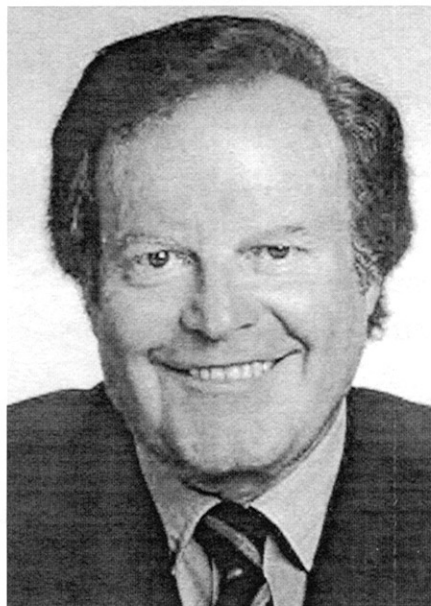


# The Missing Mentor

## Roone Arledge and Wrestling *By Stan Bishop*

When Roone Arledge died in December of 2002, newspapers with their obituaries prepared well in advanced summarized his life with emphasis on



Roone Arledge

how he first transformed sports and then news coverage on ABC. These accounts suggest an analogy to Athena, goddess of wisdom and defensive war in Greek mythology, who was born, dressed in armor and fully grown from the brow of her father, Zeus. In contrast to Athena with her divine origins, Mr.

Arledge did not just appear on the television scene fully set to put his own special stamp on ABC. Instead, he maximized the learning he acquired from his human mentors.

The *New York Times* (12/6/02), which accorded extensive coverage to Roone's death, pointed out two of these mentors. First, Roone was blessed with parents who encouraged intellectual curiosity. His father, "instilled in his son a lifelong hunger for facts and information." His mother, "pressed him to excel, which he did both academically and in every other pursuit in his school days." As an English major

at Columbia, Roone benefitted from two of the university's greatest professors, Lionel Trilling and Mark Van Doren. From them he learned the "importance of the narrative and the role of the hero." In the Olympics, for example, he made the stories of Olga Korbut and Franz Klammer commonplace knowledge in American households

But where did his intense interest in sports with the attendant sacrifices athletes make in their quest for victory come from? Although obituaries referred to growing up in Merrick, they neglected to mention that he graduated from Mepham High School where he fell under the aegis of Sprig Gardner while serving as manager of the wrestling team. This was not a trivial relationship as their association continued long after high school. At Columbia Roone continued his work as wrestling manager and even participating in intramural wrestling. He never hesitated to confer, then and after graduation, with his high school mentor, "Sprig".

The Roone Arledge/Sprig Gardner connection deserves mention for another reason. Success in wrestling just is not in the cards for every young man, especially when the competition comes from Long Island teams in the '40s and the Ivy League in the '50s. Wrestling, however, gratefully accepts support from whoever is willing to give it even though the individual may not have been a great athlete or coach. Testimony to this truth comes from none other than the National Wrestling Hall of Fame which in 1992 inducted Roone into the Hall as part of a group of "Great Americans" with wrestling in their backgrounds who have used the discipline of wrestling to launch successful careers.