

# PAUL BASS

Never Say It Can't Be Done!

The year is 1978. Jimmy Carter is in the White House, muscle cars fill high school parking lots, and bell-bottoms reigned supreme. A bushy haired kid with beads of sweat dripping from his forehead is working out in the Westhampton Beach wrestling room. In walks his coach, Ed Broderick, who asks the young man what he was doing working out this late after practice? "I'm going to win a County Championship", Senior Paul Bass replies. A moment of dead silence soon follows... "You're going to do WHAT?" Paul Bass did in fact become the 155lb Suffolk County Champion that year, and his success was just a precursor for a lifetime of dedication to the sport.

Bass attended and wrestled at Division I Bloomsburg State College in Pennsylvania. "By my junior year, I started looking at wrestling a little differently as far as strategy and preparation... I was starting to think like a coach.

After graduating Bloomsburg in 1982, Paul returned to his old stomping grounds. For two years he taught and coached at William Floyd Middle School. In 1984, Bass reconnected with a familiar face, his high school coach, Ed Broderick. Ed wanted me to help bring the program back to the success levels of the 1960's and 1970's, so when a Social Studies position opened up, I was hired." Bass started as an assistant coach with Karl Lauver in 1984 and became head coach in 1987.

With participation levels down, Bass again heard those proverbial words, "You can't do it." "People said we couldn't build a successful wrestling program in the Hamptons, that we would never win." Bass knew it would not come easy, but he was up for the challenge. "I knew to do it, I had to have a core group of kids, I think my first year we started out with forty-one and ended up with nine, but those nine helped build a foundation." The turn-around came quickly as three years later his Hurricanes would post back-to-back titles. Yet again, Bass had another opportunity to do what he does best, prove people wrong. And proved them wrong he did.

Over the course of the last thirty-two years, he has built Westhampton Beach's Wrestling Program into one which consistently competes at a high level. Bass has accumulated 250 wins and could possibly, by the end of the 2015 season, be the 8th winningest wrestling coach in Suffolk County history. He's only had one losing season in the last nineteen years and no losing seasons in the last thirteen. He has received "Coach of the Year" honors 6 times in four different decades. His program has produced over 200 All-League wrestlers, 41 All-County, 4 County Champs, 8 State Qualifiers, and 5 All-State wrestlers. Not



bad for someone who was told he could never win.

But to talk with Bass, you get the feeling the wins are not the only focus of the program. "Our main objective is to help mold and make young men, something larger than just points on a scoreboard. Wrestling teaches you about life in so many ways; it teaches you dedication, builds confidence, teaches you how to compete and gives you the tools to deal with what life is really all about, dealing with adversity, which is something

Coach Bass knows a lot about, both on and off the mat. At 30, Bass was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and told the odds were against him. "I was very confused, and almost gave up, but my wife Kim reminded me that she did not marry a quitter and helped support me through adversity, like she has done for the last thirty years." Once again the words, "you can't do it"

drove him. "Anything Paul has ever done in his life has been because people have told him he couldn't do it", remarked Kim.

For the past 20 years, Coach Bass has served on the executive board of the Suffolk County Wrestling Coaches Association as the treasurer and currently the Vice-President. He also coached kid wrestling in Westhampton for more than 20 years. However more importantly for Bass, the last three decades have been spent molding young men, centered around the sport he has loved and dedicated himself. There really is nothing else I wanted or even knew how to do besides coach wrestling," Bass says, "To see the sport help kids who get into trouble at school, or home, turn them into fine young men, that's what it's all about...especially when everyone said it couldn't be done"....

Now where have we heard that before?

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*—Kim Bass*