

National Wrestling Hall of Fame and Museum

Florida Chapter



NEWSLETTER

Volume 6, Issue 3

Spring 2023



The President's Podium

Gary Townsend, Class of 2016

President, NWHOF Florida Chapter

As the saying goes, "There is a new kid on the block", the **Florida Wrestling Hall of Fame**. I was asked "Isn't this a conflict of interest?" Absolutely not! In fact, it complements our operational guidelines. The National Wrestling Hall of Fame Chapters, per their policies and procedures, only recognizes coaches, officials, and contributors for their Lifetime Service to the sport of wrestling. There are also chapter awards for Outstanding American and Medal of Courage. Requirements to qualify for each award are:

Lifetime Service to Wrestling

Given in recognition for a minimum of 20 years or more of dedication to the development of leadership and citizenship in the youth through the sport of wrestling.

Outstanding American

Given to former wrestlers who are highly successful in other walks of life and use the disciplines learned in wrestling in their profession.

Medal of Courage

Presented to a former wrestler who has overcome what appear to be insurmountable challenges.

Per the policy and procedures of the State Chapter organizations, we do not recognize athletes. That recognition is reserved for the National Wrestling Hall of Fame. This is the opportunity to honor our Florida Wrestlers who represented Florida to highest Standard and made our wrestling community proud.

The primary mission of the Florida Wrestling Hall of Fame is to recognize and honor Florida wrestlers for their outstanding accomplishments and their demonstration of sportsmanship, integrity, and exemplary leadership. The Inaugural class includes NCAA D1 champions, All-Americans, Pan-American champions, World and Olympic Team members, and a World Championship medalist. They are certainly the legends of Florida Wrestling. The Hall of Fame recognizing Florida's great wrestlers is long overdue.

We are two totally different organizations. The NWHOF Florida Chapter welcomes the Florida Wrestling Hall of Fame, and will provide support and leadership to ensure the success of the new Hall's future.

*Remember, when we do it, we do it with class,
for we are honoring the best of the best.*

Thank you,

Gary Townsend

The National Wrestling Hall of Fame & Museum is a private nonprofit institution whose mission is to honor the sport of wrestling by preserving its history, recognizing extraordinary individual achievements, and inspiring future generations.

**The National Wrestling Hall of Fame
Florida Chapter
Honors Weekend
for the
Class of 2023
is August 25-26, 2023.**

More information on page 8 and page 23.

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**Bob Burns. Class of 2007,
Alumni and Nominations Director for the Florida Chapter**

CLASS OF 2024 NOMINATIONS

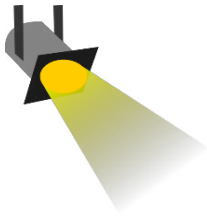
Dear Wrestling Community,

Thank you for your continued support of the Florida Chapter of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame. It is the wrestling community that is responsible for helping us find and recognize those men and women that have dedicated their lifetime to the sport of wrestling. We once again ask for your assistance to help us find deserving individuals to honor.

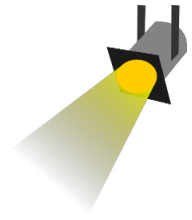
Now is the time for making a nomination for the 2024 Induction Class, as submissions are due by **August 30, 2023**. Applications can be downloaded from our website at <https://nwhof.org/state-chapters/florida>. All applications need to include one letter of nomination and at least two letters of recommendation. Completed applications are to be sent to Robert Burns, 328 S.E. 2nd Court, Deerfield Beach, Florida, 33441.

If you have any other questions, please contact me at 954- 426-6457.

Thank you in advance, and thank you for your continued support of the greatest sport in the world.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



Larry Blustein

Class of 2009

Larry and his wife Pamela have been together for 46 years and have two grown children. Here's the part that is important to know: Pamela lets him collect Beer Cans and Sports Memorabilia! What cool hobbies! Larry recently spoke with Alan Solomon (Class of 2016).

Larry has spent the last 53 years covering high school football, baseball, softball, and wrestling – and has helped place student-athletes to colleges and universities nationwide for all those sports.

