

The 99th Match

Based on a True Story



Vinny DiGirolamo

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by Vinny DiGirolamo

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Any association to real people and the details of wrestlers, cheerleaders, coaches, matches, activities, dialog, dates and schools (except Brentwood High School) described or represented in The 99th Match, are fictional though based on a true story. A small synopsis of the true story was partially published as "Pinned!" in the New Era magazine, Oct 2000, pgs. 12-14.



*This story is dedicated to all of the children
who are born into their 99th match without
a coach to teach them the ropes, nor
a team to support them, as they face their real
and seemingly insurmountable challenges.*

You are never alone.



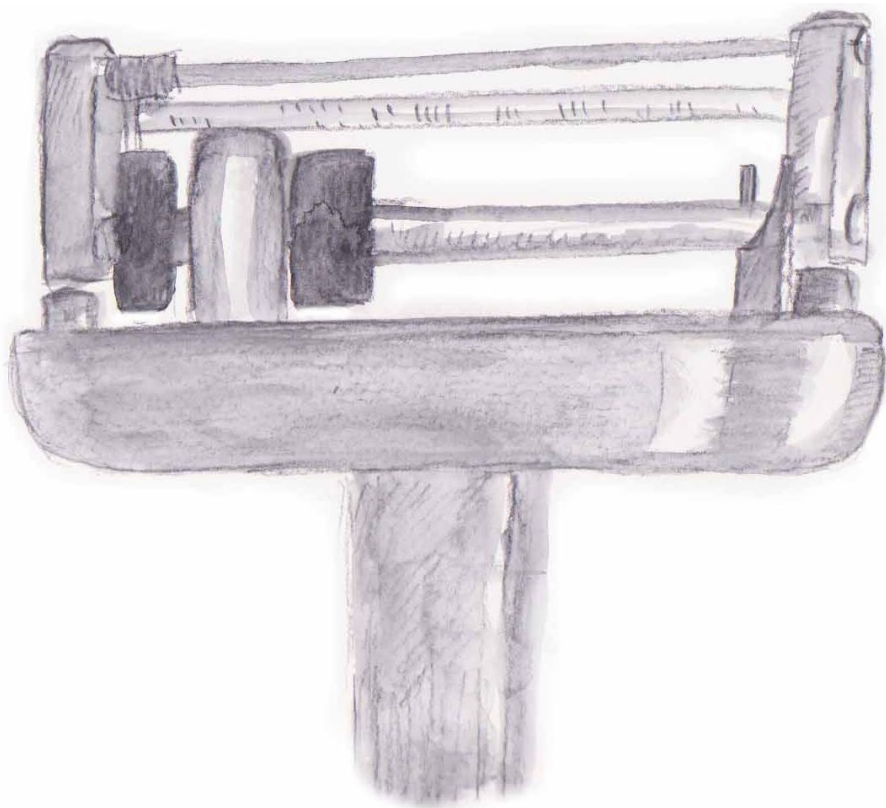
Wrestling Rules

Not everyone is familiar with the sport or lingo of wrestling. For those of you unfamiliar with what the author considers God's favorite sport, this short list of wrestling rules will help:

- A typical wrestling team is composed of twelve wrestlers who compete in specific weight classes. Throughout the year all wrestlers compete in their individual weight class.
- Their individual scores contribute a set number of points that are added to the overall team score regardless of the individual match score. Generally, the team gets three points for a win or what is referred to as a decision, four points for a point spread of 8 to 15 points, and six points for a win as the result of a pin.
- A 'pin' occurs when a wrestler's back and shoulder blades are placed squarely on the mat for two seconds. Pining your opponent is the object of every wrestling match. If you pin your opponent, you win automatically and six points are added to your team score.
- A High School match consists of three two-minute periods, and an overtime period in the case of a tie if needed. Sometimes the first period can be three minutes long depending on league rules.
- Each wrestler can weigh less than their weight class allows, but if the wrestler's weight exceeds the class designation he will not be allowed to compete.
- In this story, weight classes for high schools wrestling are separated into the following weight categories: 98 lbs and below, 105 lbs, 112 lbs, 119 lbs, 126 lbs, 132 lbs, 138 lbs, 145 lbs, 155 lbs, 167 lbs, 177 lbs, and Heavy Weight (all weights over 177 lbs).
- A team is generally scheduled for ten to fifteen team competitions during the wrestling season.
- If a team is undefeated, it has won all of its team matches during a single season. However, the team's matches will include wrestlers who lost their individual matches.

