

Q&A with Pat Dougherty



I recently had the opportunity to sit down with one of Loyola's wrestling greats, Pat Dougherty '10, for a candid interview about his past as a wrestler, football player, and his experiences at Loyola as well as his college football career. This interview is the 2nd in a series of interviews to come. With the start of the IHSA State Series beginning and the Regional Tournament this Saturday, I thought it would be great to sit down and talk some wrestling with the past Regional Champ, 2x Sectional Qualifier, State Qualifier. Pat is arguably one of the greatest wrestlers in Loyola History with his 41 wins in one season, being the most of any Loyola Wrestler ever. He also held the career wins record and several other records that have recently just been broken, but many remaining intact. Enjoy the read and make sure to keep your eyes out for more interviews in the next few weeks as we enter the IHSA State tournament series.

STEPHENS: Thanks for taking the time to meet with me and discuss your past and your experiences at Loyola as a wrestler and football player.

DOUGHERTY: Certainly. I have made a lot of good memories as well as great friends during my time at Loyola.

STEPHENS: This is my second interview in the series of Q&A interviews that I am conducting. This is obviously one that is very special for me as I had the opportunity to coach you throughout your high school career. Now that you are done with your wrestling career and you look back upon all the time you spent in the Loyola wrestling room, what are some of the greatest memories of wrestling for Loyola?

DOUGHERTY: Wrestling for Loyola was an unreal experience I was able to meet and work with a lot of different coaches and saw a lot of wrestlers come and go. I think each year I had some great memories that stood out to me. My freshman year was interesting transitioning from the grammar school club into the high school level. It really shows that the wrestlers who were involved in kids clubs have a huge advantage with the fundamentals because the movements that are new to people can take at least a whole season to get used to. My sophomore year was cool because I

began experimenting with off-season wrestling including freestyle and Greco roman and also competing at state level tournaments. My junior year was very pivotal in my career adding the expertise and experience of Coaches Vince Colletti and Tim Loeffel to the Rambler coaching staff. Very knowledgeable guys who enjoyed taking turn kicking my butt. Then my senior year was special because I had reached some goals I had not intended on reaching while trying to become one of the best wrestlers in the state.

STEPHENS: When was it that you started wrestling?

DOUGHERTY: I began wrestling at age 8 at OPRF and then the club moved to Fenwick after a few years.

STEPHENS: Is it true that Nick & Chris Dardanes were the guys who got you involved in wrestling? They are both stars for the University of Minnesota and potential All-American, possibly National Champions this year. Do you still keep in touch with them and follow their collegiate wrestling career?

DOUGHERTY: Yes. I attended the Big Ten Wrestling Tournament last year at U of I and this year I was at their dual meet at Northwestern. At Northwestern, I ran into a lot of my kids club coaches including Mr. Barnhisel (father of Bobby Barnhisel - Fenwick state champion 152lbs 2009) and a lot of other mentors and it was cool to see them and catch up. I have known the Dardanes twins since I was 2 years old. For those who don't know, I have a twin sister and our parents became friends at a twin club. We also played football together throughout grade school. If they were not such instant studs at sports at age 6 I don't think I would have been the same athlete I am today. We were in a different category than the other kids in grammar school that just played basketball. We had learned things like accountability and mental toughness at a young age. I am very proud of those two warriors.

STEPHENS: After you had graduated from Loyola, you have become somewhat of an icon. After shattering almost every wrestling record in all categories, younger wrestlers strived to break those records. Some have come close and some have succeeded. Nonetheless, you had set an example for these younger guys on the team and you set a bar for them to aim for. Who were some of the guys that were role models for you that you looked up to earlier in your career?

DOUGHERTY: Easy. Anthony Harvey. His picture was on the wall. Freshman year I asked coach Picchietti, "How do I could get my picture on the wall"? He said you have to be a state qualifier. That was a standard that had been reached before so I wanted to qualify for state my junior year like he did. I had never seen him wrestle, nor had I ever met him, but he must have been important so I wanted to be the next one to be on the wall. In a way I hope that kids who may have never met me and want to be great high school wrestlers will want to do the same thing and do whatever it takes to leave a mark and not just be a passerby.