Because of his schedule covering football camp and games, Larry's travels have been limited to Florida, but he does spend time on football fields and in gyms from Key West to Pensacola and everywhere in between.

Larry credits his father for introducing him to wrestling and other sports at an early age. His love for wrestling began in the 1960's - Larry and dad attended the first six state Championships – and he's been at it ever since.

Over the last 37 years, Larry's contribution to the sport of wrestling has come from serving as the Public Address Announcer at the state tournament. Prior to that he wrote stories and features on teams, coaches, and athletes.

Larry hosts two football podcasts every week as well as publishing on two websites and hosting a popular high school sports show in south Florida on WQAM Radio.

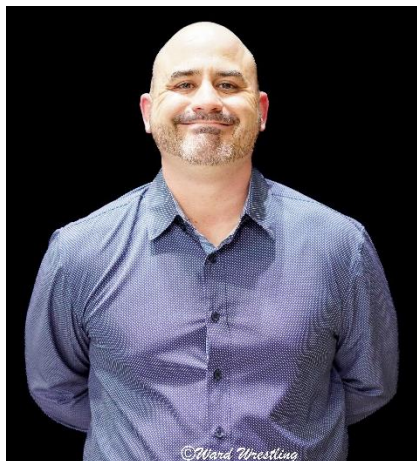
“Few people, in my opinion, have covered sports the right way, so I have made it my life's work to do it the right way,” Larry said.

“One of the things that always keeps me going is the ‘Challenge’ that the sport brings. The fact that you are trying to get better in every way, in everything you do that premise should not change.”

--Joe Patrovich, *Advice from Champions*, page 120

MEET THE CLASS OF 2023

The NWHOF Florida Chapter is proud to announce the members of the Class of 2023.



Sean Ballard



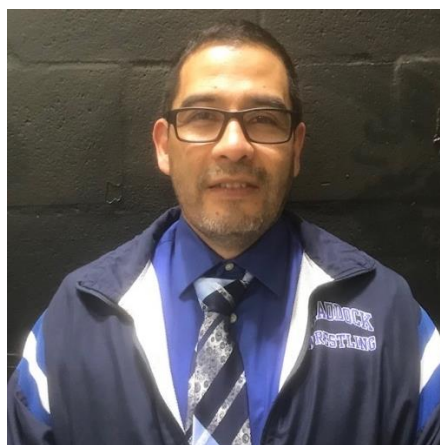
Chris Bono



Donald Knauf



Samuel Pruitt



Saul Tejada



Donald Weekley

Detailed information on the Class of 2023 can be found on the NWHOF Florida Chapter webpage (<https://nwhof.org/state-chapters/florida>) and in the Summer issue of this newsletter.



A few alumni stopped by to welcome the Inductees!



Back row: Bill Hoke - 2011, John Lawton - 2022, Bob Walker - 2003, Greg Bondurant, - 2002, David Mitchell - 2014, Mike Joyce - 2010, Bob Thomas - 2017, and Steve Sentes – 2013.

Middle row: Bob Hendrickson - 2021, Russ Cozart- 2000, Ira Fleckman - 2006 , Kevin Pedersen - 2022, Trevor Eliot (Michigan Chapter), Kris Hayward - 2016, Mike Turner - 2020, Pete Myers - 2018, Eric Hughes - 2019, Nathanael Richardson - 2020, Jane Townsend - 2015, Rick Tribit - 2008, and Gary Townsend – 2015.

Front Row: Jeff Malavsky - 2019, Mike Crowder - 2018, Inductees Sam Pruitt, Sean Ballard, Donald Weekley, Donald Knauf, and Saul Tejada, Bill Combs - 2010, Mark Prince -2022, and Bob Burns – 2007.

Outstanding American Award

Outstanding American

Given to former wrestlers who are highly successful and use the disciplines learned in wrestling in their profession.

In the twenty-plus years of the Florida Chapter, only seven Floridians have ever received this award: John Vaughan (2000), Monsignor Michael Devine (2001), Captain Stephen Archer (2002), Frank Brogan (2002), Dominic Gorie (2012), Gerald Brisco (2018) and Kevin Pedersen (2022). John Vaughan's contributions were in the Fall 2022 issue, so we move to the second name on the list.

