MONSTER OF THE WRESTLING MAT

High School Athlete: At 95 lbs, the best in the State / High School Acedemics: Honor Society / College Athlete: 4 Big Ten Titles and a National Championship Team / College Acedemics: College Professor and a lifetime of fitness and healthy living

By Jay Guertin

Michael McGilliard
Class of 1965

Even better in the classroom
MAT CHIEFS—Okemos high school won its first state Class B wrestling championship Saturday and three boys carried the brunt of the load. Individual championships went to Mike McGilliard at 95 pounds and to Pat Karslake at 165 while Dave Martin was the runnerup at 103. Admiring the title trophy, left to right, are McGilliard, coach George Reynolds, Karslake and Martin. Early reports had McGilliard losing in the finals but he defeated his foe to take the individual title. (State Journal Photo) (See Story Page C-2, Col. 2)
The Monster of the Okemos Wrestling Mat does not readily bring to mind a 95 pound High School senior. But the truth is, Mike McGilliard was the most feared and honored wrestler in the State of Michigan in his class in that 1964 season. Author Jay Guertin remembers that year with the clarity of one that experienced it...he did. Jay was an all-around athlete and scholar that excelled in football (no. 32), track (sprinter), basketball, golf, tennis... and wrestling! Jay is the perfect classmate to evaluate the athletes from the Class of 1965 era...and he has done so with clear recollection and humor.

We were fortunate to get “Reflections of Okemos High School Wrestling” from Mike when he was in town for a few days in November, 2017. That weekend, Michigan State University invited back for it’s 50th Anniversary, the 1967 NCAA National Champions MSU Wrestling Team...Mike was a big part of that team at 123 pounds...with his picture in Sports Illustrated.

Thanks to the big effort to everyone involved, this is our nomination of Michael McGilliard, Class of 1965, to the Okemos Athletic Hall of Fame.

Rodney Ellis, President
Okemos Alumni Association
April 1, 2018

By Jay Guertin
Edited by Rod Ellis

Copyright ©2018 by Okemos High School Alumni Association, Inc.

All rights reserved. Published by Okemos Alumni Association

Non-profit 501(c)(3) EIN 82-1246695 Okemosalumni.org
Classmate and web manager Rod Ellis asked me to do some articles about our classmates involved in athletics during their high school days. Of particular interest are those high school athletes that went on to even higher achievements or maintained their athletic standards throughout life. These articles could be based on team or individual athletic results and are intended to memorialize them as our Alumni Nominations to the Okemos Athletic Hall of Fame. I said yes and quickly grabbed my 1965 Tomahawk Yearbook as my main source for information.

BANG! I hit my first wall. Since the yearbook went to press in the early part of 1965 in order to allow printing time, there is no information on the results of all the spring sports! In fact, it doesn’t even tell you what students were on the golf, track, tennis, or baseball teams let alone their team or individual records. In my yearbook, under tennis, is a picture of John Turner with his tennis racquet. John wrote over his picture “6-0 6-0 Turner”. I don’t know if this means that John won or lost every match 6-0? (I have a feeling I am going to hear which 😊)

BANG! The time reality hit me. In our minds, OHS is just yesterday. In reality, it is over 50 years ago and, what we have today is nothing like what the first years of the 1960’s were like. We did not have interscholastic athletics for females! We had a club called GAA, Girls Athletic Association, for women. The yearbook did say that our classmate, Barb Vary, was president of GAA. Maybe Barb or another involved female classmate can reflect on the GAA and women’s athletics in the 60’s. The second part of the time reality is the sports that I watch my grandsons participate in and which most high schools have today, soccer and lacrosse didn’t exist in our 60’s reality.

Taking into account all the information I just shared with you, I started thinking about which 1965 athletic team and classmate was the most successful in athletics. Here are my conclusions: (Please note if any classmate has a different opinion, please share it with the class)
Most Successful Athletic Team 1964/65: To me this was an easy call – our Wrestling Team! They were Class B State Champions our senior year.

