

Four Grand Marshals, who have combined to contribute more than 140 years to the sport of wrestling, will lead the annual Grand March of Finalists Saturday night before the championship bouts of the 81st IHSAA Individual Wrestling State Final Tournament.

First held in 1975, the annual March of Finalists is conducted at the State Tournament by the IHSAA in conjunction with the Illinois Wrestling Coaches and Officials Association (IWCOA) and the State Farm Center. Each year the Grand Marshals are honored for their contributions to the sport and to the young men and women who participate in it.

The Marshals play an important role in the color and pageantry of the event. They lead the 84 individual finalists and their coaches in a breathtaking Grand March around the State Farm Center arena floor just prior to the championship bouts. The annual crowd in excess of 10,000 is witness to a spectacle of high school athletics seen nowhere else in America.

Here is a closer look at the 2019 Grand Marshals:

RON COIT

Ron Coit attended high school at Normal Community High School where he established himself as a standout wrestler, which included three years wrestling on the Ironmen varsity squad. During his prep career, he compiled a record of 85-15-12 and was a three-time Capital Conference Champion before graduating in 1977.

After his career on the mat ended as a participant, Ron chose to funnel his passion for the sport into the officiating ranks. He first licensed with the IHSAA as an official in 1980, and began working his way up the ladder until being assigned to officiate his first Regional Tournament in 1988.

Ron's first state final assignment would come a decade later when he was selected to work the 1998 IHSAA Dual Team Wrestling State Finals. His first time working the IHSAA Individual Wrestling State Finals would come in 2000. All told, he has worked the Individual state tourney 11 times and the Dual Team State Finals eight times.

In 2004, he became the first non-coach to receive The George Girardi Award for his dedication to wrestling at the Normal UHIGH George Girardi Invitational. Ron has also worked the Cross State Classic, the Illinois/Indiana Classic Duals, the Middle School National Duals, IKWF State Championships and IESA State Championships on multiple occasions.

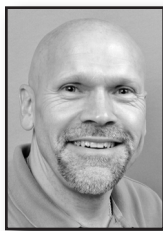
Ron was named Official of the Year by the IWCOA in 2006 and has been nominated for that honor on several other occasions. In 2009, he received the IHSAA 30-Year Service Award and was inducted into the IWCOA Hall of Fame a year later. In 2013, he received Illinois Official of the Year honors from the IHSAA. He is serving on the IESA Officials advisory committee, IESA Wrestling advisory committee and as Head Official for the IESA State Tournament. Beginning in 2019, Ron will be serving on the IHSAA Wrestling advisory committee.

A resident of Farmer City, Ron and his wife Kaye have been married for 38 years. They have three married daughters, Melissa, Melinda and Sara. They also have six grandchildren with one more on the way.

DON MEKEEL

A 1971 graduate of Dixon High School, Don was a captain, NCIC Conference champion, and a sectional qualifier while being coached by Wayne Morse and IWCOA Hall of Famer Ron Semetis. His college career continued under another IWCOA Hall of Famer in Dr. Robert Koehler at Illinois State University, where he earned two letters for the Redbirds. Don also went on to earn his Master's Degree from Northern Illinois University.

His teaching career began at Rock Falls High School where he met IWCOA Hall of Fame official Mr. Tony Licocci. Tony mentored him for many years on the mats before Don moved on to a role at Sterling High School, where he coached wrestling, cross country, and track. As Sterling's head wrestling coach, he compiled 140 wins, and his 2002 team was the first in school history to advance to the IHSAA Dual Team State Finals. The 2003 squad then set a school-record with 25 victories. All told, he coached 18 NCIC Champions, 14 IHSAA state qualifiers, three state place-winners and 10 wrestlers with 100 or more wins. Don was nominated by the



Ron Coit
Farmer City



Don Mekeel
Sterling



Rob Murphy
Wilmington



Ron Ryan
Mt. Olive

IWCOA for Coach of the Year honors in 2002 and was chosen by Sauk Valley Newspapers as wrestling Coach of the Year three times.

For nine years, Don coached the Sauk Valley Freestyle and Greco-Roman Wrestling Club and produced several state champions and All-Americans. He has supervised the Unit 5 Matmen youth wrestling program and directed the "All-American Wrestling Camp" bringing nearly 50 All-American wrestlers to the Sterling area to instruct young wrestlers. Don established the Sterling Wrestling Club, which has awarded over \$50,000 in college scholarships and financial aid to wrestlers. Don was inducted into the Sterling High School Athletic Hall of Fame in 2007.