In 1967, through the encouragement of Don and Dottie Curtis, Father Devine began what was to become a long association with wrestling in the state of Florida. Previous to his arrival in Florida, he was head wrestling coach at Summerhill High School in Sligo, Ireland, where his teams won three national titles. He was coach of the Irish National team and the World Cadet Championships in Lima, Peru in 1974. Also in 1974, now Monsignor Devine organized the first Florida International Exchange, when a Florida team visited Ireland, England, and Scotland. He served as the Director of Florida's International Exchange Program for over twenty years. He also served as a delegate for Ireland at the FILA Congress during the 1996 Olympics, and received the "Harriette Weller Lifetime Achievement Award" from the Florida Amateur Wrestling Association in 2001. Father also had the distinction of being the longest serving mat official in Florida in 2001, having just completed over 35 years.

Monsignor Devine was founding pastor of St. James Church, Port Richey, and during his time there, the congregation grew to seven thousand members. He was instrumental in building a church and school. In 1995, he founded the Florida Rainbow Company, with the objective of this organization to bring Protestant and

Catholic families from violence torn Northern Ireland to live together for two weeks in Florida - each family having a child with a life-threatening disease. The organization raised over \$60,000 and has brought eight families to Florida. For his dedication and lasting influence on wrestling, Monsignor Michael Devine is presented the National Wrestling Hall of Fame's "Outstanding American from the State of Florida" award for the Class of 2001.

Florida Chapter Hall of Fame Weekend

August 25-26, 2023

Honoring the Class of 2023

Tickets for the Friday evening Social, the Saturday morning Testimonial Breakfast, and the Saturday evening Induction Banquet must be postmarked by August 15th, or purchased online by August 24th.

<https://fl-nwhof.ticketleap.com/2023-honors-weekend/>

Friday evening **Social** - \$25.00

Saturday morning Testimonial **Breakfast** - \$35.00

Saturday evening Induction **Banquet** - \$95.00

Full page banquet program congratulatory ad - \$120.00

Half page banquet program congratulatory ad - \$75.00

John Vaughan Award 2023

Coach **Gerald Gergley**, who introduced wrestling to the University of Central Florida in 1970, will be honored with this award in August.

More information can be found on the NWHOF webpage (<https://nwhof.org/state-chapters/florida>) and in the Summer issue of this newsletter.

A FEW MORE PHOTOS FROM THE STATE TOURNAMENT



As you read in Gary Townsend's column on page 1, there's a new wrestling organization in the state, one that has a different focus than the NWHOF Florida Chapter, yet is all about showcasing wrestling, wrestlers, and coaches. Please welcome guest columnist Bob Walker, NWHOF - Florida Chapter Class of 2003 and the Chair of the FWHOF.

The Florida Wrestling Hall of Fame

by Bob Walker

The primary mission of the Florida Wrestling Hall of Fame is to recognize and honor Florida wrestlers for their outstanding accomplishments and their demonstration of sportsmanship, integrity, and exemplary leadership. Our first class includes NCAA D1 Champions, All Americans, Pan-American Champions, World and Olympic team members and a World Championship medalist. They are certainly the legends of Florida Wrestling. The Hall of Fame recognizing Florida's great wrestlers is long overdue.

The leadership of the Florida Wrestling Hall of Fame also wishes to recognize coaches that have established their legacy in the sport of wrestling in Florida but do not meet the years of service required by NWHOF to be inducted into the Florida Chapter. We recognize and wish to honor these dedicated coaches for mentoring many of Florida's wrestling athletes. In many instances they were founders of the sport of wrestling in Florida. A good deal of them worked behind the scenes to promote our great sport. The deserving recipients will be awarded the *Legacy Award*. This year's honoree is Sam McWoodson.

