

February 12, 2013



An Interview With:

TOM BRANDS

Q. First of all, your reaction to the IOC dropping wrestling in the 2020 Olympics.

TOM BRANDS: Well, here's the thing: First of all, I'm surprised that I'm surprised. Second of all, it's worse than death, because you can't control death. I feel like we could have controlled this to some degree, get ahead of it a little bit. There were warning signs in the past. We're not going to get into that.

I think, talking to some coaches around the country, John Smith said it best: You're going to fight. And this country is going to get it done because I think there's 10 international Olympic sponsors, I think, and six of them are United States based. Does that mean it's automatic? No. But maybe that's a starting point.

You know, there's a lot of things that go through your head, and anger is probably one of them, but that doesn't get anything done, so what you do is you gather information. Mike Novogratz was a team leader for the freestyle team the last four years, last eight years, been very involved, and his response was on par with John Smith, and that's fight, but do it the right way.

You have to get people behind you, you have to do it smart, you have to do it educated, you have to do it professionally, and you have to do it with some muscle, as well.

So that's where we're at. I think some things in the past that you talk about, you say, well, what are those things, we don't have to really go there, but for sure the rule changes. The rule changes need to -- it needs to retain its originality, and I'm not sure it went more original with the rule changes. I think it went more to something that's similar to like judo. And we need to get ahead of that and lead as a country, and Russia and Iran

and other wrestling strong nations do the same, because I can tell you right now when those rule changes went down, I don't know if there was one country that liked the rule changes. There was a lot of grumbling maybe but nothing that was really said because maybe you're worried about politics. But I don't know anybody that was feeling good about the rule changes.

So we've got a fight on our hands. We've got a fight. You're motivated and you're positive. It's like anything else; it's similar to some of the challenges that you faced in college wrestling over the last 30, 40 years. Just got to move forward. We've got good people, too. Got to get those good people in front of the right people.

Q. From what you've heard and what you know, how did this happen? How could wrestling have been in a position to even lose this?

TOM BRANDS: Is it just? That's what you're asking. Is it just that wrestling was the one? You know, you look at the history, and as you read more and more and more, the past president's son is an advocate for the modern pentathlon. There are some things that are kind of funny that are real odd coincidences there, and I think that when you talk about some of the comments that you read about some of the people that were in charge of the governing body for modern pentathlon and maybe some of these other sports that were saved that were on the cutting block, they even say that they did their job politically, they did their job smoothing things out. I don't know if wrestling did that. I don't know if it's arrogance on our part.

The warning signs were there, though. Maybe subtly, but they were there. And now -- this isn't final, either, and that's a good thing, although it's dangerous. Does that answer your question?

Q. Could you have imagined growing up realizing that you would never be able to

ASAP sports
...when all is said, we're done.®

visit our archives at asapsports.com

Tom Brands - 2 12 13

participate --

TOM BRANDS: I think as a youngster you look at the pinnacle of the sport, and even if you don't know what it is in this country as a youngster when you're first getting involved, you find out real quick, especially the way that information travels. I remember in 1980 or whatever, 1979, we didn't have the internet, but I found out pretty quickly what the pinnacle of the sport was when I started wrestling, and it was the Olympic Games.

Q. What in a nutshell is at stake for the sport?

TOM BRANDS: I think what's at stake for the sport is maintaining the Olympic presence, and we go from there. What ramifications this has for college wrestling, I don't think I'd go there yet in my head. We're getting ready for Edinburo, and that's where we're at. That doesn't mean that I'm downplaying this at all, but what it means is that there's really two things at stake here. I don't think you go down the path where -- how is this going to affect collegiate wrestling yet because the decision hasn't been made. It's not final.

May, we've got to get a strong presence in May, and then we've got to have a strong presence for the vote in September.

Q. Do you think it changes -- assuming everything goes through, the 2016, all the wrestlers that want to try for the last one instead of waiting for 2020?

TOM BRANDS: I think nothing changes. When you're a competitor, and right now, I've been asked about Metcalf, but he's in Baku, Azerbaijan in training camp getting ready for the World Cup, which is in Iran, and obviously he got the news at the same time we did. But he's a competitor, he's putting things in perspective, too. He's getting ready for an event.

What we have to do is we have to become unified as a world. It sounds corny kind of, but wrestling is third in the number of medals won in the United States behind swimming and track. It's ahead of gymnastics, it's ahead of every other sport. And in the world theater, if you want to call it that, there's diversity, there's all kinds of arguments for wrestling, and there's like 39 criteria you read about and then you try to find those 39 criteria and you really can't find them, but there are like six or seven that are probably the main categories, and out of those six or seven categories, wrestling is strong in three for sure, and it's pretty strong in the

other four. One of them is cost. I mean, what does it cost to have a wrestling mat?

So those aren't where I want to go with this, though. My point is let's keep it in perspective. Let's keep the people that are going to take this to battle take it to battle, and the United States and these countries that all feel the same, being ambushed, need to unify. Our FILA Bureau representative, Stan Dziedzic, he's actually at a FILA conference or on his way to one. It was supposed to start the 16th -- what's the date today, the 12th? I'll never forget February 12th. And now they're going to start the 14th, I believe. Two days from now they'll be discussing this with FILA, the body of international wrestling.

So a lot of questions yet to be answered, and I have a lot of questions, you have a lot of questions, and the best thing I can tell you is we fight in an educated, unified manner, and the United States has to lead the charge, we have to, with our resources.