It may well be Okemos’ first State Championship in any sport. (Full disclosure – I was on this team but, as all the wrestlers will tell you, I had nothing to do with winning the State Championship.) The Okemos Wrestling Teams went on to win State Championships in 1966 and 1967 and are in the Okemos Athletic Hall of Fame! Wrestlers from the Class of 1965 were Mike McGilliard, Wally Reese, Steve Senzig, Tom Sonneman, Mark Van Deventer and the aforementioned me. The coach, which led Okemos to wrestling dominance, was George Reynolds. I am attaching the recollections of the wrestling team as compiled by Mike McGilliard and our Class of 1965 wrestlers.

My Wrestling Memory: One day at practice, Pat Karslake brought a tube of Nair Hair Remover. We decided to use the hair remover on one of our teammates. Pat, one of the strongest people on earth, held down the wrestler while I put Nair on his eyebrow. When Pat let him up, he quickly wiped the Nair off his eyebrow and freaked out when the eyebrow came with it. We thought, due to fear of Karlase, he would stay quiet as to the perps. Misjudgment!! Coach Reynolds called Pat and me out and asked where the Nair was. We replied that we had opened the gym door and thrown it out in the field. (This might not have been accurate) He told us to go find the Nair. Pat and I, after spending a credible time looking, reported back that we couldn't find it.
Surprise! Coach Reynolds anticipating our failure sent a student to town to get another tube of Nair. Pat and I went home that evening minus one eyebrow!!

Look…You can see my missing eyebrow in the team picture!

In the coming months, I will be reflecting on all the other athletic teams for Okemos. If you have some thoughts for stories you would like to share with me, please contact me through the Okemos Alumni website.

Hall of Fame Nominee Athlete from the Class of 1965: When you think about athletes, you have a mental image of a tall, fluid athlete playing basketball or a hardnosed, brute of a football player. (You also may be thinking that an athlete would have a hard time spelling “academic”). This athlete from the class of 1965 is none of the above. In fact, he is almost the opposite of the characteristics I just mentioned. Our Nominee athlete is short, weighed 95 pounds, wears glasses and went on to get a PhD. My Nomination to the Okemos Athletic Hall of Fame for a “lifetime of athletic achievement” from the Class of 1965 is Mike McGilliard.

We learn in life that it is results that count. Here are Mike’s results and why I feel he is the most successful athlete in our class:
In his senior year, Mike won the State Wrestling Championship in the 95 pound category.
We had other athletes in our class of 1965 who were All League or recognized on a State level. But, none of the others were considered best in the State.

Pictured is the actual record of his State Championship tournament.
Another indicator is Mike competed like a champion at the college level. In college, Mike competed in wrestling at Michigan State University, a Division 1 college.

In the four years that Mike wrestled for MSU, they were BIG Ten Champions every year! In 1967, MSU were National Champions in wrestling. Recently a member of the MSU NCAA championship team wrote a book about it (and himself). This is the cover. Mike is the 123-pounder in glasses just above the trophy. The picture came from Sports Illustrated.

Further, Mike was awarded the Gorriaran Trophy for “most falls in the least amount of time” in the 1968 Big Ten Tournament!

In short, impressive Hall of Fame athletic results!
Reflections of Okemos High School Wrestling

By Mike McGilliard

Okemos Wrestling 1965

The finish was quite unusual. We won the league with a 10-2-1 record and headed to the regional only to be delayed by a March snow storm. At Eaton Rapids HS we won the regional, placing 4th or higher in eight weights, advancing five to the state tournament at Waverly HS three days later.

That Saturday we had two state champions and a runner-up, easily winning Okemos’ first State Class B wrestling championship. It was in fact sewn up before the finals began.

The Meridian News for March 10, 1965. Notice the reporter is Pete Georgiady ’67 and a wrestling team member.
Okemos went on to win the next two state championships in 1966 and 1967. Those three teams were inducted into the inaugural class of the Okemos HS Sports Hall of Fame in 2016, as was Coach Reynolds.

There were six seniors from our class on that 1965 team.

