Kinnick High School wrestlers take gold at Beast of the East

Story and photo by Joe Schmitt, CFAY Public Affairs

Nile C. Kinnick High School, on board Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, hosted the "Beast of the East" high school wrestling competition Jan. 7. The competition is one of several held throughout the year on various military installations in the region.

"This is the one tournament where we get to see wrestlers from Okinawa, Kadena, Kubasaki and also Seoul is here, it gives them a chance to see the other teams and also the outer islands schools get to see the competition here on the mainland," said Gary Wilson, tournament director and coach for the Kinnick team.

"Beast of the East" has been held since the 1990's and before that it was know as the "Kinnick Invitational." Teams have both been closed down and started up during the running of the program and this year saw the arrival of teams new to the competition including Japanese student wrestlers from the Shonan Military Academy located a few miles from the base.

"It's really nice because you get to see the different kinds of moves that the Japanese students run," said Zach Lacaria, wrestling at 148 pounds for Kinnick. "We get to see a lot more wrestling styles out here than you would get to back in the states."

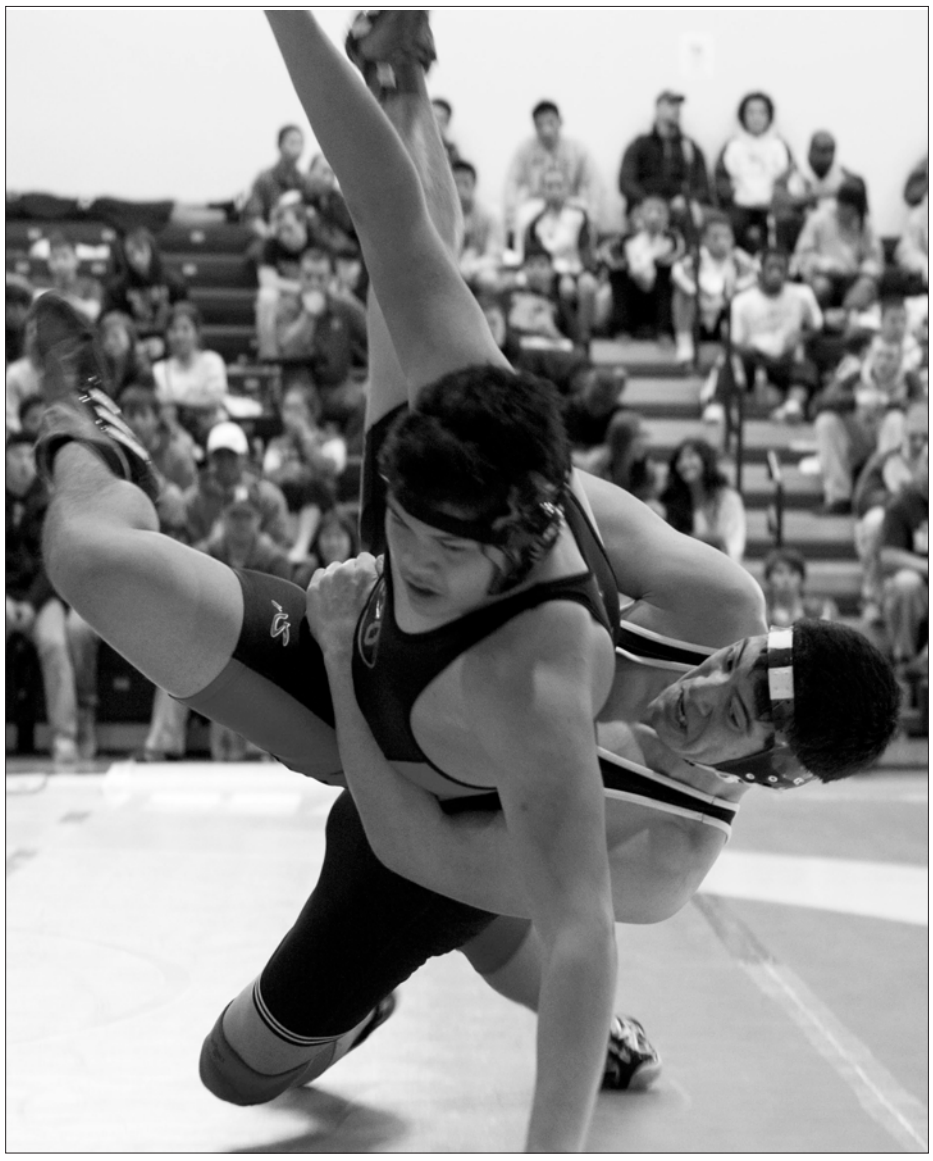
The referees for the matches were also from Japan. Wilson explained that referees come from colleges or programs and judged the matches based on international rules. The tournament was setup as a double elimination with wrestle-backs to third place. This meant that player could lose once and make it as high as third place but two losses would drop them out of the competition. The language barrier and slightly different rules did not cut back on the enthusiasm of the players.

