

BECKER CONNECTION BRINGS WRESTLING SUCCESS TO RANGERS

By Steve Kratochvil

The Becker family legacy begins in Hartford, Wis., moves a little over an hour southeast to the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, and culminates on a national stage. Brothers Brad, Kyle and Craig Becker, all wrestled in the 2005-06 NCAA Division II national championships, becoming the only brother trio in history to wrestle at the same prestigious event.

The Becker brothers have won countless awards and are part of a wrestling pipeline that originated with their father, Scott, and his nephew Kelly – who donned a UW-Parkside singlet from 1990-93.

“I was born and raised on a farm and my dad basically said there is no time for wrestling when you are on a farm,” recalled Scott. “My physical education teacher Joe McDaniels is the one who contacted my dad and said that I could be a heck of a wrestler.”

McDaniels convinced Scott’s father to let his son go out for wrestling. It did not look like a good decision at first, as Scott posted a 4-14 record in his freshman season at Hartford Union High School. The following season, he logged a 14-10 mark and the rumble was about to become an earthquake. Scott turned in a 25-2 record

as a junior and he ended his career with a 29-4 mark as a senior, finishing fourth at the Wisconsin state wrestling championships. The love for the sport had begun.

ENTER SCOTT’S NEPHEW KELLY

“I was doing carpentry work out of high school and wasn’t even thinking about going to college,” said Kelly. “One day my boss said I didn’t look happy and I drove down to Parkside that day.”

Why UW-Parkside? Well, Dan and Dale Hall, along with Mark Dubey, not



BRAD, CRAIG, NICK, AND KYLE, THE BECKER BROTHERS (LEFT TO RIGHT), ARE WRESTLERS FROM HARTFORD UNION HIGH SCHOOL. BRAD, CRAIG AND KYLE HAVE HAD SUCCESSFUL WRESTLING CAREERS AT UW-PARKSIDE. (PHOTO BY BENNY SIEU, COURTESY OF THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL)

coincidentally from Hartford, were wrestling Rangers.

“They were good wrestlers and I figured if they went there, it can’t be a bad place for me to go,” said Kelly. “My uncle Scott had really got me into wrestling long before that.”

Jim Koch, who has been the wrestling coach at UW-Parkside for 41 years, recalled Kelly was on his recruiting radar.

“We had been successful in getting wrestlers out of Hartford and Kelly was a good fit,” said Koch. “He was familiar with our school and came to wrestle for us.”

Kelly had a positive experience at UW-Parkside. Plus, he had three cousins down the road who, even at an early age, were hot wrestling commodities. He made sure Koch knew how good they were.

And so the caravan down I-94 from Hartford to UW-Parkside began. Brad graduated from Hartford Union in 2002, Kyle in 2003 and Craig in 2005.

“Kelly was a big influence on me coming to Parkside,” said Brad. “When I visited campus, I had a long conversation with coach Koch, who knew what I wanted academically. I made the decision to come and hoped my brothers would follow in my footsteps.”

NEXT CAME KYLE, A YEAR LATER

“I debated whether to go to college or not,” admitted Kyle. “I talked to Brad and coach Koch and I decided to go to Parkside and give it a try.”

Finally, there was Craig, who was being recruited by other schools. There was some doubt as to whether a fourth Becker would become a Ranger.

“At first, when Parkside was recruiting me, I really wasn’t too interested,” Craig admitted. “I wanted to create my own path in life and not just come to Parkside because my brothers did. Wherever I went, I wanted to be certain they could develop me into a national champ, and I was certain Parkside could.”

HE WAS RIGHT

With three Beckers in the wrestling room, good things were bound to happen... make that great things! All three went on to earn All-American honors. Brad was a

three-time Academic All-American who earned a coveted NCAA post-graduate scholarship. He became the 13th national champion in UW-Parkside history. Craig was UW-Parkside’s 14th national champion, getting his arm raised at last year’s national finals.

“You couldn’t ask for a more supportive family,” said Koch of the Beckers. “My God, their work ethic and loyalty is just great. They were all good students and solid wrestlers; perfect recruits.”

Koch tells of a story exemplifying the Becker family work ethic.

“I asked them to clean the wrestling room one day,” he said, “and Brad, Kyle and Craig took everything out. They told me ‘this is what dad told us when it was time to clean out the garage; take everything out.’ That’s the way that family goes about everything. Nothing is done halfway.”

You would think in a competitive individual sport like wrestling, the brothers would be highly competitive with each other. Not so with the Beckers. Kyle explains: “We’re each other’s best friends. We pushed each other, but we never asked who is better, nor did we care.”

The UW-Parkside experience has solidified a family bond that was already tight. All four Beckers said the university’s close proximity to Hartford was crucial in their becoming Rangers. It was important to all to have family time back on the homestead.

“Wrestling alongside my older brothers, who I looked up to all my life, was unforgettable,” said Craig. “I am extremely glad I chose Parkside. I couldn’t imagine it being as life-changing anywhere else.”

Kelly is a sales manager for Farmer’s Implement. Brad and Kyle parlayed their criminal justice degrees into careers with the Waukesha Police Department, where both are officers. Craig, one season removed from the mat as a competitor, is helping Koch as an assistant coach, while he finishes up his communication major.

This may not, however, be the end of the story. Brother Nick will graduate from Hartford Union in 2012 and is one of the better prospects in Wisconsin. Nick finished fifth at the 2011 WIAA state high school wrestling championships earlier this year. And, yes, Koch is well aware of him.



Our Family Tree is Growing

The UW-Parkside Family Tree continues to branch out creating deeply rooted alumni family legacies. Are you an alumnus with sons, daughters, mother, father, brothers or sisters who are also alumni or who now attend UW-Parkside? We want to know. If you have a family legacy (at least two family members at UW-Parkside), be sure to let us know – just email the details to university.advancement@uwp.edu.