The first induction Banquet will be May 13th at the Osceola Heritage Park, 1875 Silver Spur Lane, Kissimmee, FL. The social is from 4:00-6:00. Dinner and Induction is 6:00-8:00. Tickets are \$75.00 and can be purchased online at <https://fwhof.ticketleap.com/>. Delta Hotels by Marriot is our host hotel. They are located at 2900 Parkway Boulevard, Kissimmee, FL 34747. Room rate is \$99.00 per night plus tax, resort and parking fees are waived. You can book online at <https://tinyurl.com/4t6a7byz>

Honorees include:

Jared Frayer – currently Wrestling Coach at Virginia Tech; High School – Countryside High School (93-97) Record 140-3, 3 Time FHSAA State Champion, USAW Junior National Champion and Most Outstanding Wrestler; College - University of Oklahoma (97-02) Big 12 Champion. 2 Time NCAA All American, NCAA Finalist; University National Champion Freestyle; Open Wrestling – 5 Time USA National Team Member, USAW National Open Champion, 2012 USA Olympic Team Freestyle 66KG

Dwight Gardner – currently IT Consultant Ohio University; High School - Miami Palmetto Senior High School (91-93) 2 Time District Champion, Regional Champion, FHSAA State Champion; College - Ohio University (93-98) Four Year Letterman, Team MVP 97&98, 1995 NCAA Qualifier, Mid-America Conference Runner-up. 1997 NCAA – 7th Place(158lbs), 1st Mid-American Conference (OW), **1998 NCAA Champion 158 lbs.**, First Ballot Selection to the Ohio Athletic Hall of Fame in 2003. Mid-American Conference Hall of Fame Class of 2017.

Rohan Gardner – currently Civil Engineer, K-Factor Inc.; High School – Miami-Palmetto Senior High (89-91) FHSAA State Champion 1991, Runner-up 1990, *Miami Herald* Wrestler of the Year 1991, 2X Regional Champion, District Champion, GMAC Champion; College – Northwestern University (91-96) NCAA Qualifier as a Freshman, SWN Freshman All-American Team, Ohio Open 3rd, 2nd, Big 10 Wrestling Championships 5th, 3rd, 3rd, 1st, 2X Northern Open Champion, Midlands 6th, 2nd, 5th, NCAA Wrestling Championships 5th, 3rd, Northwestern University Athlete of the Year 1996, Northwestern University Athletic Hall of Fame Class of 2006.

Franklin Gomez – currently Olympic Athlete; High School – Brandon High School (04-05) State Champion, Beast of the East Champion, Iron Man Champion; College - Michigan State University (05-10) NCAA Champion, 3rd, 3rd; Open – 3 Time Olympian, Centro American Games Champion 2014, Pan-American Games Champion 2011, Silver Medal World Wrestling Championships.

Glenn Goodman – currently retired; High School – Tampa Catholic High School and Chamberlain High School (76-80) Four Time FHSAA State Champion (First in Florida), Under 16 National Champion, World Team Member, World Champion; College – University of Oklahoma (80-85) Member of 2 Big 8 Team Champions and NCAA Team Runner-up. Freestyle National Place Winner; Open – Multiple Time Freestyle National Place Winner, Pan American Champion, 1993 Maccabean Champion.

Eric Grajales – currently Automotive Service Manager, Rubber City; High School - Brandon High School (05-09) Four Time FHSAA State Champion, Career Record 217-0, named Mr. Florida as the state's top prep wrestler, Named *Tampa Tribune's* 2009 Male Athlete of the Year, Named Most Outstanding Wrestler at the 2009 Dapper Dan All-Star Event; College – University of Michigan (09-14) Four Year Letterman, 3rd Place NCAA Wrestling Championships, four time Big 10 Place winner, Four Time NCAA Qualifier, Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational Champion.

Samuel Hazewinkel – currently Wrestling Coach University of Oklahoma; High School – Windsor Hills Baptist and Pensacola Christian Academy (98-02), Three-time undefeated FHSAA State Champion; College – University of Oklahoma (02-07) Three Time Big 12 Champion, NCAA Wrestling Championships; 2nd, 3rd, 3rd, 3rd Open – University Games World Champion 2007, USA Freestyle Olympic Team Member 2012, USA Greco-Roman World Team Member 2018, Two Time Pan American Games Champion, 4 Time US Open Champion.

