

SPORTS

Dan Gable Wrestles With Sports History

The University of Iowa coach is, in a word, intense

Two floors below ground level in the University of Iowa wrestling room, 14 pairs of sweaty young men are poised like dancers waiting for the downbeat. In each of the face-to-face duos, one combatant has pulled the other's right knee up as high as it will go. They wait, out of breath, for a baldish, bespectacled man to yell, "Hit it!" Then they begin the struggle, straining their way down to the rubber mats that cover the floor, constantly trying to take the lead. After about 30 seconds, they rise and start all over again.

And after they've done this 10 times, coach Dan Gable bellows, "OK! Now I want you to run through sit-outs!" Still paired off, the wrestlers get down on the mat, one on all fours and the other leaning over and controlling his partner. At the shout, the one underneath tries to escape by sitting up and twisting away. "Every time your butt hits something it better rebound!" warns Gable. "Imagine you've got a bucket of live coals there!" The drills go on and on, followed by unstructured wrestling practice and some sprints, and some weight training and some exercise bicycling. Altogether, a workout of more than two hours—and it's the second of the day.

Intense. Very intense. So intense, in fact,

that the word doesn't seem strong enough. That's how single-minded Dan Gable, 38, is about wrestling. It's the reason why, in the history of the sport in the United States, the Waterloo, Iowa, native is both the most successful athlete *and* coach. As a 142-pounder at Iowa State, Gable won 117 straight matches, including 83 pins, and two national titles. His only collegiate loss came in his final bout, for the NCAA title in 1970. In the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Gable won a gold medal in freestyle competition against the best 149.5-pound wrestlers in the world—without giving up a point in six matches. Gable's coach at Iowa State, Harold Nichols, who trained 38 NCAA champions and won six team titles in his 32 years at ISU, says that many of his wrestlers had "slicker" physical skills than Gable, but that no one "had a greater mental desire." Intense.

Hard work: Gable's coaching achievements rival his athletic feats. As head coach at Iowa, he has created one of the most winning teams in the history of college sports. Since his second year in charge, 1978, the Hawkeyes have taken the NCAA team championship nine straight times. Only twice in NCAA history has a school done this well in any sport: Yale in golf



Crowd pleasing: More than 10,000 fans came to

from 1905 to 1913, and Southern California in track and field from 1935 to 1943. And, as Olympic coach in 1984, Gable inspired this country's best ever showing in freestyle wrestling: seven gold medals and two silvers. How has he done it? "The secret is that there is no secret," says Gary Kurdelmeier, who is executive director of USA Wrestling, the group that coordinates U.S. national teams for international competition, and who was the head coach at Iowa prior to Gable. "The fact of the matter is that wrestling, like a lot of things, requires hard work. And Gable epitomizes hard work." Intense.

Amateur wrestling, perhaps more than any other sport, demands toughness and competitiveness and desire. Unlike "professional" wrestling—which revolves around false bravado and prearranged gymnastics—collegiate wrestling pits two bodies against each other in direct and concentrated opposition. Points are awarded for gaining control, maintaining control, escaping control. Only the ultimate control—pinning an opponent's shoulders to the mat—ends an eight-minute match prematurely. When he wrestled, Gable's control always seemed unchallenged, his dominance ensured. Riding atop his opponent, Gable was focused and methodical, whether wrenching an arm for leverage or driving a shoulder to the mat. "I pinned a lot of people," Gable remembers, "but it was always after a certain point—about four minutes. There

Concentrating in the practice room: The workouts just go on, and on, and on

DRAKE HOKANSON

