

Arm wrestler a worthy opponent

Picton natives compete in the highest levels of the sport

By James McAlpine

Greatness can come from anywhere, especially in the world of sports. Sometimes it comes from a small town like Picton in Prince Edward County. A handful of people in the world of arm wrestling, who come from the County, have competed at the highest levels of both national and international events and have a shared history in the town, and the roads they took to the top.

Our story begins way back in the 1980s on a high school playground during lunch hour in a small Ontario town.

"I, myself, and Richard Schneider - got the club (Picton Arm Wrestling Club) going. We started in high school just like everybody else. Arm wrestling, in classes, lunches, and stuff like that. And then Mikel Gould was a county boy, we all arm wrestle together," says Troy Eaton, former amateur-arm wrestling world champion and silver medalist at the world finals professional circuit, now retired in Bloomfield.

"And then he left. He went to Toronto for a tournament and did not do so well and met up with the Port Perry Arm wrestling club, went to their practice, Mikel at that point was about 265 pounds. And a little 135 pounder was kicking his ass. So he called us and said, we 'had to try this.' We didn't realize it was an actual sport in Canada."

Gould was feeling a little demoralized afterwards. "It's funny, starting out I trained for the first couple years. And I was gonna quit because I was making no progress. I started out as a big strong kid and you know, cutting like a lot of firewood, and doing a lot of farm work and, I was strong as an ox, then started arm wrestling, and getting my ass kicked," says Gould. "When I started with these guys (the Port Perry Arm Wrestling Club), I mean young Terry Part, he was a 155-pound guy and it was probably two years before I could do anything with 'em. I'm like, well, maybe this ain't for me."

Then in September of 1989, the Picton Arm Wrestling Club found themselves at a Can/AM tournament in Toronto, where some members actually ended up pulling matches against each other, and people from other provinces. This led them to experience many different types of arm wrestlers and their techniques, and Eaton says it all started snowballing from there.

"It started to click a bit, and once it did, I mean once I got the feel of what I'm doing, I went from there. And I started making a bit of progress, and you know, I started winning matches and I started



Photo by James McAlpine

Troy Eaton, multi provincial, national, and world-amateur armwrestling champion, shares his stories and poses with his memorabilia. Following in his footsteps, his son Chase has started to train with members of the Belleville Armwrestling Club.

winning some tournaments," says Gould.

"And then from there, you know, things went pretty good. I just trained a little more, and continued. I was going to the national championships and everything. And I won my first national championship in, I want to say '92. But it was an amateur championship. I won my first real one in Regina, Saskatchewan, I believe it was '93, and shortly after that competed in my first world tournament."

Though Gould remembers he only placed around eighth in his first world tournament, as of this publication he went on to eventually win a staggering 19 Canadian National championships and two world championships in his weight class. Gould claimed his world titles in Sodertalje Taljehallen, Sweden, in 1994, and Tokyo, Japan, in 1999.

September 1989 was also around the time Eaton met fellow arm wrestler Annie Young, who at the time was the only

woman arm wrestler in the Picton Arm Wrestling Club - and joined because she saw Eaton and Gould doing it and thought it would be fun. Little did she know how quickly she'd get hooked on the sport.

"He worked weekends. I worked weekends. So whatever good tournaments were coming up, we tried to switch weekends so we all go together and plan ahead. We practiced every week, faithfully," says Young. "I just remember it being the only thing I wanted to do. So I had to schedule work around what weekends we wanted to go. With these we had planned ahead to go to a really good tournament, and the big thing was we all wanted to go together, and you went as a group in a vehicle to save gas or if we had to stay somewhere we'd get one room."

Commitment to practicing has always been important in arm wrestling, it has long been a very grassroots sport until

you start going to the major tournaments. You need to have someone that can provide a space for people to train. You need to have someone with one of the specialized arm wrestling tables, and you have to have people who are committed to getting better.

