

Willie Gadson a True American Success Story

I first met Willie Gadson in the summer of 1972 at a wrestling tournament here on Long Island. Wrestling was new to me, since I just completed my first year of wrestling at Mepham High School. This would be the first time I would be wrestling in an open college tournament with many of my future teammates from Nassau Community College and one of those teammates was Willie Gadson. Even though Willie and I never wrestled each other that day I knew I was going to have my hands full once the season started and so did one of my other teammates Anthony (Jocko) Giacomaggio. I can still remember Jocko saying "There is no way we are going to beat that guy from Huntington HS even if we wrestled him at the same time". We would learn very quickly that we were never going to beat him or even take him down, but then again nobody ever took him down during his time at Nassau Community College. Willie would end his career at Nassau with a record of 40-0 and winning two NJCAA National Championships before going to Iowa State University.

We were all so proud of Willie and his accomplishments because we all knew that he didn't have it easy. I can still remember Willie driving that old Volkswagen Bug from Huntington to Nassau, I don't even think Willie had car insurance or even proper license plates on the car but nothing was going to stop him from getting to school. Even while at school I remember one of the professors telling Coach Henke that Willie wasn't college material and that he should find a job. Willie wouldn't take no for an answer and always was looking to prove people wrong, Willie loved to compete.

I would learn first-hand what it was like to compete against Willie Gadson, since I was his wrestling partner for two years. Those two years I would never forget for the rest of my life. What I learned in that wrestling room at the age of 17 would be a life changing event without even knowing it. I would learn never to give up, keep on fighting and how to compete; an experience that I'll never forget. As time went on Willie and I would be separated by two time zones but that didn't stop us from talking to each other frequently, especially during wrestling season. He loved Nassau Community College and always would give me a call especially before the NJCAA National Tournament. He was so proud of the success of our team but in all honesty that success was because of him, he taught me everything. The past few years we not only talked about Nassau wrestling but about a new rising wrestling star at Iowa State University. He was so proud of Kyven and his accomplishments, Kyven even though your dad has left us here on earth, the greatest honor anyone could have is people talking about you. Your dad is still with us. By the way, you have so many fans pulling for you here on Long Island, good luck at the NCAA Nationals.

Willie your legacy here at Nassau CC is second to none and all the lives you have touched during your life will never be forgotten. You inspired me to be the best and that is something that I will pass on to our future youth.

(I'll miss you Willie) Your Teammate, Friend

Paul Schmidt