

It has always been tough

By Shane Jacobs



Coach Ramunno

When I first started wrestling in 1976, the Steamboat Springs Sailors were one of the premier wrestling powers in Colorado. They had been for as long as I can remember and still are one of the top teams in the state today. The Sailors have run up an amazing amount of championships; 18 league, 18 district, 6 state and 6 state runners-up.

The same man has coached and led this team since 1957. He cranks champions out of the Big Red Machine year after year. He not only teaches us how to wrestle but he also teaches us responsibility which helps with our everyday lives. Last year with the help of Steve Cochran, Pat Keena, and Kirk Williams, (fellow wrestlers), I started my story about Coach Carl

Ramunno. I found him in the coach's office and we began discussing Coach Ramunno's life and work.

He was born in Trinidad, Colorado on October 25, 1931. At this time his parents, Sam and Theresa Ramunno, owned and operated a farm. Sam had previously been a miner until he broke his leg in a mining accident. When Carl was 18 months old, his family moved to Arvada, Colorado and went into a dairy farming enterprise which they operated for 19 years.

"The depression was in 1931, and that was the year I was born. I remember when I was growing up the times were still pretty hard. My dad had to work for 10 cents an hour, we were pretty poor on the farm but never did go on relief. Dad shoveled feldspar rock, that was really hard work for 10 cents an hour. He could work harder than three men, he could shovel 40 ore cars of coal a day."

Carl enjoyed country life in Arvada, hunting and fishing along with farming. "We would go fishing in the lakes for bluegill and catfish. Every year we would take a trip into the mountains on a fishing expedition with the Future Farmers of America for a week during high school. We also hunted pheasant, rabbits and quail. I went elk hunting for the first time when I was in high school. I don't know how many I've shot, quite a few. Every year we'd usually get one."

When Carl started wrestling it was a new sport to him. It was at Arvada High School that he learned the sport of wrestling. During Coach Ramunno's freshman year he wrestled in the 120 lb. class; went up to 127 lbs. in his sophomore year, and in his junior year, wrestled in the 145 weight class. Carl had a good record while wrestling at Arvada High School.



"I was a district champion my senior year in high school"



Carl on the Royal Gorge Bridge

"I was district champion my senior year, I was first in the conference at 154 lbs., but I didn't place in state in 1950. In my junior year I was third in the conference. Our team won the conference championship in 1950, it was the first year we won. I also liked football but I wasn't very coordinated for basketball. I wasn't very tall but I was a fairly good athlete, so this friend of mine and I decided we'd try out for wrestling. We went out our freshman year to see how it was because we didn't have wrestling in junior high. We both made the first team. The first time I saw a wrestling match was in high school and I became very interested, I can still remember it to this day."

Carl's interests were varied. "I worked, played football, wrestled and ran track in high school, I also kept my '39 Ford in good shape. First I had a Model A and then I traded it and got the Ford. We always kept our cars in really good shape. We had dual smitties, sun visors with skirts and things like that on our cars to make them look good. Animals were another one of my interests. I raised some hogs and rabbits and some of my friends had cows for FFA projects. We all had jobs and kept pretty busy. At night we'd go to Peterson's Luncheon and play pool or sometimes we'd go to the show. We always had fun and it was always good clean fun."

After graduating from high school it was just a few months before Carl was drafted into the Army. Following basic training, he was sent to Japan where he became an aide. From there it was off to Korea and the front lines for nine

months. Carl told us his basic training was a lot of fun. "I had infantry basic, then I went into combat engineers basic training, and then overseas as a combat engineer. When I got to Japan they sent me to a medical aide school as an aide man. The Korean war was supposed to be a police action, but it was a real war. I was an aide in the Artillery. We had firing missions every night where we would have to push the North Koreans back. They kept coming over the hill and we had to keep them back, so we just kept blasting. I was a Sergeant in charge of the Aide Station at headquarters company of the Third Infantry Division Artillery. It was regular routine Army life."



Sergeant Ramunno washing his clothes

Carl returned to civilian life and began working for the Union Pacific Railroad. "I worked for the railroad for six months, as a machinist helper and worker in the round house. That's when they started tearing up the old steam engines, they cut them up for scrap metal. That was the end of the old iron horses."