"That's how we really got any better back then. Because like, we didn't have all these pieces of equipment gyms nowadays. It's basically, you arm wrestled a lot. And that's the only way you can really get practice doing it. Nobody ever really wavered from going like it was always a good club," says Eaton.

The constant training and travel culminated in what Young still cites as one of the best times of her life, road tripping to Halifax for Nationals in 1994. And then winning.

"And I remember when we drove to Halifax in a van, and then most of the other people flew and the, the trophies were

so big that the people that had bought plane tickets, they had to take their new trophies apart to bring them back home. And we got rid of some luggage and put all the trophies in the back of the van to bring our new trophies home, I remember feeling like the trophy was almost as tall as me. That's how the trophies in Halifax were, they were like, totally amazing."

More recently another Picton high school (Prince Edward Collegiate Institute) alumni, and Canadian Special Forces veteran, Devon Larratt, has been making waves in the Arm wrestling world. Larratt is the first arm wrestler to win world championships in both right and left arm at the same time, doing so in both 2016 and 2017. Larratt began his arm wrestling career being mentored by Eaton.

There seems to be three key components to reaching greatness. Determination, effort, and having good people around you, helping you.

A sanctuary for creativity

Budding artists have chance to develop their artistic talents

By Daniel Geleyn

The Tett Centre for Creativity and Learning, a unique centre of excellence for the arts in Kingston, offers many avenues to develop budding artists in our community.

The Tett Centre is a charitable arts organization which operates in the beautiful JK Tett heritage building on Lake Ontario's waterfront in Kingston. Its mandate is to provide a dynamic arts hub that co-ordinates and creates high-quality, accessible, arts-focused programming for all levels of artistic abilities and experience.

The building now known as the Tett Centre was originally part of the Morton Brewery and Distillery complex which was reputed as the largest of its kind in North America during the mid-19th century. It later served as a military hospital and army Headquarters until it was sold to the City of Kingston in 1971 as part of the vision of the director of recreation at the time, John K. Tett. The building was then used for many years by a variety of cultural groups until the city did a complete renovation from 2010 to 2015.

The Tett Centre is now home to nine tenant arts organizations, eight resident artist studios, and four multi-use rentable public spaces. Together, it forms a dynamic hub that promotes the arts in many different forms including individual artists, a dance



Photo by Daniel Geleyn

Bethany Garner has been quilting for more than 45 years. She rents one of the creativity studios at the Tett Centre for Creativity & Learning in Kingston.

schools, a mineral club, a theatre group, and even a musical instrument-lending library.

The Creativity Studios are located at the south end of the second floor of the building. Each of the artists rents his/her own personal studio and has access to it 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year so they come and go as they please.

"I have had this studio at the Tett Centre for one year but I've used the

'During COVID, there are many days when you get disheartened. You continue to create every day but it goes nowhere, just on your wall. But here, we see each other through that, there's always great support.'

Lisa Morrissey

The common space the artists share is right in the middle of the studios so it is readily accessible. This space promotes interaction between the artists and it allows them to socialize and learn from each other. Although they all work on different mediums and they have their own unique style they get inspiration and motivation from each other.

"Before I came here, I knew what I did and I know people appreciated what I did but I had impostor syndrome as I did not see myself as an artist," says

Lisa Morrissey, who works with reclaimed wood and branches found on the ground to create a variety of decor items. "But since being here in the last year, the other artists have helped me see that just because I work in a very different medium, I am still an artist. When I see an old branch on the ground, I see something that nobody else would see."

The current pandemic has made things difficult for many people. The isolation imposed by COVID-19 is very real for artists that work alone in their studios, especially when no one is shopping for their creations. But this small island of creativity has provided a great support for these few artists during this difficult period.

"During COVID, there are many days when you get disheartened," says Morrissey. "You continue to create every day but it goes nowhere, just on your wall. But here, we see each other through that, there's always great support."

The other spaces in the building also continue to be used by other permanent or temporary tenants, while following public health guidelines, during this pandemic.

"There's always something going on," says Morrissey. "It's just such a vibrant building."