



The Longest Round

JERRY MILES and his wheelchair were a familiar fixture at last weekend's CVL wrestling tournament. The former state wrestling champ has been confined to the wheelchair since 1968, when he learned he had multiple sclerosis.



JERRY MILES discusses a match with his son Perry (left), while a bad move during a match draws an exasperated frown.



A former state champ battles multiple sclerosis

CANBY—The year was 1966, and Canby wrestler Jerry Miles had just won his second consecutive state wrestling title in the 168-pound division by decisioning Sweet Home's Ernie Baxter, 4-0.

Now it is 1978, and there are two more Miles, Barry and Perry, wrestling for Canby in the CVL district tournament last weekend.

As intense as ever, thier father watches every match, but the former three-sport letterman and college football prospect can't stand and pace, or lead the cheers with all the energy he would like to. Jerry Miles is now confined to a wheelchair with multiple sclerosis, a crippling disorder of the nervous system.

For a man who has been a fierce competitor all his life, it has not been an easy transition and Miles is still making adjustments from the disease, which first struck him 10 years ago.

Miles was raised in an active, athletic family. His older brother, Ed, was a three-time state wrestling champ in the late 30's, while another brother, Dan, was a professional baseball player.

When Jerry was a boy, he recalled, his proud father frequently showed guests in the Miles' home the medals his brother's had won.

So he resolved to get some medals as well. "I felt like I had to do something there," he said. "So I played football, baseball and wrestled."



Miles was a standout in all three sports, even playing semi-pro baseball. He was also a top athlete prospect at what was then Oregon State College, but too much sports and not enough study got the better of him then and he dropped out after one year.

Miles married, settled down, and for 10 years drove long-haul trucks. But early in 1968 he began to feel weakness in his legs, and by March of that year "I could hardly get in and out of the truck."

His family doctor put him in the hospital and after a week of tests he was given the diagnosis. Multiple sclerosis. M.S.

The disease took its toll rapidly, putting him first on crutches and then in the wheelchair. He had to sell his brand-new truck.

Miles returned to school, studying political science at Portland State with the hope of entering law school. Without the distractions of his Oregon State days he did well, but the year he graduated, 1972, was a bumper year for prospective lawyers and Miles failed the admissions test.

He ran for state legislature, lost, then tried to run an insurance business out of his home.

But the pressure of the day and night calls were too much as the M.S. worsened, so on the verge of a mental collapse he gave it up.

Currently, Miles is unemployed. To help support the family's five youngsters, his wife, Anita, works at Clackamas Community College.

Life has not been easy for Jerry Miles the past 10 years, but he still draws on lessons he learned long ago in one of his first loves—wrestling.

"Wrestling helped prepare me for this," he says. "If you can take the mental discipline of wrestling, then you can take just about anything."

Miles sees wrestling as a chance for an individual to really find out just what one's potentials are, as well as providing an opportunity to push beyond what he sees as the greatest fear—the fear of failure. On the mat, it's win or lose.

Being confined to a wheelchair has given Miles ample time to think about things, and he laughingly admits that he has plenty of advice on almost any subject. But there is one thing that he thinks everybody should keep in mind.

"It seems to me that whether you have a handicap or not, so many people talk about the things they can't do. You have to think of things you can do. You have to get all you can from yourself."

Miles still competes, but largely through his two sons. Every win, every loss is felt keenly. A long day of tension like the CVL tournament leaves him drained. "He's been a real help," said Perry, a senior who placed third in last weekend's tourney. "He was always encouraging, and kept telling me that I could do it."

The younger Miles barely made the junior varsity squad as a sophomore, but with hard work and his father's encouragement he was a varsity wrestler the last two years for Canby, one of the state's best dual meet teams.

But soon both sons will be in college, then out of wrestling, and Miles admits that will leave a void.

Multiple sclerosis is a progressive disease and Miles knows that he could die from it or worse in his eyes become totally bedridden.

"I don't feel sorry for myself," he said. "I just feel sorry when I can't do something and someone has to help me."

But the echoes of his past help him face the future. The cheers of the 1966 state tournament have long since faded to most, but not to Miles. "It's not a big thing anymore, except to me," he said when asked to do this interview. "It's nice to know someone remembers."

Without those memories, Jerry Miles longest round would have been much tougher to take.

Text and photographs by Douglas Gantenbein