When Carl was in Arvada High School he met a girl named Marilyn Johnson. Their friendship developed into a deeper relationship and on August 14, 1953, they were married. Carl and Marilyn's dream had come true. When I asked what dating was like, Carl began to tell me what good times were all about back in the '50's. "We would go ice skating and bowling. Marilyn lived by a big lake where we could swim in the sum-

mer and skate in the winter. We also went to the show and on picnics. We were married at Marilyn's parents' house. It was a garden wedding where they lived on the end of Garrison Street in Arvada."

One month later it was off to the campus of Colorado State College, where after three years of intensive study, Carl had a Bachelor of Arts degree. He majored in industrial arts and received a minor in physical education. The G.I. Bill helped Carl's education and made it possible to condense a four-year course into three. It also helped reduce the financial pressures of college. "I think a lot of men went into the army just so they could get the G.I. Bill. I went to school and had a part-time job working at a filling station. At the college I wrestled and still made more money than I made when I first started teaching school."

While Carl wrestled for the C.S.C. team he was in the 157 lb. class and the team was again on top. "We were Rocky Mountain conference champions for the 22nd and 23rd straight year. My college wrestling coach never wrestled but was an All-American football player at Iowa. His name was John Hancock, he produced champion after champion every year. Most of the guys who are coaching and producing champions have graduated from Greeley."

In June of 1956 Carl Ramunno graduated from C.S.C. Upon graduation Carl turned down several good teaching jobs looking for the right job to fit his interests. It came when Mr. George Sauer, Superintendent for Steamboat Springs schools, heard of Carl through the C.S.C. placement office. Mr. Sauer had an opening for an industrial arts teacher, wrestling coach and assistant football coach. This was exactly what Carl was looking for. The fact that Steamboat Springs was located in the heart of good hunting and fishing country, to say nothing of winter sports, added to the bonus for this farmboy from eastern Colorado. The Ramunnos had only seen Steamboat once.

"It was a great little town then," Carl told us, "everyone knew each other and there weren't a lot of people just moving in trying to make a fast buck. People just took time out to live, it was great. I imagine there were about 2,000 people then. The ski area and the coal mining are what have caused the changes. The coal plants brought in a few people but it's the ski industry that has brought the growth to Steamboat. It's always been a tourist town and the tourists used to come in the summer more than in the winter. Now more people come here to ski than they have all year. Marilyn and I had come through here on our honeymoon, on the way back from Yellowstone and liked it. I like the mountains and I like to hunt and fish. I was also happy because I was looking for a place in the mountains where I could coach wrestling, football and teach industrial arts. It was perfect, exactly

what I had hoped for. I started teaching industrial arts, I had the woodshop, the metal shop, mechanical drawing and I taught drivers ed for the first year. I dropped the drivers ed and I had woodshop, drafting, crafts and metal shop.”



Mr. Ramunno's first year in Steamboat as a Drivers' Education teacher.

Carl wasn't the first coach to teach wrestling to Steamboat's youths. "They had already started wrestling. Engersaw had it for a couple of years then Rusk took it for two years. It was just getting off the ground when I came in. Harold Rusk was a real good guy, so when I came the kids thought this was the only place in the world where they had wrestling. Most of the kids that I coached had never been out of the town. Some of them went to Denver for their first



"I remember them all."

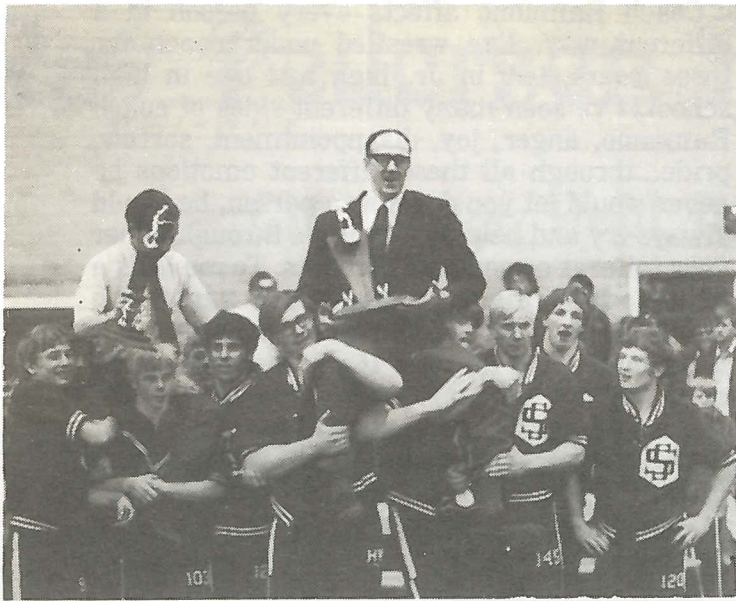
trip when we went to State. They had never been out of the valley. I had to prove to them I could coach. I had a lot of people say I didn't even look like a wrestler. I'd wrestled in high school, college and in the Army for a long time. They didn't think I was a wrestler because I didn't have big cauliflower ears and I didn't look the part, I had to prove it. The competition of the first few years was tough, it has always been tough. A lot of wrestlers that I have now, I coached their fathers. At that time I could have beat the whole bunch of them at once, I couldn't do that now, that was 20 years ago.