In addition to his coaching, Don has been a wrestling official for 44 years. He has been teaching "New official" classes the past 15 years and has recruited 75 new wrestling officials in that time. He has had the honor of officiating the IHSAA Individual and Dual Team State Final tournaments 18 times. He served as the Head Official at the 2012 Dual Team State Tournament and at the 2013 Individual State Tournament. Don was voted IWCOA Official of the Year in 2014 and 2016. He is an IHSAA Officials Clinician; rules interpreter and currently serves on the IWCOA executive board as its President. He has been NCAA certified and has officiated the Ken Kraft Midlands Championships at Northwestern University three times. Don was inducted into the IWCOA Hall of Fame in 2012.

Don currently resides in Sterling with his wife, Diane. He has two sons, Ryan and Christopher, who are both IHSAA wrestling officials, as well as two daughters, Allison and Leslie, two

grandsons, Emmett and Miles and, another grandchild expected this summer. Don retired from coaching in 2003 and teaching in 2008. This will be his last year to carry a schedule as a wrestling official.

ROB MURPHY

Rob Murphy is a 1981 graduate of Coal City High School, where he wrestled under Hall of Fame Coach George Dare. His senior year he finished in 3rd place in his weight class in Illinois, leading his team to a 2nd place finish at state.

Murphy attended Joliet Junior College and later Olivet Nazarene University, where he was a three-time NCCAA National Champion; leading his team to National titles in his junior and senior seasons. He graduated from Olivet with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education and was also commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army Reserve.

Murphy started his teaching and coaching career at Lincoln High School under Hall of Fame Coach Floyd Bee. He then got his first head wrestling coaching job at Wilmington High School, where he has been for the past twenty-five years.

While at Wilmington High School, his teams have won 10 conference championships, 12 regional championships and qualified for Dual Team State 10 times. His dual teams have trophied six times, 4th in 2010, 2nd in 2006 and 2nd in 2017, and won State Championships in 2007, 2008, and 2009. All told in his career, Murphy's teams have won 535 duals with 142 losses. He has coached 115 state qualifiers, 50 state medalists, with 19 of them making it to the Grand March and 10 winning Individual State Champions, including his sons' Rob and Jake.

Rob was a finalist for the National High School Athletic Coaches Association Coach of the Year in 2010 and 2018. He is a member of the IWCOA Hall of Fame, past IWCOA Man of the Year and a two-time Coach of the Year award recipient. He has been an active member of the IWCOA for the past 25 years and has also served as the organization's President.

Rob lives with his wife, Tina, of 34 years in Wilmington. They have two sons, Rob and Jake and a daughter, Erin, and three grandchildren, Avery, Kyler and Evelyn.

RON RYAN

Waverly High School did not have a wrestling program when Ron Ryan roamed the hallways as a student there in the early 1960's, so his introduction to the sport came during PE classes as a student at Western Illinois University. He found he had a knack for the mats and worked his way onto the university's varsity team before earning his degree in 1967.

Ron began his teaching career at Mt. Olive High School in 1967, and would go on to start the school's wrestling program in 1969. He taught for 34 years at Mt. Olive, while also simultaneously serving as the Athletic Director for many years, before ascending to the school's principal role in 2001. He served as the head wrestling coach throughout that time and continues to today despite retiring as principal in 2008.

With an enrollment generally around 150 students, Ron was able to promote the sport in surrounding communities like Gillespie, Staunton and Bunker Hill, who coopered with Mt. Olive to provide greater depth and participation. Ron has won over 450 dual team matches in his career, helping guide the Wildcats to the Elite Eight of the IHSAA Dual Team tourney in 1985. His teams captured an IHSAA District title in 1975 and followed with Regional crowns in 1979 and 1980.

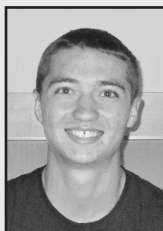
Ron has coached 54 state qualifiers in his career, including his son Eric, who was a Sectional champion and two-time state qualifier who earned four letters at the University of Illinois as a walk-on under Mark Johnson. Four wrestlers have been crowned state champions under Ron's tutelage, including a pair of two-time state champs in Brad Stockstill and Pat O'Neal.

Ron has served multiple terms on the IHSAA Wrestling Advisory Committee and is a past nominee for IWCOA Coach of the Year. He was inducted into the IWCOA Hall of Fame in 1994 and received the organization's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007.

National Anthem Soloists



Madalyn Schmitt
Normal (University)
Friday



Payton Borich
Urbana (H.S.)
Saturday