

# 2009 MAWA Hall of Fame Inductees

By Bob McPhee \* Wednesday, April 22, 2009  
On behalf of the MAWA Board of Directors \* Page 1 of 4

The MAWA Hall OF Fame increases each year as deserving individuals are recognizes for accomplishments and contributions to the worlds oldest sport. A foursome will be officially inducted at a MAWA banquet this summer. They include former coaches Bob Walker, Hal Watson and Mark Lewia and Sanford wrestler Ryan Kalman.

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## Hal Watson

It requires quite an event to revoke a reaction from Hal Watson, however, even the mild-mannered man was rendered speechless upon being informed that the former Dirigo coach is a member of the 2009 Maine Amateur Wrestling Hall Of Fame.

The honor is certainly humbling to Watson who started the Cougar wrestling program over three decades ago with little support or guarantees. Still, Watson refused to be deterred and was determined to see his dream become a reality.

Watson will be officially inducted at a MAWA banquet this summer. He will be joined by former coaches Bob Walker and Mark Lewia and Sanford wrestler Ryan Kalman.

Watson engulfed the opportunity and with a no-nonsense and can do attitude, Dirigo has revolved from club level to a state powerhouse.

"I am overwhelmed at being selected," Watson said, a retired history teacher. "To have my name mentioned in the same conversation with those (past and current) recipients is gratifying. As I have contacted people, it has forced me to realize that this has happened to a short, fat, bald kid from (River Valley)."

Watson had initially started a wrestling program at Dirigo in 1980 and Jack Schmidt placed third in the 1982 Class B state meet. Despite high student participation, a lack of interest by the administration put things on the back burner.

Fortunately, the vision resurfaced in 1985 when first-year principal Tom Ward asked Watson if he'd be willing to be wrestling coach. Watson's second-floor classroom served as a practice room and approximately 10, four by eight-foot mats were taped together between the iron-heating grates, which were cranked up.

"Hal is very deserving," Ward said, currently SAD 21 superintendent. "I vividly remember watching Hal empty his classroom every night after school and put together what he had for mats and coach wrestling. I knew then that I had to find a way to buy him a wrestling mat and support him in starting wrestling at DHS. The rest is history."

Watson initially introduced to wrestling by the late Mel Preble who coached at Stephens High School in Rumford. The fever and love for the pure sport never escaped his intra-being.

When the sport was reintroduced at Dirigo there were numerous obstacles to overcome, especially since the team wasn't allowed to practice in Defoe Gymnasium at the high school. In 1989, a regulation wrestling mat was purchased, however, it was stored at the middle school one mile away. Dirigo paid its dues and Watson handled things by instituting his own style. He hammered out discipline, while early assistants Peter Glover, Mike Burke, Roger Smith, Glenn Gurney and Spencer Quiriron were the technicians.

"I surrounded myself with good coaches," Watson said. "I took advice from anybody, then I'd pick and choose from the information that I had stumbled across. The important thing was never forgetting reaching toward the goal of a quality program."

Former athletic director Brad Payne scheduled powers Oxford Hills and Rumford in a triangular meet, and as expected Dirigo was crushed. Then Rumford coach Jerry Perkins stated the Cougar wrestlers knew what moves to execute, but they needed physical conditioning. Watson didn't take any criticism personally, but instead quietly listened and instrumented what was necessary in order for Dirigo to reach the next level.

"When you think of Dirigo wrestling it is important to think of the man who started it," Perkins said, who is a hall of famer. "Hal Watson started the program from scratch and built it up by learning and teaching the basics. Not only has Dirigo earned respect in Class C rankings, but in all classes."

For years, Watson brought out the best in his hard-nosed student-athletes and the competitiveness is well known. In 1988, the Cougars finished fifth at the Mid-State League tournament and went home with their heads held high. The following day coach Tom Hicks called to admit a scoring error was discovered and Dirigo was declared the winner.

Wrestlers are known for being able to react to any situation and following a 1989 meet, Watson took Martha outside and proposed marriage to her. Fortunately, he maintained focus and received an affirmative answer because he needed to rush back-inside and help roll the mats up. Two years later, a Class C state meet was created, but controversy erupted over seeding each wrestler. Watson promptly spoke-up and said it doesn't matter who is seeded where because we'll still kick your tail. This wasn't an idle threat because Dirigo won the 1990 state championship and finished runner-up the next three years.

