

# SPORTS MEMORIES

## Bishop Baseball Player Pays Heavy Price for 'Ego Lifting'

By Neiko Megrichian

In the weight room my teammates' bel-lowing was enough to wake up the rest of campus. It is a small room—about 20 feet by 50 feet, which is just enough for five squat racks and a double-deck dumbbell rack. The west wall is navy blue with clichéd motivational quotes that escape my mind. That day, October 11, 2019, it smelled like what a lot of coaches would probably call "hard work," but to the untrained nose was musty, rubbery and a little peachy from the Febreze cone that sat in the corner. Bouncing off every cinderblock wall was the echoing of 30 college baseball players roughly imitating Meek Mill's "Dreams and Nightmares." Sweat had started to flood the valleys of the rubber floor mats and the clashing of iron plates and barbells roared in an asynchronous melody. The environment was electric.

## That Smell. Can't Ya Smell That Smell

By Giovanni Dixon

It was winter of the 2011-12 academic year, and there was a wrestling match at my high school, Northern Nash Senior High. We were facing the neighboring school, Nash Central High School. It was a small tournament toward the end of the season. This was like a "break" from the regular-season matches. It was also meant to be a benchmark for the wrestlers who would be taken to bigger schools for matches that would qualify them for state tournament.

A senior, I had not been an active or athletic child until I tried out for the football team in my freshman year. I had come to see sports as a way to stay healthy, improve my mood, and avoid negative influences. Now that my football career had ended, I decided to join the wrestling team in an effort to remain in shape. Since this was my first year with the sport, I had participated in only three matches by the time we faced off against Nash Central. Because of what happened that day, this would be my fourth and final appearance on the mat.

I was in the weight class for heavier young men. At the time I was 185, but unlike the other wrestlers in my weight class, at 5'9", I wore my weight differently. Looking back I really should have considered losing twenty pounds.

And I should have taken the sport more seriously. If I had, I would not have been defeated in such an embarrassing manner on that fateful day. Once my match started, I realized I was up against a young man who had been a classmate in middle school. We had a few classes together and he was a giant kid even then. By the time we met on the mat, my opponent was a seasoned athlete. He was a towering 6'2" and 195 lbs. to my stout 5'9" self.

The height disparity was only one of the different reasons he would win that day, but it was not the most important. He had also been wrestling since middle school while in middle school Geovanni would have rather played games like Kirby Super Star or Metal Gear Solid and skipped classes. I could see in his eyes that he wanted to win this match not just for accolades, but to show up an old classmate.

Then there was the smell. Imagine the worst smell; then magnify that tenfold. The stench was worse the closer I got to him on the mat. Imagine onions and trash being left in the sun; then soak it in water. That's the smell that emanated from my opponent.

This young man stunk the whole of the gymnasium. Since it was a wrestling match someone sitting in the bleachers would deduce that this was the accumulated odor of many young men tugging at each other's leotards.

NO, this was from this one guy, the opponent standing right in front of me. It was common knowledge that to make weight wrestlers would exercise excessively, and work up a sweat, before weigh-ins.

And my opponent was drenched in sweat. He looked like someone who had just come from a 10-mile jog. Not only was I at a disadvantage in skill, but I was also outmatched in hygiene. When I realized that the cloud of stench wafting through the air was this young man, I shuddered.

I wore glasses and I left them on the bleachers. I was sure that my other senses had been heightened because of it. I did not falter. I steeled myself and went through with the match.

It started off easily enough, as I found a rhythm and stayed on my feet at first. I held my own, but that was when he made his first strike.

In an attempt to go for a takedown, he had stepped toward me, moving his back across my chest. He was going for a hip toss, which is when you step in front of a person and use your center of gravity to fling them forward.

