

Coach Wright trains Olympians in Beijing

By Carlie Jo Fusco

A Durant wrestling coach realized two dreams at once when he traveled to Beijing to work with the Chinese Olympic Team in 2019.

Assistant wrestling coach Alex Wright, a former high school standout for Durant, attended St. Ambrose University to study strength and conditioning.

He graduated in May of 2019, and only two weeks after the ceremony, he left to help coach the Chinese Olympic team's long track speed skating athletes.

One of Coach Wright's college professors was a citizen of China who was also working for the Chinese Olympic social media team. In addition to teaching, the professor was assigned to recruit strength and conditioning coaches as well as other athletic trainers who are necessary for a support team at the Olympic level.

As soon as Coach Wright heard about the opportunity, he had no hesitation with traveling across the world. In addition to his goal of coaching elite level athletes, he dreams of traveling the world. This opportunity gave him the best of both worlds.

"I was all excited and thought it was a great opportunity to travel the world,"

Coach Wright said.

Coach Wright enjoyed his time in Beijing. He felt like he was in a whole different world, going from Durant to a city that has more than 20 million people.

He had also experienced what it's like to be a minority, and he said it was humbling.

"It made me understand what it's like to be different. As a white man in America, it's easy to get caught in that majority population," Coach Wright said.

His original contract was supposed to end in March of 2022 following the 2022 Winter Olympics; however, due to COVID-19, he had to stay home after he took a vacation back to the States in January of 2020.

Coach Wright graduated from Durant High School in 2010. He wrestled all four years of high school on varsity, holding the school record for falls in a season with 31. By senior year, he also set the school record of career falls (94) as well as career wins (148). He graduated with a record of 148-26.

During his sophomore season in 2008, he placed fifth in the state wrestling tournament in the 103-pound bracket.



Photo by Carlie Jo Fusco

Assistant wrestling coach Alex Wright (right) and junior Ethan Gast practice before the state qualifying meet on February 13.

Currently Coach Wright's full-time job is a supervisor for UPS, with a side job of coaching the Durant Cat-Pac wrestling team and assisting the high school wrestling team. He has discovered that he has found

the most joy and purpose from his career by being here at Durant.

"Being an effective coach comes down to creating lasting relationships. I get the most out of that by being here," he said.

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loo, Iowa, on February 24. Johnson placed fifth overall with a score of 479. He was the only individual to come to the tournament without a team and place in the top five.

"It was a dream come true to be able to get a medal my first time going as an individual," Johnson said.

"I was really excited though to have my mom, grandma, Coach [Dan] Sterner, and a couple of friends there to see it all happen."

During the two-game series, Johnson bowled a 266 the first game.

"I've been in a bigger situation not once but twice this season, so I was really calm finishing out that first game," Johnson said.

Johnson started to feel the pressure of the state tournament having to follow up after his first game. During the second game, his hand and fingers began to hurt a little bit more.

He followed up with a score of 213 during the second game, bringing his final score to 479.

Johnson's road to state was a struggle.

Due to hyperextending his ring and middle finger, Johnson sat out of six meets before districts hoping that his injury would heal.

Johnson and his parents set up mul-

tiple physical therapy appointments in hopes of returning before districts. However, after the appointments, Johnson saw no signs of his injury getting better.

Two days before districts, he got cortisone shots in both his ring and middle fingers.

Johnson knew what needed to be done in order to qualify for state.

"There was definitely a lot of weight on my shoulders to come back and put up good scores," Johnson said. "It was really weird, and I felt a lot of pressure to come back to."

Districts were held on February 18 at Rose Bowl in Muscatine. Johnson bowled a season-high 516 during his two-game series: 289 the first game and 227 the second one.

This 289 score from his first game in the series was his first game back after a month of recuperation.

"It was a really good feeling, coming off of that long without bowling, and also using a ball I hadn't used since last season," Johnson said.

