

Vincent grapples with big honor

National Wrestling Hall of Fame inducts Letchworth High graduate

By Matt Surtel

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ROCHESTER — Dick Vincent had never seen a wrestling match when his coach approached him at Letchworth High School.

That was in the early 1950s, when he was a freshman. And he didn't realize just how far the invitation would take him.

Vincent, 70, was inducted Sunday into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, during a ceremony by the hall's New York chapter, at the Rochester Institute of Technology. He was recognized as an Outstanding American, honoring his accomplishments in wrestling and beyond.

His name will be included at the museum in Stillwater, Okla.

"The criteria is an individual who at some time in their life wrestled, and used their principles and discipline of wrestling, and went on to a career in business, politics or volunteering," said Michael Clair, national director of the Hall of Fame's chapter program. "He attributed his success back to his wrestling days in high school and college." Vincent grew up on a farm in Castile, near Letchworth State Park. He played on the football team and was considering basketball, when coach John Clark asked him to join the wrestling team.

Clark's pitch was wrestling built self-confidence. Vincent thought that sounded like a good idea, and decided to try.

"It worked out very nicely for me,"

he said during a Friday telephone interview. "We had a good team here in Letchworth. It was the first undefeated team Letchworth ever had in 1950 or '51."

Growing up on a farm helped, he said. But his career truly developed once he started college at Cornell University.

"The biggest thing was meeting a really extraordinary coach in Ithaca — Bill Layton," Vincent said. "He coached probably a dozen wrestlers who have gone onto the national finals. He did it as a hobby."

Vincent was himself team captain in his senior year, and the school won the eastern championship for the first time in 30 years.

He placed second in the national competitions, and some of his teammates competed in the Olympics.

"It was exhausting," he said. "It was tiring. Wrestling is a great sport. You've got to be kind of mentally tough to go out there and expose yourself to all these chances of failure."

Vincent earned an agricultural engineering degree and went on to work

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for companies including Mars, Nabisco and Cadbury-Schweppes, and also earned a master's degree from the University of Wisconsin.

He coached various high school wrestling teams over the years, and now lives in Houston.

Beyond wrestling, the award recognized Vincent's personal accomplishments. He's served on the national Easter Seals board, and is on the engineering advisory committee for a company researching biodiesel fuels.

He still follows Section V wrestling, but is now mostly a spectator. He recommends the sport as a way to instill focus and confidence.

"You ask me what I think about now, and that's what the important thing is," Vincent said. "How we can make opportunities for younger people to focus on, hopefully through their careers and their lives. Hopefully wrestling has done that."



Photos courtesy of Cornell University

VG HONORS: Castile native Dick Vincent is shown during his days at Cornell University. In the inset photo, Vincent (at right) accepts a plaque after being inducted into the Cornell Sports Hall of Fame in 1999. On Sunday, Vincent was inducted into the National Hall of Fame.

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