Feeling his sweat across my face, I

About four years prior to that morning, I was in the midst of my second fall season at Santaluces Community High School in Palm Beach, Florida. My head baseball coach was keen on introducing the varsity team to strength training during our gym class. He did what he could with what knowledge he had, but ultimately, he couldn't make us lift because during school hours he was the P.E. teacher, not a baseball coach. Most of my teammates weren't exactly thrilled with the idea of lifting weights during seventh period gym, so normally they could be found playing pickup basketball or football. Two of my teammates inspired me to join them. They introduced me to Ronnie Colman, CT Fletcher, and BroScienceLife's Dom Mazzetti, whose videos I started to watch religiously.

I soon fell in love with the rusty barbells

reared from the atrocious bodily fluid that had invaded my bubble. But I stayed strong and prevented him from completing the move by keeping my legs locked and firm. He was not done. Since he had known about my lack of experience, and could probably feel it too, he attempted to tire me out.

I still held my own. The weight room had long been my best friend, but there is only so far muscle can carry you. He tried the hip toss again and again, but I would reverse the move each time.

I was tired. We struggled, standing for what seemed like hours (it had only been five minutes). My teammates cheered saying: "Pin him" and "Go for the hold."

Spurred by this young man's nausea-inducing essence and my weakening breath, I went for the pin. With the last bit of my strength, I had done it! It took every ounce of effort, but I had done it.

The problem was that there were 10 counts. In a matter of seconds, my opponent rolled out of the pin and put me in the same position; however, the way he performed it was strikingly different than mine. He had executed a textbook example of a reversal.

Not only did he pin me down; he had done so with his armpit positioned squarely across my mouth and nose. I was in the worst position possible!

For a time I kept asking God, "Is this where I die? Will this be the end?"

I realized I was on the fifth count. I struggled to be released from his hold, but due to fatigue and a burrito from the night before, it became a bid for survival.

## Of Coyotes, Turkey Calls, and the Call of Nature

By Hunter Strickland

On April 11th, 2008 I was on my 1st turkey hunt. I was five years old, about to turn 6 the next month. It was a chilly spring morning on my family's farm in Chatham County. I had my dad and uncle with me to help me kill my first bird.

That morning my dad's green Toyota truck had shredded a pulley in the engine bay. It smelt terrible. We smelled burnt rubber for days and the worst part was the odor lingered on our clothes. I was sure the turkeys could smell us.

My dad and Uncle Travis were arguing about how to install the pulley, and you would think that with both of them working together, that it would have been fixed in five minutes. But no, it took almost an hour! They were hollering back and forth. "No, Travis, it goes on like this." "No, Sted, it goes on like this," or, my favorite part: "Get out of the way and let me do it." "No, Travis, I wanna do it."

After a solid 45 minutes, they finished the repairs, and we were on the road headed to a spot.

We got to the woods around six-thirty. Turkeys were already gobbling, and it was hard to get in the right spot without scaring birds off the roost. When we got to the spot, there were at least five or six birds gobbling around us. It was so loud we couldn't hear ourselves think. At times I was happy when the woods went quiet, but my dad and uncle love to listen to turkeys and kept calling at them, making them all gobble at the same time. My dad told me he had never had this many turkeys at once.

When the sun began to rise, a beam shone on us, making us warm. It's like God wanted me on the horizon that turkeys fly down to look for a hen. My dad put out a hen and jake decoy to attract others. My uncle had caught a glimpse of two gobblers appearing on the other side of the field. Since turkeys are territorial, we knew other turkeys would want to come to the field and fight over the hen decoy. About four minutes later, we had six turkeys in the field; four were long-beard, mature gobblers, and two of them were jakes. They were strutting in circles around each other, making drumming noises with their chests and spitting everywhere.

The spectacle shocked and excited me; as this was my first turkey hunt, it's like God wanted me to fall in love with the sport by sending all these birds our way. Then suddenly two coyotes ran into the field spooking all the gobblers.

The black and brown animals were slightly smaller than a typical husky dog. Suddenly I was fearful (I didn't know this at the time, but coyotes are as just as scared of humans as we are of them). And I was disappointed because I figured the coyotes just ruined my first hunt. Then my father and uncle quickly took care of the situation, shooting and killing the coyotes and then taking them back to the truck.

