Mr. Schalles Comes to Poolesville

By Jeff Stuart

A *Sports Illustrated* writer once wrote that Wade Schalles is “the most exciting wrestler to ever walk onto a wrestling mat.” The legendary Dan Gable called him, “The greatest pinner I've ever seen!” Wade has the record for most wins and pins of anyone who has ever wrestled. Coaches from around the globe once voted him World’s Greatest Wrestler for pinning all of his opponents at the World Championships. A limber body and improbable pins earned him the nickname of Plastic Man. Wade Schalles is wrestling royalty, and he came to John Poole Middle School on Friday, November 19.

Welcomed with a large Welcome Mr. Schalles banner (which he took a picture of on his way out), Mr. Schalles coached, encouraged, and entertained his audience of about forty wrestlers and coaches and parents for about two hours. At one point, emphasizing the use of hips, he had the kids follow him in a kind of cha cha dance. The kids had been told about Wade by their coach and seemed thoroughly enthralled by his appearance.

Mike Sofelkanik, the Poolesville Athletic Association (PAA) coach and commissioner, met Schalles at a father and son mini wrestling two-day clinic at the U.S. Naval Academy last July. "There were kids there from all over the United States,” said Sofelkanik. “We stayed at the Naval Academy, slept in the dorms, and ate at the chow halls. It was a good father and son experience. Wade just happened to be a guest instructor there. His son wrestles for the Naval Academy, so I got to meet him. We both grew up in central Pennsylvania. We talked—we had a lot in common. We hit it off. I asked him if he would be willing to do a clinic here in Poolesville. He agreed to that.

“Our kids are anywhere from six to fourteen years old. The majority of them are from nine to eleven. We have about forty kids. They are all from Poolesville, Dickerson, the upper Montgomery County area. We wrestle other teams from Clarksburg, Mt. Airy, Damascus, and teams from Frederick County. It is primarily an instructional league. Lots of kids are first time wrestlers.”

Mike is an experienced wrestler himself. "I grew up wrestling," he said. “I wrestled in high school. I wrestled for Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I wrestled all my life. It kind of gets in your blood."

In closing, Mr. Schalles told the junior wrestlers that they wouldn't become good overnight, that they would make mistakes, lots of them. They would fail sometimes—but they should work hard and as soon as they got that bad stuff out of their system, he was sure they were going to be great. He also told them that it should be fun, and that there should be camaraderie and laughter. The mats had to be rolled up at 8:00 p.m. so that basketball players could take over the gym, but Wade stayed in the hallway a good while signing autographs and posing for pictures.

He has authored two best-selling books on wrestling and a best-selling videotape instructional series. He hosts the EagleHawk Academy, a wrestling school and summer clinic, divided into two groups: a junior league (third to seventh grades) and a senior league (eighth to twelfth grades). Every student receives five to seven hours of instruction. There are currently locations in Montgomery (Landon School) and Fairfax Counties. Mr. Schalles recently relocated to the Washington Metro area from Orlando, Florida.

Practices have started, but Sofelkanik points out that it is not too late to register. Visit the PAA website for more information www.poolesvillesports.org.