- If a team wins all of their individual matches it is called a shutout.
- When a team does not provide a wrestler in a particular weight class, it gaps the position and it is called a bye, default, or forfeit. The opposing team gets six points as though the outcome of the individual match would have been a pin.
- There are two circles on a wrestling mat. The inner circle contains several lines for lineup during the start of each period or is used for resetting the match when one wrestler's hips go outside the outer circle, which is considered out of bounds.
- When either wrestler goes out of bounds during the match, the match will be paused as the referee relocates them to the center of the mat to continue.
- Coaches and teammates must remain off the mat during the competition and opposing teams are lined up on opposite sides of the mats.
- A wrestling team competition is either called a match or a game. If it's a home game, the match is wrestled at the home team's school just like any other sport. If it is an away game, the match is wrestled at the opponent's high school.
- Now that you have all of the rules you need to know about wrestling, you are ready to experience the ninety-ninth match.

Part One



The Invitation

There was a noticeable sense of excitement and anticipation within the halls of Brentwood High School early Saturday morning as Michael Stevens walked swiftly toward the locker room to join the wrestling team for an away game at Smithtown. *Today, history will be made!* he thought enthusiastically. *After years of undefeated wrestling team matches, we'll have our shot at the one-hundredth this afternoon against Bingham High.* He paused momentarily, *But first, we'll have to beat Smithtown for the ninety-ninth.*

The afternoon match would be significant in setting a new Long Island wrestling record that had taken Brentwood High years to accumulate. They had beaten ninety-eight other high school teams over a six year period to build that kind of a record and they had two more matches to win before claiming the title—the widely anticipated one-hundredth undefeated team match. The historic match would be wrestled at Brentwood at one o'clock against Bingham High School and would be attended by New York newspapers and local radio stations. But first, they would have to wrestle their ninety-ninth match at Smithtown High.

As Michael approached the wrestling room through the half lit hallways of Brentwood, he reflected on the historical nature of the event and the earlier week's wrestle-offs. He had lost to a teammate the previous day which frustrated his plans to wrestle in either one of today's historic competitions, but he felt compelled to cheer for his team from the stands despite his defeat. The significance of these two matches was something he valued and had counted on wrestling in, but now could not.

The Bingham match was being wrestled by Brentwood's first-string team while the Smithtown match was being manned by second-string wrestlers. Winning the ninety-ninth match this morning was absolutely necessary for them to qualify for the one-hundredth record setting event later that day. Achieving this new record would be a notable credit to Brentwood's superb wrestling program and would demonstrate the quality of their skillful coaching talent.

Brentwood School District was known for having one of Long Island's most aggressive wrestling programs because the high school was manned with seasoned wrestlers from four separate junior high school wrestling programs, and that made a difference. Though

wrestlers had lost individual matches along the way, Brentwood's JV team consistently amassed enough points at each competition to win the team match, and had remained undefeated. This was an unparalleled record-setting achievement coaches, wrestlers and their fans could be proud of, and they were.

Michael enjoyed the challenges wrestling gave him. He thrived on the team's camaraderie, but most of all, he loved wrestling for Brentwood. Every high school that competed against them was the underdog. Brentwood was the team to beat, the match to win, and the personal victory dreamed for. If a wrestler beat anyone from Brentwood, they were surely somebody and commanded respect. Michael considered himself fortunate to be a member of their wrestling team because in this sport, they were chief among all Long Island high schools.

Every time he wore his wrestling uniform, he felt the spirit of this ancient sport surging through his veins, calling him to arms as he hungered deeply for the challenges that lie ahead in every move and in every match. But little did Michael know that he would soon be invited to wrestle the match of his lifetime, one in which he would be called to sacrifice more than he had to give to carry the day, a match that would also set the course of his life.

This will undoubtedly be an historical day for Brentwood just as the coach said in practice, but perhaps it will even qualify as a world record too. Who's ever heard of such an incredible run like this before?

Michael felt, *a Long Island record is a world record when it comes to wrestling.*

Michael Stevens was an average student at Brentwood, but planned to attend college. He had a great desire to be an astronaut, so knew he had to be a pilot and have an education first. He had his sights set on attending the United States Naval Academy located in Annapolis, Maryland. His guidance counselor thought him unique for having set such lofty goals early in his young adulthood and eagerly assisted him with the application process.



About the Author

A retired Navy pilot, Corporate President and Independent Consultant to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Vinny DiGirolamo is the author and publisher of more than a half dozen books. He learned several of life's most important lessons wrestling for Brentwood High School on Long Island, New York, and at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland—lessons on how to face and overcome life's most difficult challenges.

As a pilot he flew carrier onboard delivery operations to aircraft carriers deploying overseas and the Navy's "Take Charge and Move Out" nuclear command and control mission more commonly known as *TACAMO*. He continues to support the full spectrum of Presidential, senior leadership, and tactical information systems and communication programs for the Department of Defense. He is married to Dana Lynn Nielsen of West Jordan, Utah. She was the head JV cheerleader at Bingham High School about the same time he attended the Naval Academy. They have eleven children and six grand children.