That all happened in a matter of minutes.

and mismatching Gold's Gym iron plates. I educated myself through YouTube University and learned all about injury prevention, maximizing muscle growth, and nutrition. Eventually I became the strongest player on the roster and one of three names to evade the injured list. I started hitting the ball further than I ever had and my throwing velocity rose quickly. I lowered my pop-time (the duration in seconds from the pop of the catcher's mitt to the second baseman's mitt on a throwdown) to 1.9-2.0 seconds, and my performance on the field made me known throughout the county as an aggressive catcher. I attributed all of my new success to what I learned in the weight room and studying people who are experts on performance lifting.

I learned that deadlifting is the ultimate movement. It is a test of brute strength which

Flapping my arms tirelessly, I hoped that someone would end this small hell, this prison. I counted seconds between my flailing.

I could see the referee looking at me, his bifocal lenses burning a hole in my skull. I questioned a lot at that moment.

Then I saw that the referee had stopped counting. Why? Was I putting up too much of a fight?

I couldn't breathe and I attempted to tap out, but the referee did nothing. At this point, I was fed up and cursed him, I cursed everyone, even God, for putting me in this situation.

He was laying there prone, staring, with an irrevocable expression across his face. I now believe I had passed out for a few seconds because the rest of what happened is now a blur.

After my opponent released me, I rose to a stir of laughter from the wrestlers on both teams and the fans. They couldn't believe the spectacle that they had just seen.

I was angry and embarrassed, still cursing loud enough for everyone to hear, as I made my way to the sidelines. "Why didn't ya'll help me?" I yelled. "I was dying, HE STINKS! I KNOW YOU CAN SMELL IT!"

As I approached the bench, my coach sarcastically asked: "Are you alright?" "What do you think."

The whole team laughed at that exchange. Later I turned in my equipment.

Since that fateful day, my family never ceases to remind me of my last match. And it always makes them laugh. I still shudder at the memory.

(Headline courtesy of Ronnie Van Zant and Allen Collins of Lynyrd Skynyrd)

When my dad and uncle got back to me, I was in tears bawling my eyes out.

But my dad and uncle put me at ease, and we resumed our hunt. At the time we were sitting on the edge of the field, leaning back against an oak tree. The field was on top of a hill with a creek running alongside it. I sat up a little and looked down the hill and saw a gobbler strutting up and down the creek. I said, "Daddy, there's a long-beard on the creek."

At first my father didn't believe me and looked for himself. When he saw the bird, he said "it was the same longbeard that had been coming to the field every day." When he said it was the same one, my heart started racing. I was having trouble catching my breath, and I was shaking uncontrollably. My nerves had got to me and, it seemed like I was having a panic attack.

I was using my dad's Benelli m2 20 gauge and I could hardly hold it, because I was shaking so bad. My dad tried to pin me down to steady me. I was shaking so much that I was crunching the leaves under me. My uncle was watching the bird move up and down the creek. He kept calling every once in a while, just to let the bird hear us.

My father explained that since this turkey was the only one that came to the field in the morning, he was likely scared of the decoys. At one point my uncle left his post and crawled to the decoys so he could gather and hide them. By the time he came back to our position, we had another problem... I had to pee.

I had never had to pee so bad in my life. After my uncle pulled the decoys out of the field, the turkey started to work his way toward us. I was trying to tell my dad that if I didn't undo my pants, I was going to pee on myself. I couldn't hold it. I had to go so bad I was crying. My dad finally unzipped my pants and I got on my knees and went. Luckily I was peeing downhill.

At the same time, out of the corner of my eye I could see that the turkey kept coming toward us. When I finished, I just sat down. There wasn't even time to button my pants. My dad looked at me and said, "Get ready. He's going to be close."

He wasn't lying. The turkey walked within ten yards of me. When my dad said I could shoot him, I had no room for error. I had to shoot him in the head or not at all. When I shot, the gun kicked me off the edge of the tree, putting me flat on my back. As I lay there, I hoped and prayed that the turkey would be dead. When I sat back up, my dad and uncle were high fiving and bear-hugging me. If a stranger had seen us, he would have thought we had just won the lottery.