"The classroom was still being used for practice when we won the state championship," Watson said. "We had six finalists and Keith St Laurent (103-pounds) was our first state champion. My philosophy for the team(s) that I stressed was that we didn't fit any previous molds. Nobody wanted us. So, if we were relentless, worked hard and stayed together we would gain acceptance. (Dirigo) built a tradition and has maintained it since it started."

Watson stepped away in 1994 and handed the reins over to Gurney and Dirigo didn't skip a beat and won the 1996 state championship. When wrestling gets in the blood stream it's hard to ignore and Watson is no exception because he was reeled back in as assistant coach for Doug Gilbert from 1997-2006.

"Hal's demeanor never changed," Gurney said. "I've never heard a referee or opposing coach say any thing disrespectful. He treated every one fairly like you'd want to be treated. I can honestly say that any one who been around him is a better person."

Robert Bob Walker had no prior wrestling experience, however, with sheer determination and a can-do-attitude founded the program at Noble HS in 1973 and also enjoyed a success tenure at Kennebunk.

In nearly two decades, Walker compiled a 253-98-1 dual-meet record and along the way won state championships at each interscholastic institution. This included the hundreds of individuals who he helped and earned their respect.

After getting the Knights going in 1974, Walker stepped away for a season, before returning in 1976 and stayed mat side until 1985. Noble finished fourth in the 1977 Class A state meet, but it served as a prelude of things to come.

In Walkers nomination, current Noble coach Kip DeVoll wrote Bob was my coach and mentor at Noble, along with many other athletes at Noble and Kennebunk. If it had not been for Bob, I would not be where I am today in terms of coaching. Bob is the father of Noble wrestling, having started the program from scratch in 1973 with no previous wrestling experiences, he built a powerful base for future teams to follow.”

In 1981 and 1984, Noble proved to be a team to be on the move after placing second at the regional and state meets, respectively. In '85, the Knights broke through by winning both the regional and state meets.

Following the banner season, Walker moved up the road to Kennebunk and

In 1991, Kenn tied Sanford for the Class A state championship. In 1994, Walker retired and Dale Doucette took over..... DeVoll and Doucette both wrestled for Walker at Noble and both coach the Knights. Glenn Rowe and Steve Winkleman were Walker's first two state champions. Walker coached 17 individual state champions 10 at Noble and seven at Kennebunk; is believed to be the only coach to win a team state championship without ever competing in the sport; even more amazing, he won two state titles with two different high school programs.

Walker was committed to enhancing the sport and served as Liaison to the MPA from 1989-94.

## **Mark Lewia**

Mark Lewia who coached wrestling at Wells for 23 years earned plenty of respect and will be inducted in to the MAWA HOF, also. Lewia guided the Warriors beginning in 1983 and following the 2006 stepped aside to coach the junior high program.

Lewia had discovered how wrestling can contribute to a person's life, when competing at Kennebunk. He placed third in the 1979 state meet. The lessons learned prompted him to move in to the coaching ranks.

Wells won 254 dual meets and became a team to watch for in tournament competition. This included Class B state championships in 1988 and 1996, respectively. In both big wins the teams had stepped-up following set backs at the regional, one week earlier. The Warriors did win three regional crowns and finished second seven times.

Lewia coached 26 individual state champions and 54 state finalists. This included the late Sean Sheehy who won three titles. The Navy Seal was inducted in to the MAWA HOF in 1994.

Wells has always been a competitive program which competes hard and has earned nine Sportsmanship awards from the Maine Principal's Association.

When Lewia stepped away his brother Scott took over and continues coaching the high school team.

Ryan Kalman who competed at Sanford HS and Springfield College will be inducted as a competitor. He was a member of two state championship teams at Sanford and was a finalist in '92 state meet.

Kalman enrolled at Springfield and excelled in the classroom and on the wrestling mat. He was an Academic All American in 1995 and 1997.

In 1997, Kalman earned All American honors with a sixth-place finish at the NCAA Division III championships. He was inducted in to the New England College Conference Wrestling Association HOF.

Kalman joins his late father Keith as the fourth father-son tandem in the MAWA HOF. The elder Kalman won a NE championship in 1964, in fact Sanford is the only Maine team to ever win the NE crown.