STEPHENS: What do you view as being your greatest accomplishment as a wrestler in high school at Loyola?

DOUGHERTY: I think my greatest accomplishment was my varsity career wins. I believe I was 92-32 and that was lettering on varsity 3 years. I had 8 varsity matches my freshman year going 4-4. I came along way under some great direction.

STEPHENS: You received a lot of attention from colleges to play football as well as wrestle. Ultimately, you chose to play football for Illinois State University. What made you chose football over wrestling? Do you ever think about returning to the mats?

DOUGHERTY: Well the schools that had shown interest in me for both sports were small D-2 and D3 colleges, with a few FCS D-1aa for football. After my parents had worked their tails off to send TWO kids through Loyola at the same time and that shaped me into who I am and Loyola had allowed me tremendous opportunity. I wanted to be able to pursue a sport that I had a higher chance of earning some money off of my college tuition. That is why I chose one of the top FCS programs in the Midwest in Illinois State. They had offered me a small amount of money off my tuition when I signed and just recently I had earned a partial scholarship. I miss wrestling all the time but I am still around it whether it's coaching my younger brother, helping some young Ramblers at Loyola or supporting my friends at the collegiate level.

STEPHENS: In HS, you were a 2x Most Valuable Wrestler in wrestling and were the CCL Blue Division Defensive Player of the Year. How was it that you were able to compete in these two sports and such a high level?

DOUGHERTY: I think the two sports go well together and a lot of the same mentality transfer over from football and wrestling. I just really enjoyed both of them and wanted to be the best I could be. Both sports helped each other even if both of my coaches were fighting over my off-season attention I was still able to excel in both. The weightlifting and training I did in football helped me be a strong and fast upper weight wrestler. The grappling technique and being able to use my hands effectively from wrestling made me a nightmare in pass rushing. Of course mental toughness is everything when it comes to these sports, the classroom and my social life.

STEPHENS: What did you do in the off-season to prepare for both sports? Did you find that it was difficult to transition from the football field to the wrestling mats after going so far in the playoffs for football and missing the beginning of the wrestling season?

DOUGHERTY: In the off-season I tried to accommodate both sports. I was constantly busy and I really liked it. I was never bored. Between lifting and conditioning for football and wrestling free style and Greco a few times a week throughout the spring and summer I knew that I was going to have a lot of fun my senior year. The transition is always tough because football is a sprint and wrestling is a marathon. I always had to do some extra work in getting back into wrestling form and sometimes we wouldn't have had any days of practice and compete in 10 matches in two days. Many of us were dual sport athletes so we were used to it and knew that we had a grind ahead of us.

STEPHENS: You had the opportunity of having a great wrestling partner in your co-captain and teammate, Tom Kelly. Do you feel that played a role in your success? Do you feel that you played a role in his success? Do you and Tom still keep in touch with each other?

DOUGHERTY: Tom Kelly and I were great wrestling partners. We never brother-in-lawed each other, we just always expected the best efforts from one another. We took tremendous pride in being leaders in the room and being elected captains by our peers. It helped wrestling him because he was a much bigger guy and I had to rely on good technique and proper setups to take him down. Anything less than my best was not going to work on Tom. Same went for Tom. He

would work on eliminating bad habits of being a “muscler” in order to wrestle at the top of his game. Most of the time his game plan was to muscle and it worked 80 percent of the time but he won some big matches his senior year using some very finesse technique. And Yes me and Tom are still good buddies I will see him a few times a year and sometimes we work out together when were both home on break.

STEPHENS: I think it’s safe to say that you will most likely be inducted into Loyola’s Hall of Fame for Wrestling and Football as well. How does it make you feel knowing that your name will be etched into Loyola Athletics for eternity?

DOUGHERTY: It is an honor and I hope that I am in the hall of fame at Loyola someday. It is a great feeling knowing that I made the most of my time in those halls and the welcome I receive when I come and visit it is just a great place to be a part of.

STEPHENS: There are wrestling programs all across the state losing participants to other sports, i.e. football, lacrosse, hockey, baseball... Wrestling is a no-cut sport while these other sports have cuts or the possibility of not getting any playing time if the athlete doesn’t participate in off-season training. What are your thoughts? Do you feel that there are certain sports that compliment each other? You were someone who had the pressure of participating in Football and Wrestling at Loyola? Was there any time-share issue? Do you feel that you would have done better if you chose 1 sport?