Legacy Award - Samuel McWoodson



FLORIDA WRESTLING HALL OF FAME

FLWHOF.COM

Florida Wrestling Hall of Fame

2023 Induction Banquet

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Florida Wrestling Hall of Fame will host their Inaugural banquet at the Osceola Heritage Park Event Center on Saturday, May 13, 2023. Nine individuals will be honored:

Class of 2023

Florida Wrestling Hall of Fame Award

Given in recognition for their outstanding wrestling accomplishments

**Jared Frayer, Dwight Gardner, Rohan Gardner, Franklin Gomez,
Glen Goodman, Eric Grajales, and Sam Hazewinkel**

Legacy Award

Sam McWoodson

- For banquet tickets, please visit: <https://fwhof.ticketleap.com/>
- For Delta Hotel reservations, please visit: <https://tinyurl.com/4t6a7byz>

*For more information on this special event,
please contact Bob Walker at bobwalker10@aol.com*

“Believe, Work, Accomplish, Repeat!”

--Anibal Nieves, *Advice from Champions*, page 219

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Museum Memo

Pete Collins, Class of 2012,

Mobile Museum Director for the Florida Chapter

Green Jackets Sighted in the Community!

Eleven local members of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Florida Chapter and one from the Michigan Chapter were invited to attend the Finals of the Pinellas County Conference Championships on February 11th. Thank you, Mark Prince, Countryside Coach and Class of 2022, for the matside seats and for introducing each member!

Members attending were Harriet Weller (2000) Father Michael Devine (2001) David Frayer (2002), Walt Allison (2004), Pete Collins (2012), Charlotte Owen (2012), John Niles (2014), Jim Smoot(2019), Marc Allison (2020), John Lawton (2022), Mark Prince (2022), and Tom McDougall (Michigan 2020 now residing in Dunedin).



Please support the NWHOF Florida Chapter supporters



Thank you, Frank Pettineo, Class of 2006,
for your continued support!



WWW.SPARTANCOMBAT.COM



Website Wonder

Bob Thomas, Class of 2017, Media Services Director for the Florida Chapter

The FHSAA State Championships was the precursor to our 24th annual induction into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Florida Chapter on August 25 and 26.

Thanks to Wisconsin's Head Coach Chris Bono for taking time Wednesday to give an inspiring "Mat Talk" to many state qualifiers.

The popular 'History of Florida Wrestling' display brought much attention to the work of the Florida Chapter. Our Spin to Win wheel created a line of participants 15 deep. The "Push UP" hall of fame competition was the newest addition to our fun.

On Saturday, March 4, the Class of 2023 assembled in the Silver Spurs Arena. Fans and alumni rose to welcome Coach **Sean Ballard** of Palm Bay Magnet School and a Space Coast Sports Hall of Famer, University of Wisconsin coach **Chris Bono**, South Fork Coach **Donald Knauf**, Coach **Samuel Pruitt** of St. Petersburg High School, Braddock Senior High School Coach **Saul Tejada**, and Ft. Myers coach and official **Donald Weekley**. These men will receive the Lifetime Service to Wrestling award during Honors Weekend. Congratulations to the class who, in the not-too-distant future, will have a place of recognition in the National Wrestling Hall of Fame and Museum in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

The 2023 John Vaughn Award will be presented to Coach **Gerald Gergley**, who introduced wrestling to the University of Central Florida in 1970.

Our annual Next Level Scholarship recipients were Brielle Bibla of Matanzas High and Dominic Joyce of North Port High, both FHSAA State runner-ups. (See pages 18-21)

The NWHOF Florida Chapter wrapped it up with the presentation of 56 NWHOF Certificates, one for each champion in each weight class. We are proud participants in the ever-increasing achievements of Florida High School Wrestling.

