HALL OF FAME SPEECH

FOR

GORDY OPITZ

Hello everyone. It’s a great accomplishment to have been named to the Mercer County Hall of Fame and it’s a privilege to share a few words with all of you tonight as I represent all of the inductees. If there’s one thing I know, it’s that the determination, passion and focus we bring to our sport really helps to inspire other areas of our lives, and to be recognized for our achievements is very rewarding. I know Plato was around waaaaaaaaay before (**Name the sports)** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ was invented, but what he said thousands of years ago holds true today. He said, “You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.” It’s true that athletes’ interactions on the playing field is a form of communication, and the eight of us being honored really believe in our conversation!! This year’s inductees have this award in common, and there’s one more thing we share…. we know that none of this would be possible without the love, support and encouragement we receive from our family, friends, teammates and coaches, so, in a BIG way, we’re ALL Hall of Famers!!

**I'm honored to have this chance to speak on behalf of my newest teammates representing the Class of 2012 and share our gratitude as we receive this incredible honor. I have had the opportunity to meet the inductees and speak with them, and I found an overwhelming degree of humility and gratitude. It became evident that what I wanted to say tonight would be a combined expression of acknowledgement, appreciation and thanks.    In speaking with my fellow inductees, I learned that for the most part, we all came from humble beginnings. We began our sports careers on cobblestone streets, in back alleys, in vacant lots. We made up our own rules and learned the code of ethics inherent in sportsmanship. Sports taught us the essential foundation of life at an early age: we learned about commitment and setting goals. We learned that quitting was not an option. We learned to be part of a team and we learned that the lessons we treasured in sports would be the same ones that would guide us to build a successful and meaningful life.**

**I believe the greatest gift we can give is to simply say “thank you.” Albert Schweitzer was considered a genius and probably not much of a sports enthusiast, but I think we can all learn from his words. He said, “Sometimes our light goes out but it is blown into flame by another human being. Each of us owes deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this light.” Everyone here knows what it feels like when his or her own light feels a little weak and there are definitely people present who act as “rekindlers” on a regular basis. For that we are all very thankful.**

**First, we would like thank the HOF Board of Directors for all of their great work behind the scenes continuing this incredible tradition...the HOF has established itself as a beacon in the community and has created a context that is second to none for the purpose of honoring its past and present inductees.    Each year, the culmination of their efforts is this great evening, although there are hundreds of hours and enormous effort made behind the scenes, all intended to make this night so special.   We thank you for your commitment to insuring that this event is the best!!**

**We want to thank our families, both immediate and extended…. Thanks to our parents for instilling in us a great work ethic, the necessity of sportsmanship, integrity and a value system that plays anywhere in the world, for helping us to understand that putting others first is paramount to success, and for always doing their best to support our goals and dreams. To all the parents out there, sometimes it may not have seemed like we were listening or absorbing life’s lessons. …but we got it and we’re thankful….I bet some of you didn’t expect that!! (Say this playfully and wait for the laugh).**

**To our spouses and children, thank you for always being there to support us and provide unconditional love …you keep us grounded and give our lives purpose. We love you!**

**To our coaches and teachers, we are grateful for always being pushed….I mean encouraged (Wait for the laugh) to constantly become better…Thanks for motivating us to strive for the best, and for believing in us more than we sometimes believed in ourselves…. all of you are great role-models in the bigger picture of life… you are all the true keepers of those rekindled lights….**

**We owe tremendous thanks to our teammates and friends …… thank you for “having our backs.” We learn in life that most things are accomplished with and through others.   Knowing you were there …and will always be there for us in good times and bad times is one of life’s great joys! There is an expression that goes, “I am part of all that I have met, and I am sure that I speak for my fellow inductees when I say, I am proud to be a part of all of you!**

**And of course, a very special thanks to all of our competitors --- thanks for pushing us and MAKING us become better.  We really wouldn’t be here today if not for you!**

**I’d like to acknowledge the coaches and the referees in memory of my grandfather (god rest his soul). He had a tendency to BLAME the refs for everything. He believed that WE never lost a game-the REFS always did. (Say this as an aside, like a secret) ….By the way, he also thought Studio wrestling was real so that gives you some perspective.  (Wait for the laugh). In all seriousness, there were and are many outstanding officials in Mercer County / Western Pa who show up and give their all to make great sporting events.**

**It's amazing that rarely a day goes by that we don't reflect back on the values we learned in our respective communities and sports, and how that has impacted our lives.  You can take the kids out of Mercer County but you can't take the Mercer County out of these kids!!   We were taught honesty, integrity, commitment; dedication and loyalty... to do "what is right", respect one another, win with class and lose with dignity.     Those are the true LESSONS OF LIFE!**

Although we live in a world of chaos and uncertainty, we’ve learned that **people** determine the outcome!   People are hard working… They lead and build teams, organizations and cultures.   People exemplify values, set goals and work to achieve their dreams.   If there is any luck in the world, we create it with “people luck” …….the luck of finding the right mentor, partner, teammate, leader, and of course, **friend** - one of the most important!!! My fellow inductees and I were the lucky ones because we found you!!

 **In closing, words alone can't do justice to how we feel in accepting this honor. We thank all of you for making all of this possible. Please accept our heartfelt thanks for teaching, coaching, guiding, leading, challenging and inspiring us to become better men and women. We look forward to taking the inspiration we’ve received from you and sharing it with the next generation of athletes, teammates, mentors and friends!**

**Thank you all!**