

## WRESTLING, from B1

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telling my parents,” he said. “They thought I was still playing basketball. I wasn’t sure they’d let me wrestle. When it came time for the first match, I was in the lineup at 95 pounds but my parents hadn’t signed my permission slip.

“When I got home, the newspaper had already printed the lineup and it was sitting on the table, along with the signed permission slip.”

One of the things Burtnett appreciates most about wrestling is how smaller athletes – like himself back then – are able to compete.

“It’s available for all sizes,” he said. “There’s a class for everyone, from the smallest kids all the way up to 285 pounds.”

Burtnett wrestled through high school and into college at Lock Haven University in

Lock Haven, Pa. He finished third in the 1960 Pennsylvania State College Wrestling Championships.

After college, he had head-coaching stints at two high schools in Pennsylvania before moving to Rider, where he compiled a 10-year record of 94-34-2 and coached 14 individual conference champions. His 1973-74 squad was the only Rider team to go undefeated (15-0-1) in a season.

Burtnett stepped down as Rider’s coach in 1978 to pursue another passion – athletic training – as the school’s first full-time director of sports medicine. But he was far from done with wrestling. In addition to officiating at the high school and college level, Burtnett coached at two high schools, a middle school and a PAL program before moving to The Villages in 2003.

### Life in ‘retirement’

Even in “retirement” in The

Villages, Burtnett couldn’t stay away from wrestling. When T.D. Talbott was starting the Buffalo program, he looked for people in The Villages with a wrestling background to help. Among those he found was Burtnett.

“I’d do clinics for T.D. and I was his ‘coach in the stands,’” Burtnett said. “I’d watch the kids and take notes, then I’d give T.D. my observations and he’d work with them.”

Talbott appreciated Burtnett’s attention to detail.

“The main thing I can say about (Burtnett) is he is a perfectionist,” Talbott said. “He is very knowledgeable and he keeps learning, even to this day. He loves wrestling and has done a lot for the sport. He’s really deserving of this award.”

In addition to the “America Needs Wrestling Award,” Burtnett is a member of the Rider University Athletic Hall of Fame, the New Jersey Chapter of the National Wrestling

Hall of Fame, and the Bedford County Athletic Hall of Fame. He also received a Dedication of Service Award from the New Jersey Wrestling Officials Association.

Burtnett’s latest honor comes at a crucial point in wrestling’s history. The International Olympic Committee Executive Board recommended in February that the sport be removed from the Games, starting in 2020. That led to an international effort to save the sport, which has been part of the Olympics since 708 B.C. A final decision by the full IOC will be made in September.

“It’s out of our hands now,” Burtnett said. “We’ve done all we can. Now we’ve got some good people whose job it is to make the case. It will be up to them.”

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