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Wrestler Takedown

Jeff Malavsky, Class of 2019,

Director of Development for the Florida Chapter

Next Level Scholarships

2023

The NWHOF Florid Chapter is proud to announce Dominic Joyce and Brielle Bibla are the recipients of this year's Next Level Scholarships. Dominic is a Senior at North Port High School with a 4.0 GPA. He will continue his academic and wrestling careers at Chardon State College in Nebraska. Brielle is graduating from Mantanzas High School with a 3.5 GPA and will be continuing her academic and wrestling careers at Presbyterian College in South Carolina. Below are this year's winners' essays.

First, Dominic Joyce:

Wrestling has had a huge impact on my life. At the young age of 8, I came home one day with a wrestling information flyer. I was instantly addicted; I loved the hard practices and always having something to improve on. Wrestling pushed me to be the best version of myself, not just working hard in practice and staying after to do more reps and extra conditioning, but to improve on the little things like my diet, how much water I drink, my manners in public. It has taught me to respect others and to show compassion when someone is struggling. Through wrestling I learned what working hard was. In the classroom I learned that if I wanted a good grade on a test or quiz I would have to push myself to study more and try harder in class to get what I wanted. These lessons will help me for my whole life.

The many habits and skills that I have learned in my high school wrestling, will help me

move on to college. One of my habits I learned from wrestling is focusing on the things I can control. For example, in college I will focus on my effort I put into every class and make sure I'm taking good notes and studying. Time management is also another great skill that I have learned; in college, it will help me to get my work completed on time and get to my classes. Asking for help is also very important and I will get help/ tutoring when I need it. A habit that I have developed from wrestling is you can always do one more of something. Whether its from doing one more push-up to one more sprint in practice, or in the classroom and writing one more page of notes after class you can always do more.

I plan to give back to the wrestling community by coaching a youth or high school team or coaching at an MMA gym. Since my freshman year I have been an assistant youth coach for the wrestling team and love every second of it. An opportunity that I want to explore would be to create online content for wrestling and fitness to help younger kids to reach their goals in wrestling and in me. My hopes are to grow the sport and give back but also learn more knowledge of wrestling. Wrestling has been an integral part of my life and has given me many life lessons. I have had many great coaches through the years. Sharing my life lessons and coaching others is a goal I plan to achieve as I grow older.



Now, Brielle Bibla:

My high school wrestling career has been an amazing journey, especially with the sanctioning of girls wrestling in Florida. It has made me realize that, if I can do what it takes in this sport, that I can do absolutely anything I put my mind to. Between the discipline it takes, the weight cuts, the hard work in the

classroom and countless hours in the wrestling room, it has undeniably shaped me as an athlete for the better.

Academically, wrestling has pushed me to realize that if I can go through three hours of hard-core practice and giving my all, I can certainly sit down, focus on what's in front of me and come out successful. Personally, wrestling has taught me to push through everything I do, to never give up, to be a leader, to grow the sport, that I can transform into the best version of myself.

One thing my high school wrestling career will carry with me to college is that you must do what you love and have fun with it. I laugh and smile when I practice because I enjoy what I do. I always look for the positive in everything. Running for miles or drilling for hours isn't a walk in the park, but putting a smile on your face and laughing through it to have a good time makes it a lot easier and worthwhile. Wrestling has taught me to be a team player, to be strong physically and mentally, and most of all to have the heart to do what it takes to achieve greatness in my life.

I will forever give back and grow the sport that has molded me into being successful. I have been accepted into the college of my choice to study medicine and wrestle at the next level. After that, I would love nothing more than to coach kids and see them flourish in wrestling as I know the gifts this amazing sport will provide. I want no girl to feel inferior or afraid because it's just as much of their mat as it is the boys. I want to see them overcome adversity and be confident in their intentions. I truly enjoy helping with younger girls in the wrestling community by working with them one on one to rejoice in their successes, since their successes are just as important as mine. I would love to see new opportunities blossom like all colleges that offer women's wrestling, or a college in Florida that offers a women's program or seeing more female wrestling advocates like me to put in all that this wonderful sport has given me.