"We started winning and everyone was gunning for us, that made it tough. Colorado has one of the best wrestling programs in the country. We have three state tournaments, A, AA, and AAA, they are first class tournaments. Colorado also has freestyle wrestling during the summer. I would say Colorado is a power in wrestling. Meeker is running through a good bunch of kids but we've got a good bunch too and we'll be right in there with them. We wrestle the same type of



Ramunno and his daughter with his 1958 State Championship trophy.

style. They used to go to one or two tournaments, now they are going to the same tournaments we are. We've had great matches, like the times that we beat Montrose AAA state champions, or Grand Junction AAA champions, and Meeker matches, where Steamboat and Meeker would go at it, 1st and 2nd in AA state. We also defeated Vernal, Utah when they were the state champs. I remember them all. We take each match one at a time. They're all the same, they're all tough. I just hate to get beat by schools like Craig. There have only been a few schools that have beaten us."



“Every sport has to have rules.”

I asked Coach Ramunno what it takes to be a good coach. “Being a wrestling coach takes a lot of work and a lot of time. You just can’t go down, go through the motions and go home, you won’t get it done that way. That’s what a lot of young coaches do, they just put in the time and go home. They beat the kids out of the locker room. I’ve been here 23 years and I’ve always been the last one out of the locker room. If you don’t work at something you’re never going to be any good. People wanting to coach need to know the basic moves, they need to know how a kid feels out there on the mat. They should have some experience in wrestling so they know what a kid is going through when he has to lose weight, when he loses and when he wins. They should have experience in putting on tournaments and know how to handle different types of individuals because wrestling is an individual’s sport. To get to the top you need good discipline first; then you have to dedicate your life to it and work at it. You can’t just get a title and start coaching. Some guys are successful wrestlers and they are the worst coaches that ever hit the field. They expect too much from a kid right off the bat. Just like some parents expect their kids to be top-notch athletes just because they were, and the kid doesn’t want to play any sport at all. I’ve seen it happen many times. The hardest parts of my job come when I have to kick a kid off the team or I have a try-out where a kid was really good but somebody else beat him out, maybe because he was physically better. I hate to see that happen but it does. In competitive athletics you have to go with the best individual.

“Every sport has to have rules and I have training rules that have to be followed by everyone on the team. If people start running around with the wrong crowd and smoking or drinking, they’re off. Kids sometimes lose respect for their parents, coaches, school and

teammates, their attitudes become bad and I just have to get rid of them. I think training rules are real important, especially if the coach enforces them. If he doesn’t and lets the rules slide for one person, it’s not fair to the others and hurts the program. It’s hard for high school kids in training because of the pros advertising things like chewing tobacco. It makes it hard for a high school coach to tell them it’s wrong. The kids say, ‘Walt Garrison chews tobacco, why shouldn’t I?’ It’s hard to get across to the kids that tobacco is harmful. Another problem is that kids see their parents drinking, so they don’t think it’s wrong. The parents have probably never been athletic so they don’t know it’s harmful.