When I look back on this event, it gives me chills and brings a smile to my face. To this day, it's my favorite hunt of all time. It shows me that when you're hunting, it's not always about killing; it's about having fun and making memories. Hopefully one day I will get to experience this with one of my kids.

requires every muscle from the levator scapulae to the to calves to be completely in sync in order to move the weight safely and powerfully. Deadlifts are one of the only movements where you cannot cheat. To complete a full rep, you must lift the barbell from the ground up to your hips so that you're standing upright. It became my favorite movement, so I worked hard on perfecting it.

I held myself to a high standard in the weight room. I always kept a good posture, walked tall, kept focused and became wildly self-aware (not to be confused with self-conscious).

October 11th was stormy. My alarm clock blared at 5 a.m., but I had already been awake. My roommate, a teammate, wished me a happy birthday.

"Thanks, bro. You ready to go lift something heavy?"

"Too early to think about that," he said.

I was fired up. We were moving into our strength phase of the offseason lifting program and the main movement that Friday was the deadlift.

I was new to Wesleyan. I had only known my teammates for a little less than two months and I was eager to prove myself as an impactful player. For whatever reason I imagined the quickest way to make a name for myself was to make the loudest clash when my loaded barbell hit the floor. After we warmed up as a team with our final deadlift set of 225, I slapped another 45-pound plate onto both sides, knowing damn well we had four more sets afterwards. I hit 315 with ease, and remained focused, tall, and self-aware.

"Oh, big man!" my teammates called out.

Big man. I thought. I stood 5'7" and some change on a good day and weighed about 175 lbs. "Big" would usually be the last word to describe me. But I felt really good, probably too good for my own well-being, and I proceeded to break the golden rule of mindful strength training: ego lifting. This is when the weight of your ego is too heavy for you to support and that weight transfers to the physical world.

"Another 35, please," I said to my teammate, Kellogg.

He replied the only way a well-trained gym rat would: "Let's f'ing go."

Kellogg was another weightlifting-indulgent teammate who respected me just as I respected him. He was set to try 385 lbs.

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Morgan (3 home runs, 18 RBIs, .386 batting average), Jackson Hobbs (9 RBIs, .386 BA), Tyson Bass (1 HR, 8 RBIs, .387 BA), and Pennington (1 HR, 9 RBIs, .324 BA).

On the mound, red-shirt freshman C. J. DiBenedetto has been impressive, winning two of his first three decisions, while compiling a 3.00 ERA, with 10 strikeouts in 15 innings.

Megrichian said DiBenedetto has bounced back from an injury-plagued 2020. He praised his teammate's poise in high-intensity situations and said his curveball has been effective. "There's a significant velocity difference from his fastball and the two play well in his arsenal," he said. "Sometimes his fastball tails into a right-handed batter, so when he drops in his curveball, hitters will often roll over and ground out, or they just buckle at the knees."

## Softball Set for Conference Action

Pitcher Beth Braswell has already displayed mid-season form, as the Bishops split their first six non-conferences games.

The senior won two of her first three starts, compiling an 0.95 ERA while striking out 25 hitters in 22 innings. As a batter, she's hitting .333 with a team-leading 7 RBIs.

The team opens USA South Conference action on March 13 when it travels to Staunton, Va. to play Mary Baldwin University.

## Cross Country Teams 3rd

The men's and women's cross-country teams each placed third in the USA South Conference East Division championship following an abbreviated season. Both teams raced on Wesleyan's on-campus course February 27.

Due to the pandemic, USA South officials eliminated the typical conference-wide meet, opting to run separate championships for each division.

Meredith claimed the women's East Division team title, while Methodist's Makayla Lawler won individual honors with a time of 23:12 on the 6,000-meter course. Wesleyan's lowest time was recorded by first-time runner Florentina Lonati, who placed 15th with a time of 32:06.