QUALIFIED CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM IRAS

RETIREMENT PLANS

Certain IRA holders have the opportunity to make tax-free distributions from their IRAs to qualified charitable organizations. For tax-free eligibility, the qualified charitable distribution (QCD) must be sent directly from the IRA payable to the receiving qualified 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Eligibility and Donation Limit

IRA holders must be at least 70½ years of age before the distribution. In addition, beneficiaries of inherited IRAs who meet the age requirement can also take advantage of QCDs.

For those who qualify, the maximum IRA charitable distribution is limited to \$100,000 per tax year. Any distribution in excess of this limit will not qualify for the tax exclusion benefit and will be treated as ordinary income. The provision applies for Traditional, Roth, and inherited IRAs, but does not typically apply to distributions from “active” SEP or SIMPLE IRAs.

Benefits of a QCD

If a taxpayer makes the donation as prescribed by the IRS, then the distribution will be excluded from gross income and counts toward:

- The taxpayer’s \$100,000 exclusion limitation for the year the distribution occurs and
- The taxpayer’s required minimum distribution (RMD) for the current year

With the increase in the standard deduction for 2018 and future tax years to \$26,600 for married filing jointly age 65 or older and \$13,600 for single filers age 65 or older, more Americans will be using the standard deduction rather than itemizing deductions on their tax returns. QCDs are excluded from taxable income, but do not allow for an itemized deduction. If more individuals age 72 or older use the standard deduction, the QCD is a great way to keep taxable income lower when satisfying an RMD and still get the full benefit of the standard deduction. By using the standard deduction, a taxpayer will receive no benefit for their charitable contribution unless it is processed as a QCD from an IRA. In addition, by not including a charitable donation from an IRA as ordinary income, an individual’s adjusted gross income is not increased, which could affect the ability to:

- Qualify for Roth IRA contributions
- Avoid other potential tax ramifications, such as:
 1. The 3.8% health care surcharge. (Even though distributions from IRAs are exempt from the 3.8% health care surcharge, taxable distributions from IRAs could push income over the threshold amount, causing other investment income to be subject to the surtax.)
 2. Paying more for Medicare Premiums.
 3. Taxation on Social Security Benefits.

QCD Tax Reporting

Typically, the custodian of an IRA will report a QCD as a normal distribution on the 1099R tax form, while QCDs from inherited IRAs are reported as death distributions. This gives the IRS no notification that an IRA holder intended to make a tax-free distribution from the IRA to a charity. It is the responsibility of the IRA holder or his or her tax preparer to properly report the QCD on a 1040 tax return. It is also strongly suggested that the IRA holder obtains a receipt from the charitable organization.

Is a QCD the right strategy for you?

Please seek the aid of a competent tax advisor or tax attorney for guidance.



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32018-01 Stifel does not provide tax advice. You should consult with your professional tax advisor regarding your particular situation.



Memories of Great Matches Involving Florida Wrestlers

Ira Fleckman, Class of 2006, Contributing Writer

Angel Soto, North Miami VS Brett Gustafson, Brandon

Angel Soto was one tough wrestler. His coach, Joe Giccobee was one tough coach, too.

I had refereed Angel Soto's matches and seen him wrestle many times. He wrestled in the Kids program but it was as a high school wrestler that he dominated opponents and established himself as one of Florida's best wrestlers. Even as a Kid Angel appeared to have more muscles than he could comfortably fit into his singlet. I didn't know Angel Soto's parents but I suspect that his home life wasn't too easy or traditional. He wrestled with more than just a desire to win the match; he wrestled like he had something to prove. I am not certain what he wanted to prove but very few opponents left the mat not convinced that they were lucky to survive with all their body parts still attached.

While preparing for the state tournament, I was invited to bring my Norland HS 112 and 220 pound wrestlers and practice at North Miami. Forgetting my own safety, I actually wrestled with Angel. I believe he took it easy on me. I did wait until the end of practice so maybe he was tired, too. In any case I was convinced that he would be a Florida state champion.

