

Turk Pinned Him in Olympics, But...

# No American Defeated Koll

By STEVE SOLOMON

Collegian Sports Writer

He was a wrestler who, in four years of collegiate competition, never walked off a mat second best.

He was a legend in his time, a hero, a three-time NCAA Champion. He was tough. He went off to war at 18 and returned as a mature college sophomore three years later. "But only after he scored a takedown on Hitler," a friend once joked.

His roughest match must have been against the Germans, because he licked every American he faced from 1945 to 1948.

He was Bill Koll, the Penn State wrestling coach, and it may have been in Europe that he decided to make the sport his career. So he developed a style and winning demeanor that stayed with him long after the firm waist and well-defined arms of his youth melted away.

**Fierce Competitor**

He became a champion first, then an authority. He won tournaments, then organized them. His speech comes from a wrestling book, but not his personality. He's warm, personable, candidly honest. He has an aggressive look, but as a high school boy he learned to release it only where it could benefit him—on the wrestling mats. It has made him a fierce competitor, and a winner.

"There's nothing he likes better than a close meet," one of his wrestlers said, "but he'd better have one more point than his opponent after the last match."

Bill Koll's march towards a spot in the record books started after his graduation from Ft. Dodge (Iowa) High School. He entered the State College of Iowa, a small break in the cornfields of the Midwest, and won ten straight dual meets and the state AAU title as a freshman.

Then a battle on a much larger scale called, and Koll, dressed in khakis, was in Europe the following year. The work was dangerous and the towns monotonously similar. Nimes, Clermont-Ferrand, St. Etienne, Troyes. It was hell, but it gave him a certain callousness that only hunting another man with a rifle can give.

**Unraveling Experience**

And by comparison, it gave him the feeling that wrestling a man face to face in front of 5,000 people back in the States isn't the worst ex-

perience in the world.

Koll returned to State College of Iowa in 1945, a sort of athletic Napoleon ready to direct a nation's post-war attention back to the gymnasium. His return elevated SCI above its tassel and silk surroundings and signaled the greatest era of wrestling the school has ever known.



STUDYING the situation are Bill Koll and assistant wrestling coach George Edwards (left). Koll is seldom this quiet during a match as the lively coach frequently takes to his feet to shout encouragement and advice to his wrestlers.

Koll was never defeated in collegiate competition, although it wasn't until his junior year that he overcame the effects of the three year layoff that had him dodging bullets in Europe. He went unscathed through 5 consecutive dual meet bouts, and won the NCAA 145-pound title three times running. Twice he was the outstanding wrestler in the tournament.

**Different Sport**

Wrestling in 1945 was essentially a different sport than its descendant today. The rule book could have been read cover to cover and memorized between the first and second periods of a match. It was a rough sport. Virtually any hold was legal. You had to defend yourself at all times, lest you find yourself lifted five feet off the mats and bounced up and down on your nose several times.

It was a brutal era, but it bred its heroes. Koll's profile decorated the sports pages of many Midwestern newspapers, and he probably could have stolen a few votes from Truman in 1948 if he weren't competing for a medal in the London Olympic Games.

It was in London where he met his match. His opponent in the semifinal round was a Turk with a style completely foreign to the Western method. Koll, nevertheless, scored seven takedowns, but in one agonizing moment left himself vulnerable—and was pinned. With the tough American out of the way, the winner breezed to a gold medal.

**Established as Coach**

Twelve years later, Koll was enshrined in the Helms Athletic Foundation Wrestling Hall of Fame. By that time he was a coach, and rapidly establishing himself in the upper echelon of the nation's wrestling mentors.

Koll had returned to his alma mater in 1953 to succeed his collegiate coach, Dave McCuskey. He produced his first NCAA champion in the same year, Jim Harmon, at 157. Two more followed — Bill Weick at 157 in 1955, and Bill Dotson at 137 in 1963. His eleven year record at SCI was 71-42-6.

He moved on to Penn State in 1964. It was a move into the big time, where Bill Koll belongs. The office is still small, but there is always a story, a few laughs, a blue haze of cigar smoke. And a lot of memories.



Wrestling Coach Bill Koll Gives Directions During a Match



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