DOUGHERTY: It’s like I stated earlier I think that football and wrestling go together and I truly believe that without the help of both sports I would have just been an average wrestler or an average football player. I also think in high school you should play the sports that you want to play because it’s about what you learn from your experiences and having fun. That’s why you lift all those weights in the off-season and go to all those off-season wrestling tournaments, because the games and the competitions are fun. After being a college athlete, you realize that the number of people that play sports beyond high school is really small. So in my opinion, if you want to play a sport in high school, make sure you are getting something out of it because it might be the last team you are a part of.

STEPHENS: What is most significant about the culture of wrestling in your opinion? Is this promoted at LA?

DOUGHERTY: The culture of wrestling is toughness. Not everyone wants to do it and they shouldn’t. It’s hard. It’s grueling on your body. You sweat... A lot. But, after all the sweat and hard work, it is very rewarding. I think that if people realized how rewarding it is, they would not have an issue with the training. The juice is worth the squeeze, but unfortunately it is sometimes hard to convince guys who have not been through anything like that before. As a coach, you taught me the concept of “delayed gratification”. At first, I kind of thought you were a little crazy, but then after placing in the Sophomore State tournament and I experienced that gratification (or a little taste of that juice), it all made sense. The feeling of getting your hand raised after a big match and accomplishing a goal like that is unlike any feeling. It’s better than winning a football game, because you are on the wrestling all by yourself. You put the work in yourself and you get all the credit and praise. You get your hand raised which is something so simple, but yet such a tremendous feeling.

STEPHENS: Would you like to see anything change with the wrestling culture here at Loyola?

DOUGHERTY: At Loyola, I think that the culture has changed quite a bit over my time and the culture is understood among the students and even the faculty. I know people understand when there leaving the building to go home at 3:15 and see the wrestling team running up and down the stairs, they know those guys are nuts to put themselves through that. But they also know and respect the dedication that goes along with it. I would like to see more guys just come out for the team and try it. We have a lot of great athletes in the school that could be great wrestlers. I think more of them should come out for wrestling and just see what happens. Maybe it will help them become more mentally tough, or more focused, or disciplined, or control their aggression, or understand time management or just become a better person and student. If you are the type of person who enjoys a competitive environment and wants to compete and succeed, then you should try the sport of wrestling. If you want to be a bad dude on the football field, why not put your money where your mouth is a get on the mat? Like I said before, it is not a sport that is for everyone, but it does help build character and helps boys become men.

STEPHENS: Would you ever consider coming back to Loyola to coach or assist in any capacity? If so, which sport would you rather coach, football or wrestling?

DOUGHERTY: I think I would love to coach wherever I would be needed. My goal is to work in athletics someday, possibly an athletic director of a university or high school. So who knows, maybe I can help coach a sport while doing something like that. Maybe one of those schools is Loyola.

STEPHENS: How would you say high school wrestling has evolved since you participated?

DOUGHERTY: The new weight classes I think were a smart change. Also, there is a lot of technique that I am seeing little kids do when I watch elite IKWF tournaments that I don't even know. I am pleased when I see that because I know that there is still a lot of involvement in the sport and that it is not going to change.

STEPHENS: I think the biggest thing to change since you wrestled is the new weight class changes. You started the season at 189 pounds and then cut down to 171 pounds. That is a very large gap between those weight classes. Now, they have added a 182 pound weight class and broke up that huge gap (170, 182, 195). What weight class would you have gone if the new weight classes had been around during your senior season? I feel like you would have been a perfect fit at 182 and would have been a State Champion for sure, but then another side of me thinks that you would have been trying to cut down to 170.

DOUGHERTY: I think 182 would have been a great weight class for me because that's what I naturally weighed after football. I was 182ish at the Maine East invite and I felt very strong, but the weight class was 189 and I was underweight. I even recall eating nachos between dual meets that day. That would have been great if they had that my senior year.

STEPHENS: Would you like to see any changes made to the Loyola wrestling program?

DOUGHERTY: I think the program is on the rise. The kids enter the program as boys, and if they stick it out for four years, they leave Loyola as fine young men who are prepared for life. Most wrestlers in general DO NOT go on to wrestle beyond high school, but the things that they learn in that room will carry with them the rest of their lives. The Loyola wrestling program and staff has

the capabilities of producing D1 wrestlers if the wrestlers choose to put in the work, but it is producing good men that are tougher than when they came in as freshman and are ready and prepared for the real world. For years, we have referred to this as being, BOSS TRAINED. For those of you reading this who has wrestled under Coach Stephens, you know exactly what I am talking about.

STEPHENS: What are some goals (long term and short term) you would like to see accomplished by LA wrestling?

DOUGHERTY: I would like to see more success in the Chicago Catholic League conference Championships and at the state level. Our conference is the best in the State when it comes to Football and Wrestling. Loyola is seeing great successes on the football field, but that is not necessarily transferring to the wrestling mat. We are seeing Champions and all-conference wrestlers now on an annual basis, but I would really like to see us progress and compete as a team with the other Powerhouse teams in our conference. I think that Loyola has incredible athletes walking the halls of the school, but they just need to challenge themselves to come out for wrestling and stick with it for 4 years. Then we will see success as a team. I would also like to see perennial state qualifiers and place-winners. The coaching staff is in place and the Loyola facilities are some of the best in the state. Now we just need to have some kids step up to the challenge.

STEPHENS: How would you like to see Loyola wrestling program expand its horizons?

DOUGHERTY: I agree with Coach Picchiatti on getting JV and B team football guys. A little wrestling couldn't hurt their chances of success on the football field. It definitely didn't hurt Tom Kelly or myself. Both Tom and I were actually not starters on the football team freshman year. I believe it was wrestling and hard work that propelled us to be great in both Football and Wrestling.

STEPHENS: How active are you in following the sport at a high school level (or any level) since participating in it?

DOUGHERTY: I don't follow much high school these days I am starting to not recognize names of kids anymore. Now I just watch college every now and then. I think I'll follow it more once my brother enters high school.

STEPHENS: Yes, you have a younger brother (Mikey) who is wrestling in the kid's wrestling club. Who is going to be coaching him when he comes to Loyola; you or me?

DOUGHERTY: I am not sure who is going to be coaching him or even where he is going to high school. Have you seen the price of tuition for Loyola these days?! Obviously, own hopes are for him to attend Loyola, and in that case, we can hopefully coach him together.

STEPHENS: Great answer, Pat! There is no doubt that you have one of the greatest and most decorated resume in Loyola Academy history. You were a 2x All-Conference in some of the hardest weight classes the conference has ever seen, 2x Regional Finalist, and Regional Champion. You were a finalist or Champion in almost every tournament you wrestled in throughout your Junior & Senior campaigns. You had the most varsity wins in Loyola history until that was broken just 2 years ago. You are arguably one of the best if not the greatest Rambler Wrestler of all time. If you were to pick the top 5 wrestlers in Loyola history, who would they be?

DOUGHERTY:

1. Michael Paloian - Loyola's only state place-winner.

He got what everyone below on this list was striving for, and for that we are proud as heck but green with envy.

2. Pat Dougherty - sometimes he tech-pinned kids.

3. Matt Picchietti - he was a man among boys in high school. I also once saw him bulldog a kid into a locker. But in all seriousness he was a two sport stud and pretty bright for a meathead.

4 & 5. Chris Schultz and Tom Kelly tie for the 4th spot. Both were CCL champions and a match away from placing downstate. These guys were absolute beasts.

STEPHENS: Pat, I would like to thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me for this interview. It was a pleasure to coach you over the years and I am extremely happy that we have remained friends after you graduated. The Loyola Wrestling community appreciates all the great memories that you have given us over the years. I would like to wish you luck and continued success as you finish up your collegiate football career. Thanks again for taking your time to chat with this old man!

DOUGHERTY: Anytime Chris. You have been a great coach and friend to me. The Rambler Wrestling program is headed in the right direction and has a great future ahead with you as the Head Coach. I wish you and the Ramblers best of luck this season. GO RAMBLERS!