"It was a really good feeling, and it put me in a really good spot to contend at qualifying for state."

After missing out on a state wrestling appearance by just two places his freshman and sophomore seasons, Wildcat

120-pound junior Ethan Gast finally broke the barrier and gave the Cats their lone state qualifier of the year. Gast felt a sigh of relief after winning his wrestle back in district action at Wapello on February 13.

"It felt like a weight was lifted from my shoulders," said Gast. "The hard work I put in throughout my high school career finally paid off."

Gast wrestled hard in his two post-season meets to get to state. At the sectional meet in Lisbon, Gast won his first match in an 11-2 major decision over Nate Wood from North Cedar, before losing to defending state champion Brandon Paez of Lisbon via fall. Gast finished second during this meet, advancing him to the district meet.

At the district meet in Wapello on February 13, Gast needed three matches to punch his ticket to the state tournament at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines.

In his first match of the day, Gast needed all three periods to beat Garret Dickey of Wapello 8-1.

In his second match, Brandon Paez again got the best of Gast, winning by tech fall 18-3.

Gast would then need to win his wrestle back to ensure his spot in Des Moines.

Heading into possibly the biggest match of Gast's wrestling career, Head

Coach Casey Strub attempted to calm Gast down.

"He told me to wrestle this match just like any other match," Gast said. "I wanted to be aggressive and not let him control the match."

Gast's trip to Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines didn't go as planned for the 120-pounder. After losing his first match by fall to Cade Cook from North Linn in the second period, Gast was forced to wrestle a second match on day one to make it to day two.

Gast controlled his second match heading into the third period leading Paul De Jong from North Mahaska 3-2.

However, an aggressive shot halfway into the final period cost Gast, and De Jong capitalized, pinning Gast with 1:12 left on the clock.

Both Johnson and Gast are using their trips to state as fuel in hopes of making it back to state next season.

"The feeling of losing that last match will stick with me throughout the year and fuel my desire to prove myself next season," Gast said.

Johnson said he will be tweaking little parts of his game and "just consistently shooting my spares, working on staying calm throughout the whole game. If I make a bad shot, just recover the next frame with a mark," said Johnson.

Wilton Cafe's boys' track athlete of the month



Junior Soren Murray-Lopez, a high jumper, is preparing for the upcoming track season. In seventh grade, Murray-Lopez and a friend decided to do the sport together. He "enjoys bus rides to talk and hang out with friends." His favorite races are the 100-meter dash and the 4x100-meter relay.



Murray-Lopez

Arty's Ice Cream and Grill's girls' track athlete of the month



Senior Lillian Nielsen is getting ready for her last high school track season. The best part about the season for Nielsen is the bus rides. Her favorite race is any relay. "I love the anticipation of waiting for my teammate to pass me the baton," says Nielsen. She hopes to complete the whole season without any COVID-19 cancellations and set a new personal record.



Nielsen

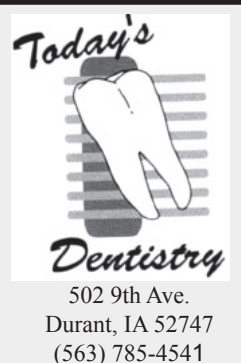


Peels Inc. golfer of the month

Junior Karissa Hoon is gearing up for this next golf season. "I like going to different meets and meeting new people," Hoon said. After going out for a summer camp her eighth-grade year, she has loved it ever since. She plans to get into the low 90s for 18 holes, make it to state, and beat her last year's score of 101.



Hoon



Today's Dentistry coach of the month

Coach Doug Frett has been coaching for 29 years, 13 at Durant. He and his wife have two kids, Cale and Dawson Frett. The family also has a dog, Kona, and a cat, Cookie. "I played many sports growing up, and I wanted to share my knowledge and experiences with others," Coach Frett said. His favorite part is getting to know each athlete and building relationships that last, for most, after their high school careers are over.



Frett