Jay Guertin, Mike McGilliard – 1st Region, 1st State, Team Most Valuable w/Karslake, Wally Reese – 1st Region, (State Qualifier), Team Most Improved, Steve Senzig – 4th Region, Tom Sonneman, Mark Van Deventer – prior to ’65.

Regional and state champions are Dan Cope, Steve Senzig and Dave Williams, fourth in regionals; Doug Willingham, second in regionals; Mike McGilliard and Pat Karslake, regional and state champions; Dave Martin, regional champion and second in state; and regional champion Wally Reese.

Other team members in the state championship but not in the class of ’65 were Pat Karslake (1st), David Martin (2nd), and Doug Willingham.

Our class of ‘65 story was a four-year adventure starting in 1961-62 with a new
Okemos wrestling coach named George Reynolds, just out of Michigan State, who never got to wrestle there due to injury. We practiced in the gym lobby and rolled up and carried the mat to the gym for meets. There were 15 “wrestlers” on that 1962 team, and we went 4-9 in dual meets. Reynolds was adamant we were going to improve. He had a mini-megaphone he used at meets to encourage and instruct. His wife, Jane, was at every meet with babies and kids in tow.

In our sophomore year we were up to 21 wrestlers, had a 7-7 dual record, placed 4th in the region with six advancing to the state tournament. We placed 9th in the state, and Fred Stehman ('64) won a championship, first ever for Okemos. We were getting clocked by Boys’ Training School and Michigan School for the Blind, with Stevie Wonder cheering them on. That all would soon reverse.

Our junior year we had fewer wrestlers but were significantly more skilled up and down the line-up. We went 15-5 in dual meets, won the region and placed 3rd in the state championships. Stehman, who should be credited with putting us on the map, won his second state championship and Karslake his first of three consecutive.

Meanwhile we took more initiative, gathering for pre-season workouts followed by no-rules basketball. Some entered the state AAU meet in Flint and attended the MSU Wrestling Camp in the summer. Reynolds continued to coach, teach, and discipline (the shoe would be out today, and should have been then). We practiced occasionally with Class A teams Lansing Eastern and Everett. For two consecutive years, Reynolds took several of us to the NCAA Wrestling Championships at Kent State and Cornell and Ithaca, NY, his hometown. He wanted us to see what it takes to be really good.

"Unfortunately, the State Journal reporter perused the wall brackets (likely before the finals) and decided the wrestler in the finals from the top bracket was the winner. So the report in the Sunday paper was that I won 2nd place. That was clarified by an article on Monday. But meanwhile I got a lot of congratulations/condolences!"

Our senior year we were up to 27 wrestlers with several brother pairs. Although we went 10-2-1 in
dual meets, with tournaments we individually wrestled in about 30 matches. Wally Reese’s brother, Al, helped coach. As mentioned above we won the league, region, and State Class B tournament, placing three in the finals, with Karslake 1st at 165 lb, McGilliard 1st at 95 lb, and Martin 2nd at 103 lb, with Reese and Willingham also qualifying.

It was a great 4-year adventure.
Epilog:

I did make an effort to stay active the past 50 years. While at MSU I won two intramural doubles paddleball championships with two different partners. Of course, I kept wrestling and we won four Big Ten Championships and the 1967 NCAA National Championship (and my picture in Sports Illustrated!). In grad school at Iowa State (Animal Genetics major) I played a lot of golf. Here at Virginia Tech (Professor of Dairy Science) I have regularly played racquetball at noon, ridden my bike to work (2 mi one way), and golfed. Now, 4 years retired, I still do those but weigh 15 lbs more than when I came here. Amazingly, Virginia Tech wrestling was 4th in last year's NCAA Championships; nothing to do with me except for one email to the coach exhorting better hand control on escapes. I couldn't resist!

50 years later, Michigan State welcomed back our 1967 National Championship team.
1965 Okemos High School Physics

Jan, Mike and grandchildren 2017
Mike McGilliard
Okemos High School class of 1965
Nominee for OHS Athletic Hall of Fame
Mike McGilliard * Class of 1965
A Spartan Journey
Michigan State's 1967 Miracle on the Mat

Dale Anderson
Foreword by Dan Gable
Introduction by Mike Chapman