last summer, for instance, Matt Lackey was not idle. He won the 167.5-pound title at the FILA Freestyle National Championships and World Team Trials and competed at the World Championships in Nantes, France. Now that's a productive summer!

Finally, at the end of the season you can review your performance and revise previous goals for the next season. Then, you can use the summer months as a springboard to help realize those goals.

Last year, maybe your primary goal was to make the varsity team. Next year, your revised goal should be loftier - maybe to place in the top three in districts. Regardless of whatever goals you set, make sure that they are challenging yet realistic.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The first time that you roll around on the mat with your teammates in the fall, make sure you are prepared so well that each one thinks, "I know what you did last summer" followed quickly by "You prepared for wrestling."

Have a healthy and productive off season!

Matt Brzycki has been involved in the strength and conditioning of collegiate wrestlers for more than 20 years. Since 1986, he has authored nearly 60 articles for *Wrestling USA Magazine* and is the editor of *Maximize Your Training*, a 455-page book that features chapters written by more than 30 strength and fitness professionals. The book is \$19.95 and available at all major bookstores.

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