

OLYMPIC HOPEFUL CREDITS HIS SUCCESS IN LIFE TO CORNING TEACHERS AND COACHES

BY SEAN WILSON

Staff Reporter

A life threatening injury nearly took the life of Christopher Baker when he was just seven years old, and yet it is that same accident, along with nurturing local leaders, that is the driving force propelling this young man to possible Olympic fame.

"If it wasn't for all those Corning coaches and teachers who believed in me I would not be where I am today," said Baker. In fact to credit all those teachers and coaches the young man cites for his personal achievements in life would take up more space than this article.

Baker will find out in early April whether or not he is off to Athens Greece in August for the 2004 Olympics. Interestingly August 24th is Baker's 26th Birthday.

It has never been easy for Baker in the sports world. At five foot three and one hundred and thirty pounds, he is not your typical athlete, but he says Corning coaches saw beyond his small frame and focused within. "Baker don't let anyone tell you that your not big enough!" barked Coach Gary Burton, "imagine that your are two hundred and twenty pounds with a one hundred pound heart."

Baker's football coach Bob Hall says for Baker, attitude was everything. "He just had that "I am going to go for it" mentality.... regardless of his size he maintained a positive attitude to be the best." Hall says this type of scholar doesn't come along that often. "It's great to have a student like Baker, your just can't buy that stuff."

"I have been an athlete all my life and have always dreamed of going to the Olympics and would gladly give all the medals I have earned so far to my coaches because they were like fathers to me." said Baker who lost his thirty

one year old father to a heart attack in the late eighties. This was the same year of the accident that nearly ended this promising youths life.

"I was on my way to the dojo when I was hit and that's all I can remember of that part of my life, everything before I have blocked out even the accident," said Baker. According to an article printed in the Observer, Baker was hit while he crossed in front of a truck driven by George Hall of Corning who was said to be traveling at a safe rate of speed when he hit the young boy. Baker was rushed to Corning Memorial Hospital and later flown to Enloe for treatment of head injuries.

Today the Olympic hopeful (and former Corning Observer delivery boy) is living in North Bend Washington. After a brief stay in Tacoma and prior to that Redding where he attended Shasta College for two years.

•Bakers background

Baker wrestled for Corning for the 1993-1994 School Year in the 103 LB weight class and in 1996 Traveled to Atlanta GA. For the FILA USA Wrestling Junior World Team Trials taking home a 6th place finish. He also wrestled for Pacific Lutheran University 125/133 LB weight class (NCAA Division III) however that program was cut last year due to funding.

Baker now belongs to Greater Gold Wrestling out of Seattle Washington and is a current team member of Team Washington Senior Greco-Roman 55 kg. Weight class. "This will be my fifth year traveling to Las Vegas to the US Nationals" said Baker, who placed 2nd in the Nation at the AAU Grand Nationals in Hampton Virginia Greco Roman 128 LB weight class. Baker placed 3rd in the nation in freestyle 128 lb weight class and placed 5th at the AAU Ironman Worlds in

Knoxville

Tennessee in May of 2003

This year Baker placed 1st at the Washington State Freestyle Championships (55 kg)