In the men's race, Methodist placed first, followed by William Peace and then Wesleyan. The Monarchs' Drew Topoly

on our second set out of five. The difference between me and him was that he hadn't quite hit the ego stage in the lift, so there was no question it would be an easy feat.

My first rep went up quicker than I had expected, causing my head to balloon. The shouting of my teammates harmonized with "Face to the Floor" by Chevelle. There was extra snare in this harmony from the iron plates rattling against each other. As I pulled the slack out of the barbell on my second rep, I shifted my hips forward too soon, breaking the form that I had spent years perfecting.

Instantly, I felt my lower back pop. Instantly, I saw the fate of my athletic career crumble. Instantly, I experienced one of the worst self-loading episodes of my life.

I could blame this on a number of factors. I had slept poorly. I lifted the day before. I was numb from my pre-workout. Hell, Kellogg made me do it. Except none of that had anything to do with my bigheaded idiotic mistake, which essentially cost me the remainder of the offseason and even seasons to come. Perhaps I should've worn a belt. It may have softened the blow, but it would not have saved me from moving my hips too early. I had never lifted with a belt before that time. I thought belts were for old men, or for show. Now I never lift without one (when I have the choice).

In the following seasons, our team dynamic changed. We got a new coach/recruiting coordinator, who fell in love with two new catchers. Not to sound sour, but they weren't special. Very good ball-players sure, but not better than me or the other catcher that we had.

As time went on, I found ways to train without straining my back. I got stronger by doing different variations of squats and Romanian deadlifts which relieve tension from the lumbar. It worked. I was mashing the baseball. I could catch, throw, and run with no problem. Unfortunately, my new coach was already committed to his recruits and I lived on the back burner.

"You're too much of a liability," they told me. "We can't be in a big position and have to pull you from the game. Don't worry. You're still going to travel with us, but we aren't putting the other two on JV. You've made a lot of improvements by the way."

finished first with a time 27:16 on the 8,000-meter course. Battling injuries, the Wesleyan team was paced by Chris Sielkowski, who placed 7th at 30:06.

## Volleyball Loses 3

The volleyball team opened its season with three road matches, losing two at Greensboro (3-0, 3-0) and then a third at William Peace (3-1).

Like other fall sports, the volleyball team is playing a shortened, conference-only schedule, with the regular season ending April 10.

Against Greensboro, the Bishops were led in the first match by middle blocker Lauren Weaver, who recorded 12 kills and 4 blocks, with a .409 hitting average. In the second match, Michaela Seawell had 8 kills, 3 assists and 2 aces.

Freshman setter Sloan Martin made an impressive debut, tallying 19 assists, 14 digs and 3 kills in match one; and 21 assists, 2 digs and 3 kills in the match two.

In Raleigh, on March 10, Wesleyan claimed the first game against Peace, but the Pacers swept the next three. Seawell achieved a double-double with 11 kills and 17 digs and added 2 aces and a block.

## Golf Finishes 14th in Tourney

The Wesleyan golfers finished 14th in a field of 16 small colleges at the Savannah (Ga.) Invitational in early March.

The Bishops placed 7th among the 8 teams from the tough USA South Conference. Methodist, a perennial national powerhouse, led the field with a cumulative three-round total of 865. Wesleyan tallied 943.

Bishop number-one man Frankie Schmitt shot a 277, one over par, with individual rounds of 70-71-76.

This season is the first for new Head Coach Mac Sykes, who took over for Gregg Ripke, who stepped down last year. At the helm for 10 years, Ripke led the Bishops to one of their most successful seasons in 2018, when the team claimed the USA South title, a berth in Division III national tournament, and a national ranking of 13th.

A 1980 Wesleyan grad, Sykes was a four-year letter winner for the Bishops, winning the team's MVP award in 1977. Ripke will continue to assist the program during 2021 to help in the transition, the college's athletic department said.

(NCWC Sports Information contributed to Bishop Sports Briefs)