

Vernonia Mat Pack: Having Fun and Learning to Wrestle

By Scott Laird

Vernonia High School Wrestling Coach Chris Wolf is building for the future.

Wolf has started the Vernonia Mat Pack, a wrestling club for young boys and girls interested in learning about wrestling. Just like T-ball, soccer, basketball and Little

they all say the same thing, that it starts with the little kids. I look at programs like Culver who are eight or nine time state champions and that's what they do."

The Mat Pack practices Monday through Thursday evenings from 7:00 to 8:00 PM; Mondays and Wednesdays it's K-2nd grade, Tuesdays and Thursdays are the 3rd-5th graders. Coach Wolf is assisted by current VHS wrestlers Joe Benes, Mikol Pihl and Dawson Shay.

Benes, a senior VHS team captain, has created his Senior Project around coaching wrestling. In addition to assisting with the Mat Pack, Benes often leads parts of the VHS team practices. Benes says he would someday like to work as a School Administrator and wrestling coach and hopefully even start his own wrestling club where local athletes could work out.

Underclassmen Pihl and Shay will hopefully return next year and assist Wolf with the Mat Pack.

"When I watch the older kids wrestle it's obvious which kids started young, because they do more things right" says Wolf. "When kids don't start wrestling until high school it takes them a good two years before they really understand the sport—understand the body mechanics and positioning."

An evening observing the Mat Pack is...well...maybe Coach Wolf said it best when he called it "chaotic." I tried to clarify and said it looked like "controlled chaos," and Coach Wolf replied with a laugh, "except without the control!"

There is structure to Mat Pack activities including some stretching and warm up exercises. Then the coaches teach a new wrestling move and the kids practice that move. Sometimes there is some open wrestling time, where the kids practice all they've learned; sometimes there are games and other activities.

Some parents stick around and observe; some fathers who know a thing or two about wrestling themselves will offer their kids pointers and advice.

After watching a lot of running around, high energy yelling and rolling around on the mats, I asked one parent if the kids sleep well after a Mat Pack practice. She nodded her

Guy Football, the Mat Pack starts with kids as young as kindergarten and starts teaching the fundamentals of their sport. When these young kids reach the age when they can start to compete, they will have a good solid foundation and be better prepared as athletes. It's how small towns and high schools build their sports programs and become perennial league, district and state champions.

"When I've gone to tournaments with the high school team, I've talked to coaches of successful programs and asked how they got there," says Wolf. "And



VHS head wrestling coach Chris Wolf (right) and VHS senior Joe Benes (left) work with some members of the Mat Pack.



Joe Benes shows a member of the Mat Pack the correct way to do a take down.



head enthusiastically and replied, "Absolutely!"

"I want to see Vernonia build a wrestling program," says Wolf. "I am trying to get us where we need to be and I know that may take ten years. But when these four and five year olds that we're working with now get to high school they are going to have a big jump on their competition."

Senior Center Offers Tax Prep Help

The Vernonia Senior Center has secured qualified tax preparers to assist low and middle income citizens this tax season. These are volunteers for the AARP Tax-Aide program and brings free tax help to the above citizens. People do not have to be a member of the AARP to avail themselves of this program.

This service will be available at the Vernonia Senior Center on March 14, 2012 from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. They will be scheduling 45 minute appointments. To schedule an appointment citizens may call 503-429-3912. Space is limited. For more information, interested citizens can go to www.aarp.org/taxaide.

Vernonia's Voice is published twice each month on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday. Look for our next issue February 28th.

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