



JOHN ZABATTA

John Zabatta got the wrestling bug in 1954, when as a 7th grader, he was herded into the wrestling room at Valley Stream Central HS by Hall of Fame Coach Harold Earl. Since then, wrestling has remained a big part of his life. He was on both of Central's County Championship teams of 1960 and '61. Captain of the '61 team, he was 19-0, and the 158 lb. County Champion. A well-rounded athlete, he was an All-County football player and Captain of that team, and the 3rd baseman on the 1960 County Championship baseball team!

He earned a scholarship to Penn State and there, wrestled for 3 years under Hall of Fame Coach Charlie "Doc" Speidel.

While in the Army in 1966, he was called on and coached the Fort Sam Houston Freestyle wrestling team in the All-Army meet held in El Paso, Texas in 1967.

Returning to Valley Stream, he coached for the next ten years with Hall of Fame coach Bill Linkner at Valley Stream South and together they won 10 League championships! John then moved across town to coach alongside Hall of Fame coach Nick Nannos at Valley Stream Memorial, then to VS North with Hall of Fame coach Tom Maddock, and finally, a return to South again with Linkner, where John became Head Coach with Bill's retirement.

Two years and two league championships later, John retired and in 1993 was presented with the Ted Petersen Award as Nassau County Coach of the year.

Soon after, John became active with the Friends of Long Island Wrestling as Board member and membership chairman. He worked on the Golf, phone-a-thon and other committees, while also working with Coach Tom Ryan to promote and fund-raise for his Hofstra wrestling program.

In 1997, with his son Danny turning 5, he started the Valley Stream Youth program of "Kid Wrestling" and when he, his wife Maureen, and Danny relocated to Florida, jumped right in with the local "Buffalo Wrestling Club" youth program to assist wherever he could. He is a USA Wrestling member and the local club President. Always involved in organizing and running league, qualifying, holiday, and other tournaments when here in Section 8, he could always be found working as score-keeper, timer, or busy at the Head table, and is continuing that same work in Florida!

Coach "Z" accomplished much while at three Valley Stream High Schools. His legacy will be the wrestlers who loved the sport. He got the most out of his athletes, believing in them and building confidence in those that were unsure of themselves. He made them feel that they could win and... they did!

We proudly welcome John Zabatta into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame for his Lifetime of Service to Wrestling.