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Petrides coach honored

Legends of the mat on hand to lend support to Beat the Streets effort to promote city wrestling

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- The Beat the Streets Program has been steadily building toward its goal of a youth wrestling empire in New York City since 2004, and they could not have done it without New York City coaches.

A legion of supporters attended a Beat the Streets Program gathering last night that honored New York City coaches and the PSAL at the Bowery Hotel in Manhattan. The gala event brought together members of the program, a number of local coaches, former wrestlers and featured several of the sport's true legends.

Legendary wrestler and coach Dan Gable, a USA Wrestling Hall of Famer and Olympic Hall of Famer; Lee Kemp, 2008 U.S. Olympic Freestyle coach; John Smith, Olympic and World Championship Medal winner; and Lee Roy Smith, National Wrestling Hall of Fame Executive Director were among the celebrities rubbing elbows with members of the city's wrestling community, including several Staten Island's high school coaches.

One local coach had his turn on the dais, as well. Petrides' Michael Blyth, head coach of the 2008 PSAL Dual Champions was honored as the High School Coach of the Year.

Blyth, who said he was most pleased his wife, daughter and two sons were able to attend the event, was quick to thank his fellow Panthers coaches Dave Olah and John Cichon. He brought the pair on stage to share in his honor, saying they were instrumental in the development of the team at Petrides HS.

"I am honored to think that I am worthy of this award," Blyth said. "I'm forever grateful to Beat the Streets for their support of Petrides wrestling."

The Panthers squad has been to the PSAL Dual Championship final in each of the last three seasons and is a fine example of the program that Beat the Streets would like to see built in every school in the five boroughs.

"It all comes down to coaches," said Michael E. Novogratz, Chairman of the Board for Beat the Streets.

Novogratz, who is also the President and Director of Fortress Investment Group LLC, was instrumental in raising more than \$2 million, which went toward the purchase of wrestling equipment and the establishment of more than 40 new programs in the PSAL.

"We can throw a lot of money at the thing," Novogratz said, "but our real genius will be finding, helping to place and then inspiring coaches. We really are a support group for coaches."

In his remarks, Novogratz announced the PSAL would next year begin the organization of both a freestyle and Greco-Roman season for high school wrestling in addition to the existing winter folkstyle season.

PSAL Wrestling Commissioner Larry Cantor and Sports Coordinator Lance Hermus told the Advance they would support that effort, which would make New York the first city in the nation, at the high school or collegiate level, to offer competitive seasons of both freestyle and Greco-Roman disciplines.

"We are sending 500 kids to camp this summer," Novogratz said. "Hopefully they bring back some of the wrestling culture to NYC."

"When we started this thing (in 2004), there was one high school wrestling program in Manhattan," said Al Bevilacqua, President of Beat the Streets. "Now we have 18."

That developmental surge was not lost on wrestling legend Gable, who delivered an impassioned speech to the crowd in attendance.

"It's really important that we have this event here tonight and that we have a catalyst that is actually building something in our sport," Gable said of Beat the Streets and NYC. "You're a catalyst for all the other cities in America that don't have wrestling. They're going to look to you and you're doing a great job, so keep it up."