“I had a kid once that I knew was a smoker, I wanted to try and help him. I worked him so hard that he couldn’t even take his socks off in the locker room he was so tired. I didn’t care if he quit or not, I had a state champion right behind him that I could put in. If he wanted to quit he could have at any time and he knew it. I made him realize the importance of being in shape. He became a state champion hands down. In fact he was in such good shape that he helped the guy he beat up off the mat. The important thing was that he had to do it for himself. I didn’t care one way or the other, either do it or check in the uniform, that’s what I told him. He changed and was good and he appreciated it and told me so after the season was over. It’s these kinds of things that make coaching worthwhile. Winning is very satisfying, but not as much as seeing a kid become successful and know that he’s done a good job. The saddest thing is to see a kid that’s not very good at whatever he’s trying to do. Being successful means a lot to a person’s life. Kids can gain this feeling of accomplishment through athletics.”



Coach Ramunno and Shane Jacobs

discuss the season.

1957

Individual Standings:
2nd - C. Sandelin
3rd - F. Guire

State Records

1958

TEAM STANDING: 1ST PLACE AT STATE

Individual Standings:

1st - T. Sandelin, T. Dorr, F. Guire
2nd - O. Bedell
4th - P. Phelps

1959

TEAM STANDING: 1ST PLACE AT STATE

Individual Standings:

1st - S. Ross, T. Sandelin, T. Dorr, F. Guire
2nd - P. Phelps
3rd - J. Oldfield, O. Bedell
4th - G. Whitmer

1960

TEAM STANDING: 2ND PLACE AT STATE

Individual Standings:

1st - J. Oldfield
3rd - C. Appel, D. Gardner, D. Phelps, D. Bedell
4th - B. Anderson

1961

TEAM STANDING: 2ND PLACE AT STATE

Individual Standings:

1st - T. Beale, D. Phelps
2nd - D. Gardner, G. Fisher

1962

TEAM STANDING: 1ST PLACE AT STATE

Individual Standings:

1st - D. Gardner, P. Powell, C. Appel, B. Werner
3rd - B. Anderson

1963

TEAM STANDING: 1ST PLACE AT STATE

Individual Standings:

1st - R. DeSantis, B. Anderson
2nd - T. Oldfield
3rd - J. Holscher
4th - B. Gardner

1964

TEAM STANDING: 2ND PLACE AT STATE

Individual Standings:

1st - B. Gardner
2nd - D. Werner

1965

TEAM STANDING: 2ND PLACE AT STATE

Individual Standings:

1st - J. Selbe
2nd - B. Dorr
3rd - T. Lockhart, W. Williams, W. Iacovetto

1966

TEAM STANDING: 2ND PLACE AT STATE

Individual Standings:

3rd - D. Lockhart, B. Dorr, M. Dorr
4th - R. Allen

Coach Ramunno affects every person in a different way. I've wrestled under coach for three years, two in Jr. high and one in high school. I've seen many different sides of coach Ramunno, anger, joy, disappointment, sorrow, pride...through all these different emotions he never would let you down as a person, he would always try and help you improve through either your failures or accomplishments. To me he is a kind of a father figure, he makes you want to win for yourself, your school, your parents, your team mates and for him. If you lose though, he picks you up and helps you see that it's not the end of the world, he helps you learn from your mistakes to be better next time. He motivates you to win, and when you do, you have pride, and that makes you successful.

They're all tough



1967

TEAM STANDING: 1ST PLACE AT STATE

Individual Standings:

1st - M. Dorr
2nd - L. Appel, E. Duncan
3rd - R. Jiminez
4th - D. Lockhart

1968

TEAM STANDING: 1ST PLACE AT STATE

Individual Standings:

1st - R. Wright, E. Duncan
2nd - K. Monger, M. Dorr

1969

TEAM STANDING: 2ND PLACE AT STATE

Individual Standings:

1st - K. Monger
2nd - F. Baird

1970

Individual Standings:

2nd - B. Muhme, C. Higbee
4th - W. Vilapando

1971

Individual Standings:

1st - J. Muhme, W. Vilapando
3rd - T. Gilroy

1972

Individual Standings:

1st - B. Muhme
2nd - J. Muhme

1973

Individual Standings:

3rd - D. Kuntz
4th - D. Appel, L. Mack

1974

Individual Standings:

3rd - G. Waggoner, S. May
4th - R. Spencer

1975

Individual Standings:

3rd - D. Gourley

1976

Individual Standings:

3rd - C. Groblebe
4th - T. Lee
5th - D. Giffleson, R. Schirr

1977

Individual Standings:

2nd - T. Arroyo, C. Groblebe
5th - J. Barnhill

1978

Individual Standings:

5th - T. Ramunno