Q. You talked about the warning signs. Can you get more specific on the rule changes?

TOM BRANDS: I don't think you really go there. That's being critical. I don't want to get critical. You know, you remember the rule changes when you're going to two out of three periods, they wanted to make it more like judo, and that's what happened, and it wasn't the best thing for the sport. I don't know if there's one person that I've talked to, internationally or in the 50 United States. They might have said, hey, let's give it a try, but no one said, this is a good thing, hey, this is really good. So that's where you've got to start, and you go down that path and you're afraid you bite your tongue being critical, because sometimes you need to look in the mirror, which I do a lot, and then you want the leadership to look in the mirror, as well, and that's on FILA.

The signs were there. Subtly, it's easy for me to say now, of course it is. But we've got to fight. We've got to right a wrong, because it's a wrong. You can talk about the pureness of the sport and you can say that's, whatever, drama, Romeo and Juliet, whatever, what do you call that, just a sad song, but it's true. It's true in the sport of wrestling.

Q. Some of the younger guys like Cory Clark and Thomas Gilman probably had 2020

circled.

TOM BRANDS: Cory Clark has 2016 circled, so he's a little ahead of his time. Gilman, too, probably.

But I think those -- I mean, Gilman was on a team. He was on the cadet FILA team, and that's an age group, that we're talking about right now. And the world championships aren't going to go away with this, but if we start going down that path then I've got to answer Mike's question where you're asking about the landscape of overall wrestling in this country, and I don't think we go there yet.

Q. Are you worried about a trickle-down type of effect?

TOM BRANDS: I don't think we go there yet. I think we get motivated and we get unified. There's a conference call at 3:30 today with some pretty heavy hitters that are in the best interest of wrestling at all levels, and that includes the trickle down. But they're interested in this decision, and Mike Novogratz is leading that charge along with Andy Barth and those people whose names aren't familiar to you, but they're the type of people that can get it done with know-how, with know-how and getting in front of the right people.

There are people out there who are a lot smarter than me to ask these questions, and a lot of what I'm saying is inspired by John Smith, who thinks a little bit differently than I do. Right away he's -- this can't be a wait-and-see thing. This has to be a fight. And I agree with him. We cannot wait and see which way the wind is going to blow on this thing. We've got to go, and that's where Novogratz is headed and that group of 30 on that email or whatever. I've talked to Sanderson, I've talked to Pat Santoro, I've listened to Kevin Jackson in a Scott Casper interview, I've talked to John Smith, talked to Gable, I've been in contact with some other people by email, and I think it's a really good response so far.

Q. Does that give you confidence that this can be a fight?

TOM BRANDS: I don't make predictions.

Q. What does it say about the wrestling community within the U.S. and probably all around the world that this uproar came so quickly?

TOM BRANDS: I think it says that they made a mistake, and there's no doubt about that, and I don't want to go down that path, either. You

don't want to pick a fight with a wrestler. But I don't know that the response would be quite as vocal or as much of a tidal wave as other sports being dropped, and I am not downplaying these other sports, either. You know, it's similar to Title IX maybe with the dropping of programs. You've got to make room for women's sports 40 years ago, but not at the expense of men. Let's add, let's add, let's add, and let's find a way to maybe be a little bit more inclusive, but at the same time I think one of the comments was this is what's best for the platform of the Olympic Games. It's not necessarily what's wrong with wrestling, but okay, now we're in a battle, and I think wrestling is something -- has shown it's something to be reckoned with more so than other sports, so you're going to have to pick and choose maybe a little bit.

Q. What specific things can you and the other coaches do for this fight?

TOM BRANDS: I think stay educated and be involved as much as you can. At the same time you've got other things you're trying to focus on and drill home in your own room. We're going to talk about it when I go upstairs, and it'll be quick. But there's still a lot of good in wrestling in this country. 114,000 tickets were sold last year at the NCAA championships, and we're going to Des Moines, Iowa, here in about five, six weeks. So there's still a lot of good events, and we've got to stay ready for that because that is a stepping stone to world and Olympic gold for all of our guys in our room.

Q. Would you clarify what you said about Title IX a few minutes ago?

TOM BRANDS: I didn't say anything about Title IX. You make out of that what you want to make out of that. All I'm saying is that wrestling is in competition with other sports. Find a way to be all-inclusive, all right, don't make this a Title IX thing. I said it's like Title IX 40 years ago where, let's do something that's good. It was an injustice to women. I am a huge advocate for Title IX, but Title IX the right way, not at the expense of men.

So why an Olympic platform, why at the expense of wrestling, why at the expense of modern pentathlon, why not be all-inclusive, let's figure out a way to be all-inclusive.

People get so wound up about certain names or certain -- we'll call them hash tags now in this modern -- Title IX is probably a hash tag out



visit our archives at asapsports.com

there. You want to make a big deal when somebody says Title IX, are you for it, are you against it. Hey, I'm for what's good for participation. I have two daughters that are athletes, so that ought to tell you enough about Title IX about me. But I have never been an advocate for anything, any gain at the expense of other opportunity, ever, period, whether it's the wrestling in the Olympic Games or not, et cetera.

Q. How would your life be different if you hadn't had that Olympic opportunity?

TOM BRANDS: I don't know. Here's the thing: You asked a question about what does this have to do with trickle-down effect with wrestling, et cetera, what does this mean for the landscape of wrestling. Would I be coaching here? I don't know. Who knows. I know one thing: I know there's a lot of discipline required. There's a lot of relationships, and there's a lot of learning how to manage relationships on a world stage. There's international friendships. There's culture, becoming more maybe aware of what's going on in other parts of the world because of the traveling that you did to get ready for the Olympic Games when you're competing, and that's very, very valuable.

You know, that's what I meant when it's worse than death because you're affecting the future. You're affecting people that generations from now, they aren't going to have an opportunity to wrestle in the Olympic Games. Are you kidding me? They've been wrestling in the Olympic Games since 700 BC, and those were 20-year olds, too.

I'll stand by what I said. Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports