



# FAREWELL TOUR

PHOTOS BY COREY MEINTS/ACKLEY WORLD JOURNAL

Dozens of former Gerbracht-trained wrestlers gathered to bid farewell to head coach Chad Gerbracht at Senior Night. They were part of a sendoff that included people who helped him along the way to a 24-year career.

Gerbracht leaves coaching shoes on the mat

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It's customary for wrestlers to leave their shoes in the middle of the mat to announce their retirement. Chad Gerbracht's competitive days may have ended some time ago, so maybe he will leave a stat book instead now that he has officially retired from coaching.

Gerbracht was hired as an assistant at AGWSR in 1999 under Dave Wagner but he was thrown into the head job as Wagner wrestled and ultimately lost his match with cancer. Gerbracht had a chance to learn the ropes under Wagner for about a year.

"I was named the interim head coach about a week before my second season in 2000," Gerbracht said. "Unfortunately, it became permanent around mid-season. I wasn't looking for it. I was hoping to learn from a veteran coach first then possibly look for a head job. I knew how to wrestle but knew very little about the transportation, scheduling, ordering uniforms, planning practices, dealing with parents, weigh-in procedures, organizing youth programs."

As this season, his last, enters the tournament stage with Conference, District and State ahead, Gerbracht leaves with a 225-281-1 record. He's coached 40 North Iowa Cedar League medalists, 12 champions, 25 State qualifiers, and 23 State medalists.

"After last season I started thinking about it," Gerbracht said. "Spending more time with my family is the biggest reason. I want the freedom to volunteer without a schedule, help Ali (his daughter) out when she needs or wants it at Cedar Falls. I don't want to miss anymore of Gavin's activities because I'm coaching other people's

kids. I'm also finding out the body doesn't handle the physical grind of wrestling at my age as well."

Over his 24 seasons in the corner, Gerbracht said he has built a lot of memories. Surprisingly few of them dealing with actual results on the mat.

"There are so many great memories," Gerbracht said. "Like traveling to team camps with various groups, watching kids achieve their goals, past alumni stopping in to catch a practice, crowning Ali as the first Girls State Champion, and listening to youth wrestlers with dreams of being the next State Champion."

And though he said his body can't take the wear and tear it once could, Gerbracht said he will miss practices the most.

"I love it when the kids come in talking smack to each other to start practice, then grind it out for the next two hours," Gerbracht said. "Nobody knows how much work these kids put in except us in that room. I will also miss working and hanging out with my coaching staff. Without them, I'd be in a lot of trouble."

But there are certainly things he won't miss.

"I won't miss early morning bus rides and late night stat tracking or running multiple programs - youth, girls and boys - all at the same time," Gerbracht said. "Those were some long days. You know going in it is a thankless job most days. Like the kids, you like to be patting on the back and told you are doing a good job once in awhile by the people in charge. My athletes and most of the parents throughout the years have been very grateful and understanding of the hours that coaches invest in these kids."

Though he had one more home meet on Jan. 14 with the home invite, which his Cougars won with four champions, his official farewell was two nights earlier on Senior Night. More than two dozen of his old wrestlers were there wearing "Gerbracht



Chad Gerbracht walked away from a 24-year head wrestling coaching career at the end of this season. He did it with his final four State qualifiers and his 23rd State medalist.

Trained" T-shirts. Countless others from his past, including his Independence High School Coach Brett Adams (an Iowa Falls State medalist) were in the gym as well.

"It meant the world to me," Gerbracht said. "Some days you wonder if you've made a difference in each of your athletes' development and lives - scratching your head to find a way to motivate them to be the best version of themselves. Then you have a night like that and you can go to sleep knowing you did a pretty good job with these individuals. I'm so proud to see those kids that are now adults being successful in their academic careers, their professional careers, in their marriages and in how they are raising their own kids. Life is good."

As a wrestler, Gerbracht won three WAMAC conference titles at Independence. He was a three-time district qualifier, and was named to the Iowa Elite Team. He continued wres-

ting at Wartburg where he was a three-time letter-winner, two-time All Conference honoree, two-time national qualifier, an All American and a member of the first National Championship Knight squad.

That's a lot for a guy who didn't even necessarily like wrestling when he was young.

"I didn't love wrestling growing up but I did it because my friends did it," Gerbracht said. "Midway through college I really started loving the process and enjoying the sport. I was surrounded by some really great coaches and teammates that made it fun. Then comes the coaching, sharing your knowledge and experiences with the next generation hoping they make a few less mistakes along the way. Wrestling is a physical sport and I love that aspect. It will reward you and it will humble you, so make sure you're ready. The sport teaches us to set goals, to work hard, how to

overcome challenges and how to get back up when you get knocked down. I used to believe it is a sport for everyone but it isn't and that is why they quit. Wrestlers are a breed of their own, sometimes you have to help kids locate this quality."

Gerbracht has coached all three of his kids at one level or another including Ali, now the head coach of the Cedar Falls girls' program and son Bo, a current senior. Gavin is presently an eighth grader. Juggling fatherhood of three with coaching everybody else has been difficult, he noted.

"This was really hard because you want to help them but too often you are working with other kids a majority of the time and you short-change somebody along the way," Gerbracht said. "They also are put in an awkward position with their friends because dad is the coach."

But coaching his kids has been rewarding.

"I didn't think I wanted to coach my own kids prior to them entering high school," Gerbracht said. "Now, having had two kids go through, I wouldn't have it any other way. Coaching sports, there were days I

didn't see or talk to my kids because we had a game or practice. I am able to see and talk to them every day. I have been able to be a part in their development throughout the years. I've been able to celebrate the good days and help work through the bad days."

Now that it's all said and done, Gerbracht said his crowning achievement is leaving the program and the kids in a solid place.

"I wanted to leave the program better than I found it," Gerbracht said. "We have only missed five state tournaments in my time here. This means our kids and communities were represented consistently throughout. We now consistently fill a majority of the weights. I really worked hard to research the accomplishments of our former athletes to build a wall of fame that our younger generation can look up to. Being an advocate for girls wrestling for 20 years has now allowed us to have our own program where these ladies can compete and be recognized alongside the boys. We have a place in history from having the first female state champ to having our first female collegiate wrestler." ●

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