

Ed Reinisch: Father of Baldwin Wrestling

By B.A. Schoen



Coach Ed Reinisch

Ed Reinisch was hired by the Baldwin School district to teach physical education and coach boys' athletics beginning in the fall of 1941. There were fewer high schools on Long Island than today, and they competed in fewer sports. There were

almost no interscholastic sports for girls.

George Craig, Baldwin athletic director and head football coach, made Ed his assistant and added, "Oh yeah, you're going to start a wrestling team." When Ed protested that he didn't know how to wrestle, hadn't even seen a high school wrestling match, Craig said, "Go over to Mepham and see Sprig Gardner. He didn't wrestle either, but he seems to have figured it out." Thus was a program born and lifetime friendship forged.

The legend is that Frank "Sprig" Gardner learned wrestling out of a book. Anyone interested in becoming a wrestling coach would do well to follow that book because Coach Gardner won his first 100 matches at Mepham and Ed, using the same book, was the first team to beat him. Any good coach would correct me at this point and say neither Ed nor Sprig won any matches; young men or, rather, boys on their way to becoming men wrestled and won or lost all the matches. Common sense tells us, however, that the efforts of a coach dictate the kind of success a program has over a period of time.

Recruiting is an essential part of scholastic coaching. After a few years of coaching, Ed had 40-50 wrestlers on his teams. A large squad today, it represented between one

fourth and one third of all the boys in the high school. When Ed began coaching, only a few schools in Nassau County wrestled. Ed began taking his boys across the state to find more competition, to learn more techniques, and to give the boys a taste of the responsibilities and rewards of travel. Ed took his teams to Ossining, Ithaca, and Watertown high schools, each with its own proud traditions of wrestling. He formed friendships with coaches and got the Cornell University coach to travel to Long Island and put on a clinic for the high school coaches here. Sprig and Ed understood that coaching was and should be recognized as a profession separate from teaching, and to further that end they formed the Nassau County Wrestling Coaches' Association.

In 1971, I was a sportswriter in Tampa, Florida, covering high school wrestling. I had the great good fortune to see and be remembered by Sprig Gardner, who wintered a little south of there. That was the first time I heard how Baldwin was scheduled to be Mepham's 100th opponent, from the horse's mouth you might say. "I was very eager to get to 100 wins," Coach Gardner told me, "and I thought Ed might have the squad to beat me. I called him up and asked if we could reschedule. He agreed right away. Now Ed is a nice guy," the coach continued, "but he also realized it was a bigger accomplishment to beat a team that has won 100 matches in a row than to beat a team with 99 wins, and so we wrestled Amityville the next week and won, got written up in *Life Magazine* and all the papers, and then the next week we wrestled Baldwin."

Ed and Coach Gardner remained friends for the rest of their lives, often fishing together. When he died, Coach Gardner left his boat to Ed.

Between 1941, when he began the wrestling program at Baldwin and 1958, when he gave up the varsity coaching position, Ed had a winning record, and his wrestlers won 17 individual Long Island titles for an average

one per year for every year that Ed coached.

Ed's association with wrestling did not end in 1958 either. He became a wrestling referee as well as the Baldwin elementary wrestling director. People today don't know but in the 50's and 60's wrestling was a unit of instruction in almost all schools on Long Island, and all boys from around third grade through senior high had wrestling as part of their curriculum for several weeks. Ed made it his business to see that all the P.E. instructors in the district knew wrestling and how to teach it. He had a Saturday morning program for third through sixth graders and integrated us with the team by allowing us to stay after our practice to watch the older boys work out. We got to help with the mats and be in the gym on Saturdays when the "Golden Wave" wrestled home matches.