Brett Gustafson was a year younger than my son, Solomon, and usually in a lighter weight class. Brett and Solomon may have wrestled each other as kids but I don't recall. Brett was not like his brother, Todd; Brett was exceptionally good looking, even as an adolescent. He had a laidback easygoing approach to life and made, even wrestling, seem easy. Todd was hard-nosed and his matches with Mark Surette were as close to brawling as the referees would tolerate. Brett was tall and lanky and certainly didn't look like he had ever lifted anything too heavy.

Brett and Angel were paired off to wrestle each other at the State Championship Tournament. Angel started his warm ups under the stands about the time wrestling began. Angel and Brett were around 140 or 145 and this seemed too early to begin to warm up. Some of the partisan Brandon fans were not too happy with my having ranked Angel above Brett in the polls but I didn't feel that there was much else I could do. The crowd seemed to know that something was going to happen in this match. To be honest, I really thought that Brett might surprise Angel by scoring and not getting injured. After the handshake, I turned to say hello to someone and the crowd roared. I turned to see Angel Soto on top of Brett Gustafson. Without any hesitation Angel applied a cradle and Brett was folded into a very tight package. Angel had Brett on his back and the referee was as surprised as anyone in the gymnasium.

Those who were partial to Angel were yelling for the pin to be called, while those partial to Brett held their breath. From my seat in the stands, I couldn't tell if Brett was pinned or not but it seemed that it wouldn't be too long until the bout would be over. The referee got into position and somehow Brett fought off being pinned. He was on his back for a very long time and I can't imagine that his position was too comfortable.

I can't remember the sequence nor the order or scoring but Brett started to score points. Little by little the match got closer and closer, and Brett was on a roll. The Brandon fans got

louder and louder and Brett Gustafson just kept on scoring points. I can't recall how the bout ended but I remember that the winner was Brett Gustafson. His victory was punctuated with the advisory from a Brandon fan for me to retire from ranking wrestlers. (I have based my ranking on returning points ever since.)

Brett joined the 1987 Florida National team where he earned All American honors at the National Juniors, placing 3rd in Greco-Roman. Brett went on to wrestle at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga where he earned All American status. I have seen him since at the state HS tournament and he seems to have done well in other areas of his life, too.

Angel Soto still lives in the Miami area and I believe he is helping out with one of the Kids wrestling programs. Angel, too, seems to adjust well to adult life and is doing well.

“Wrestling touches the individual in all facets of responsibility to self through dedication to become the best individual through hard work, physical development, competitiveness and self-drive to become the best person possible.”

-James Cunningham, *Advice from Champions*, page 220

Florida Chapter Hall of Fame Weekend

August 25-26, 2023

Honoring the Class of 2023

Tickets for the Friday evening Social, the Saturday morning Testimonial Breakfast, and the Saturday evening Induction Banquet must be postmarked by August 15th, or purchased online by August 24th.

<https://fl-nwhof.ticketleap.com/2022-honors-weekend/>

Please support the NWHOF Florida Chapter supporters



(866) 281-5199



The NWHOF Florida Chapter
wishes to express our
Deep Appreciation
and
Gratitude
to
Bill and Melanie Combs
for their
Generosity
and
Continuous Support
of this association.

About the Florida Chapter

The Florida Chapter for the National Wrestling Hall of Fame
was established in 2000.

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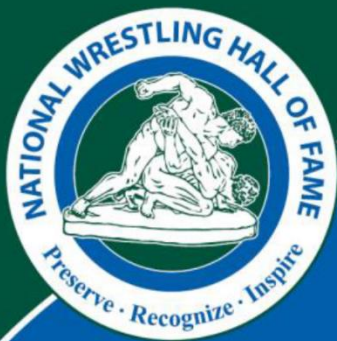
TBA, Girls

WEBSITE: <http://nwhof.org/statechapters/florida>

ON FACEBOOK:

www.facebook.com/NationalWrestlingHallofFameFloridaChapter/

The mission of the Florida Chapter of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame is to pay tribute to those coaches, officials, and contributors who represent the best qualities of what the sport of wrestling has to offer and who share those characteristics with young people day in and day out.



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Stillwater, Oklahoma



**State Chapter
Induction Banquets**



Waterloo, Iowa

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