

57th Annual

<i>William F. Powley Memorial</i> <i>Service to Wrestling Award</i> presented to

John D'Elia

The Powley award recognizes decades of dedication to wrestling

It was sign-up day for the Hackensack High School freshman football team and I couldn't wait to be part of it. I walked into the field house and there were the coaches checking heights and weights of all the prospective players. At an athletic 5 feet tall and 88 lbs., I was sure that I was going to be a force to be reckoned with on the gridiron. Unfortunately, that day the coaches didn't seem to agree. They brought me aside and told me that I was too small to be playing high school football. I was devastated.

Three months later one of my friends who was a 190 lb. lineman was going to a wrestling team meeting, and asked me if I wanted to tag along. I knew nothing about wrestling; at that time we did not have a recreation wrestling program in Hackensack and I thought it was the WWF stuff that I watched on TV with my grandfather. When we got there, the coach handed my friend the paperwork to sign-up. I was lingering behind him in the doorway when the coach came over and said, "Hey, what about you? Are you here to sign-up too?" I proceeded to tell him the football sign-up story, thinking that you had to be the size of my friend to wrestle. The coach explained that anyone, any size, and any weight can wrestle. After participating in my first week of practice, I was hooked. I found that the fairness of the competitions and the comradery among wrestlers was like no other team that I had

been a part of in the past; the love I developed for the sport would lead me on a 45 year journey as a wrestler, coach on three levels, official, wrestling parent, league director, tournament director and any other task that was associated with the sport.

During my high school career at Hackensack, I was very fortunate to be a part of some outstanding teams coached by the late Joe DeFalco. Although I was a district champ and region place winner, I am proud of our team's accomplishments and the winning tradition that we were part of. In my 3 years as a varsity team member, the Comets only lost 4 dual matches. The 1973 undefeated team won the NNJIL Championship, District Championship, and was awarded the Lehigh Cup, given annually to the # 1 team in Bergen County.

A year after graduating from high school, Hackensack was in the infant stages of organizing a junior wrestling team and when I was asked by my former coach if I would be interested in coaching it, there was no way that I could refuse him. So at 19 years old I seized the opportunity to try my hand at coaching. Little did I know that in that first year (with only 16 kids on the team) and with the help of a great group of dedicated parents, it would grow into a program that over the years has introduced youth wrestling to nearly 2,000 participants.

I attended Bergen Community College and was privileged to wrestle on the first nationally ranked team under Coach Ed Kochakji. After wrestling at BCC, I was asked to join the staff as an assistant coach, where I gained valuable experience coaching on the junior college level. While there, I also organized and directed the BCC Invitational Jr Wrestling Tournament which was run annually for many years.

In the early 1980's I was proud to serve as one of the architects and organizers for the newly formed 23 member Twin County Junior Wrestling League. This league was truly different than the other leagues at the time because it allowed every wrestler on every team the opportunity to wrestle in all matches and tournaments. The popularity of this format caught on as the TCJWL has grown to 56 teams today. I also served on the executive committee for over 15 years, as Region Tournament Director for many years and to this day as a Trustee for the league. While still coaching the Jr Team, I was offered a chance to become an assistant coach at Hackensack HS, which I jumped at. A 1-13 team the season before, that 1984 team turned it around and went 13-3, winning a District Championship. I am honored to have had the pleasure of coaching all three current Hackensack HS coaches, John Stallone (College), Ralph Dass (HS) and Mike Walker (Jr's) at one time during their wrestling careers.

In 1991, I became a cadet official and later a member of the NJWOA Northeast Chapter, officiating for 10 years until my own son began his wrestling career and I decided to return to my true passion, coaching. Although not active, I remain a carded wrestling official today.

Today I am a trustee for the Hackensack Jr Wrestling Association, the Hackensack HS Wrestling Parent's Association and involved in just about any wrestling event held at Hackensack. I am a lifelong resident of Hackensack, and happily married to my wife of 25 years, Susan. I'm extremely proud of our children, Jennifer, a graduate of TCNJ, and John, a junior at the University of Delaware. Both were Honor students and 4 year varsity athletes at Hackensack HS.

I have been lucky to be part of this sport in some capacity over the last 45 years. I cherish the many young wrestlers I have had the opportunity to coach and the many lifelong friendships that I have made along the way. I was surprised and humbled to be selected for this service award given the long list of previous awardees and others deserving recognition. I would like to take this time to not only sincerely thank the committee for my selection, but each of you for allowing me to coach your children, become your friend, and be a part of your wrestling family.