Ed promoted the "family" concept of a wrestling team. He looked out for "his boys," of course, as any responsible educator should, but he also urged the wrestlers to look out for each other. Winning a varsity spot was an honor to be earned but humiliating an opponent, especially a teammate was not done. Moreover, wrestlers became wrestlers for life, Baldwin wrestlers, for life. Alumni wrestlers were encouraged and looked forward to coming back to demonstrate and work out with the current team, showing the latest nuances and "secrets." At a recent meeting of the Board of Directors of *The Friends of Long Island Wrestling* about ten of Ed's "Boys" who wrestled on teams up until 1952 came to plead his case for induction into the National

Wrestling Hall of Fame. As these accomplished gentlemen stood and made their statements about Ed, they often turned to one of the more senior wrestlers and said, "When I was a boy, you were my idol!"

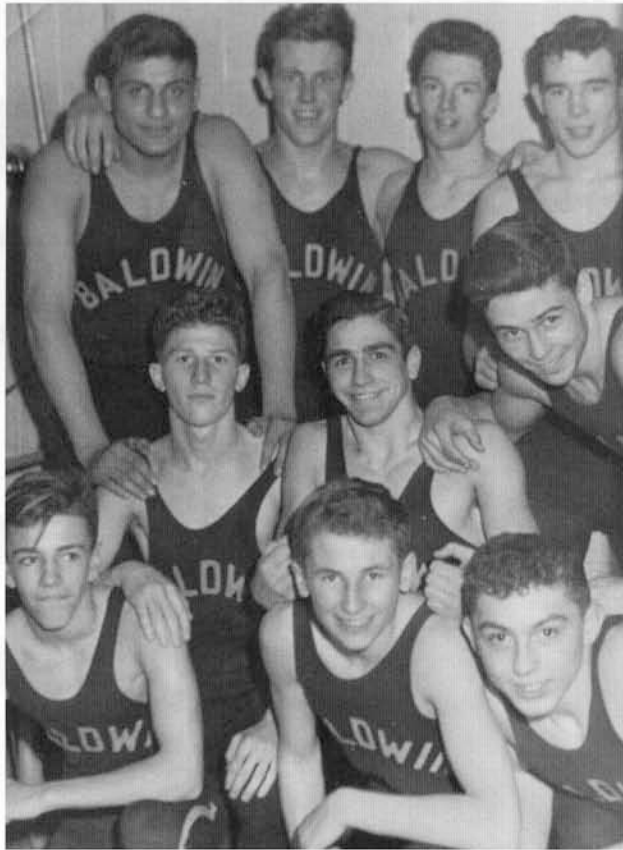
Ed left Baldwin to accept the athletic directorship at East Meadow, a district that was young and expanding. This enabled Ed to encourage wrestling by hiring the people who would help the sport develop.

Ed lived in Baldwin for the rest of his life and was well known to the wrestling fans for generations. He handed out medals to winners of Christmas and qualifying tournaments many times. When I was the junior high coach in Baldwin, he asked me to mail him a copy of our schedule and made a point of attending at least one home match a season.

Baldwin High School has recognized Ed in several notable ways. He was an early inductee into the Baldwin High School Football Hall of Fame as a coach. There is a plaque

dedicated to him in the Commons of the high school, one of only four people so honored, and every year the Baldwin Bruins Booster Club awards the Ed Reinisch Award to the outstanding senior wrestler.

When I was President of the Boosters, Donald "Jelly Bean" Berndt, a co-captain of the legendary team that defeated Mephram so many years before, drove up from New Bern, NC to present the award at the Boosters' Varsity Banquet. To me, that simple act sums up all the reasons Ed Reinisch belongs in the National Wrestling Hall of Fame for his "Lifetime Service to Wrestling." Ed didn't just serve wrestling and all it stands for. All his life, from the time he began coaching, his deeds live on through the many he coached.



Teammates from the 1950 Baldwin team. (From top Left to right) Tom Megale, Dave Tormelson, Chip Sibbers, Bob Stites, Matt Flynn, Julius Vizzi, Jay Doyle, Bob Theriault, Charley Keller and Bob Drier