Ikeda Tomokazu, coach for the Japanese Shonan team, through a translator said "Our students do not get to wrestle with other kids very often. I think that's the part they enjoy the most, they get to play with American and other kids."

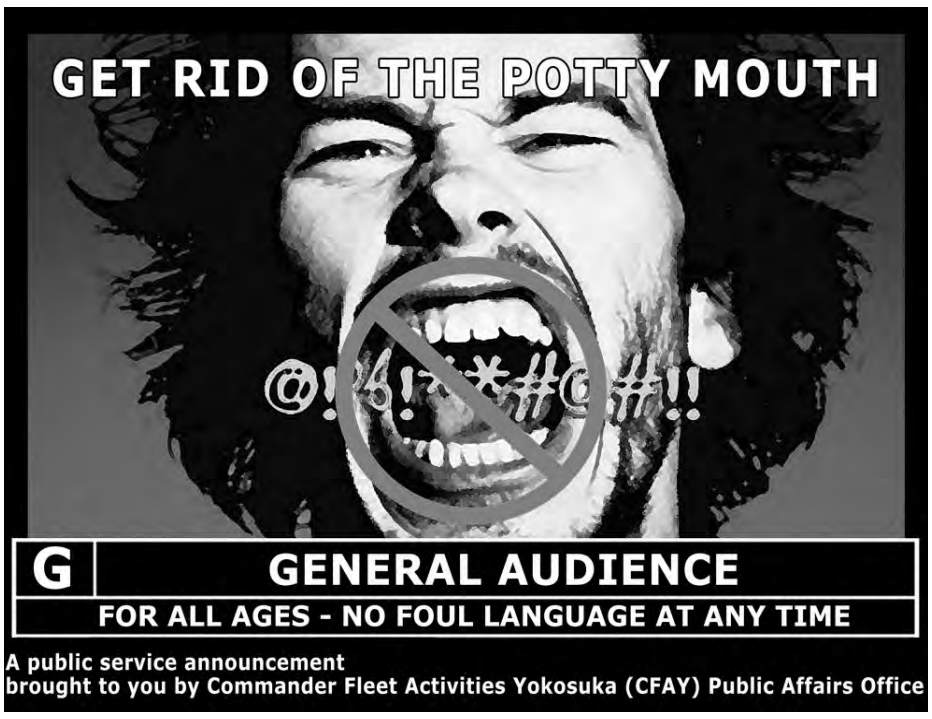
Third, fourth and fifth place matches were all run and determined before the final bouts stared. Most of the schools had one or two wrestlers still in the running and Kinnick had three, Quincy McCants at 155 pounds, Zach Lacaria at 148 pounds, and Alex Banks at 158 pounds. The rounds featured several rivals who have wrestled against each other for first place, sometimes several times.

"I think I can beat my opponent," said Lacaria. "My coach promised me curry if I win. So, hopefully I can go out there and get a pin."

Laceria didn't get the pin but won by decision. McCants also won his match while Banks lost a well fought round. The competition is not the last opportunity for the high schoolers to win a major competition before they graduate. The wrestlers and most of the schools will meet again towards the end of spring in the "Far East" competition.



Jack Barnes throws Daniel Costello to the mat during a wrestling bout that was part of the "Beast of the East" competition Jan. 7. Barnes went on to win the match and take second place overall for his weight class.



Wounded Warrior, cont. from pg. 1

In addition to the new room at the USO Yokosuka Center, the Wounded Warrior Project has provided kits designed to offer items of comfort to wounded warriors.

"Inside the kits you will find gear great for physical therapy sessions, toiletries and reading material about different programs designed to help wounded warriors through recovery," Willett added.

According to the website www.woundedwarriorproject.org, the Wounded Warrior Project TM began when several veterans and friends, moved by stories of the first wounded service members returning home from Afghanistan and Iraq, took action to help others in need. What started as a program to provide comfort items to wounded service members has grown into a complete rehabilitative effort to assist service members as they recover and transition back to civilian life.

If you are interested in using the Wounded Warrior room, please visit the USO Yokosuka Center. Desk volunteers will allow access and the use of the room is on a first come, first service basis. The size of the room will be slightly expanded once the center relocates to its new location at the Outdoor Recreation Center later this year.

"This Wounded Warrior room is quiet and inviting, and will allow service members to take a break from the day-to-day stresses so many of them experience. Great job USO," Pachuta added.

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