

## A conversation with Kluever

By: Tom Goff

Nobody knows more about the Cheesehead, its roots, trials, tribulations and successes than Scott Kluever, the tournament's originator and director. So before the event begins this weekend, Cheesehead Wrestling Website picks Kluever's brain to get his insights on present and past day tournaments.

CWW: How did this all start?

SK: I felt Wisconsin wrestling was pretty good, and then I got a chance to take a team out to the Dapper Dan, in which you have Team USA against the best wrestlers from Pennsylvania. We had Wisconsin vs. a team from around Pittsburgh in the opening match. We went out there and our best wrestlers in the state lost to their district. I always wanted to run a tournament that brought in national teams and so I started talking to (former Walsh Jesuit coach) Bill Barger, who at that time, his team was national champions. He had a bunch of guys on the USA team and we just started talking and I said I want to run a tournament, much like you have the Ironman, and he said we'll help you. Sitting right next to us was Jim Jackson from Apple Valley, so Bill told him that if you go to this tournament, I'll go. So we had two of the top teams in the country committed right there. And then St. Edwards, a historical program out of Cleveland, Ohio, which won many national championships, jumped on board too.

CWW: Where did the name "Cheesehead" come from?

SK: That came from a guy in Ohio named Bob Pruesse, who wrote for Amateur Wrestling News at the time. He said whenever I look at Lambeau Field, what do I see? I see those Cheesheads. So that's what you should name your tournament and that's how it got its name.

CWW: Montini won it last year and Kaukauna finished second, but who looks like the strongest teams coming in this year?

I think it's a five- team race, really. If you look at the InterMat national rankings, you have Kaukauna, Mason Mountain View out of Arizona, Montini, Southeast Polk and St. Edwards. Southeast Polk is the highest rated team, so there supposed to win it, but the thing about the Cheesehead is that it has to be a total team effort. Like Montini could have five champions, but five champions alone doesn't win you this tournament because you need your team depth of 10 through 14 guy making it into the top 16, and that's kind of important. So if you look on paper, Montini looks to maybe have the most champions, but will they have enough horsepower to win it?

CWW: There were 26 teams last year and 29 this year. Why the expanded field this year?

SK: Because we, didn't have school on Friday, so we could start earlier in the day. We get a lot of programs we have to turn away, and I hate to turn teams away, so we had some quality

programs that decided they wanted to get in, and instead of turning them away, this year we've allowed to bring them because we can start earlier in the day on Friday.

CWW: How much time do you spend trying to set this whole thing up?

SK: Recruiting the teams has changed over the times. I used to have to call coaches from all over the country. I'd look at the top 50 teams in the country and I'd start calling and I had to sell them that the Cheesehead is a great fit for teams that travel, because we offer multiple matches. There's no "0-2 and a barbeque." What changed it, is getting on TV was huge because it's seen all over the country and the other thing that really helped is Flo Wrestling coming (to record the matches). Then, word of mouth started happening. We pretty much had anyone who was really good, whether its St. Edwards or Blair Academy or Wyoming Seminary or Apple Valley or the Iowa or Illinois schools, they've been here and they tell other people this is a good tournament. If you want to test your kids, this is tournament you should look at.

CWW: How has The Cheesehead changed over the years?

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CWW: Why has the Cheesehead been as successful as it's been?

SK: In my opinion, it's the community of Kaukauna. They step up every year for it. They take pride in that teams from all over the country want to come to our little town and wrestle in our gym. It takes over 200 volunteers to run it. We've got great leaders in John Moore, Lee Meyerhofer, Steve and Ann McDaniel and I'm probably forgetting 20 people I should name, but that core group has done a tremendous job organizing their groups. Everything is broken down to a leader of a group, whether its concessions, tickets sales, there's a leader who works to get a group of people to volunteer. So it's a lot of work.

CWW: St. Edwards's of Ohio won the first Cheesehead back in 1999. What's it like to finally have them back, and what took them so long to return?

SK: St. Ed's can go anywhere in the country they want. They're invited to every tournament and the funny thing was their coach e-mailed me in the middle of summer, asking can we get in and I was shocked. You know I had talked to him about coming back. Somewhere in his schedule it must have worked and its awesome to have them back, because when you talk

wrestling, there are very few schools in the country – like St. Ed's, Blair Academy, Apple Valley – that everybody knows, so it's great to have them back after so long.

CWW: Over the years, the makeup of the tournament field has changed. Why is that?

SK: The first year, there were a bunch of teams out of Ohio, one out of Illinois and a bunch from Wisconsin and it's hard because teams are getting requests from everybody to go to these different tournaments, so you have to build relationships with these people, and I've built a lot of good relationships with these coaches, and it's got to fit their schedule. That's why you see some of the bigger names come and go. They might be at the Beast of the East one year, then they might go to Cheesehead, then at Reno or Ironman or Clash. Every year, it's a little different. Every year, you have your teams that have been really good to us, like Montini. They're a powerhouse and they're here every year, Same with Southeast Polk. When you can get those teams that are really good to come every year, then other teams will come too.

CWW: Is there any school that hasn't been here that you'd like to get?

SK: St. Paris Graham. They're really good and we go out to Jeff Jordan's camps in the summer. Kaukauna coach Jeff Matczak and him know each other really well, so it would be nice to get them out here because we've had a lot of other good schools from Ohio. St. Paris Graham is going to be good for years to come because they just won the Ironman with seven freshmen in the lineup, so it would be nice to get them out here. We talked to Jeff and he said before he retires, they will be at the Cheesehead. We don't know when he's retiring, so hopefully they'll be here.

CWW: You have been through this as a coach and tournament organizer, now you're going through it as a dad because your son Keaton is a freshman 285-pounder for the Ghosts. What's it going to be like to have your son wrestle in the tournament you originated?

SK: It will be weird. I think we figured out that when he graduates will be the 20<sup>th</sup> year. Nothing will change as far as what I have to do and how I do things. He knows how big of an event this is to our family. He's been through it all growing up. He's been at seeding meetings, he's been a table runner and a towel tapper, Now, it will be fun to watch him try to achieve his goals on the mat.

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