

DR. NORMAN BORLAUG

Norman Borlaug is a legend. Not because of wrestling though, but for things much, much more meaningful. Like the fact that it has been estimated that he has saved more lives than any other person who ever lived. How's that for a line on the old resume? Borlaug's story is an amazing journey which begins in 1914, near the tiny northeastern Iowa town of Cresco, just 10 miles from the Minnesota border. There, Borlaug was raised on a farm and learned the values of hard work and determination — principles which would one day make him one of the most important people in the history... of well, people.

Borlaug grew up loving sports and competed in football, baseball and wrestling. After graduating from Cresco High School in 1932, he went on to attend the University of Minnesota, where, in addition to studying forestry, he competed on the Gopher baseball and wrestling teams. Interestingly, Borlaug was all set to attend the University of Iowa, where the wrestling coach had promised him a roster spot, as well as a good campus job.

"Shortly before I was to leave for Iowa, George Champlin, a football player for the University of Minnesota who lived in Cresco, drove up," said Borlaug. "He said, 'My dad said you should be at the University of Minnesota. I'm going to early football practice tomorrow. Come and ride along. You can hitchhike back if you don't like it there.' I went and never came back."

While he had to drop baseball after his freshman year because of a conflict with a chemistry lab, he excelled as a 145-pounder on the mat, even reaching the conference semifinals in 1937, his senior year. From there, Borlaug became a pioneer in Minnesota wrestling. You see, Borlaug saw the need to develop youth programs in the state, so he recruited his old high school coach, Dave Bartelma, to move to the Twin Cities and take over as the Gopher's first full-time wrestling coach. He agreed. He also organized what would become the first ever state high school tournament as well. Borlaug was instrumental in helping Bartelma get it going and even refereed the first regional and state tournaments back in 1938. He even traveled with Bartelma, conducting wrestling clinics for kids, parents and potential coaches throughout the state.

Borlaug would later receive his master's degree from the U of M in 1939 and doctorate in 1942, in the field of plant pathology. During that time, in addition to working for the U.S. Forestry Service, he refereed at high school meets in the area and also served as the Gophers freshman wrestling coach. By now, Borlaug had also gotten married to his wife, Margaret, whose brother was also a Gopher legend in his own right — George Gibson. (Gibson, who was an All-American lineman on the Gopher Football team, went on to play for the NFL's Minneapolis Red Jackets and later became a world renowned oil geologist. He also coached both football as well as wrestling at Carleton College earlier in his career as well. Sadly, Gibson died in August of 2004 at the age of 100.)

Borlaug then ventured south of the border, to work as a microbiologist in Mexico studying genetics, plant breeding, plant pathology, entomology, agronomy, soil science and cereal technology. Some 20 years later he discovered a high-yielding disease-resistant form of wheat. With that, Borlaug became one of the world's foremost humanitarians, with a new mission of setting out to feed hungry throughout the third world. As a result, he has spent the last half century traveling the world, touting the virtues of the "green revolution," and truly making a difference.

In fact, in 1970 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his immense strides in agriculture which produced food for underfed, undernourished nations. Specifically, Dr. Borlaug developed high-yielding varieties of wheat, which produced eight or nine bushels to the acre where only one had grown before. His success with wheat contributed to the development of a new "miracle rice" in the Orient with the same life-saving effects. His efforts literally saved millions of people from death by starvation.

Today, Borlaug is considered to be the world's foremost agronomist. His honors and accolades are far too many to list, but among the bigger ones he has been awarded 31 honorary doctoral degrees from universities in 13 countries. In addition to his Nobel Prize, Borlaug also received the National Academy of Science's prestigious Public Welfare Medal in 2002. Furthermore, he was presented the Aztec Eagle by the government of Mexico in 1970, America's Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1977 and the Presidential World Without Hunger Award in 1985. He is also a member of the National Agricultural Hall of Fame and has served on the President's Commission on World Hunger as well as the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. In the Spring of 2004 the Minnesota Senate even made October 16th "Norman Borlaug World Food Prize Day."

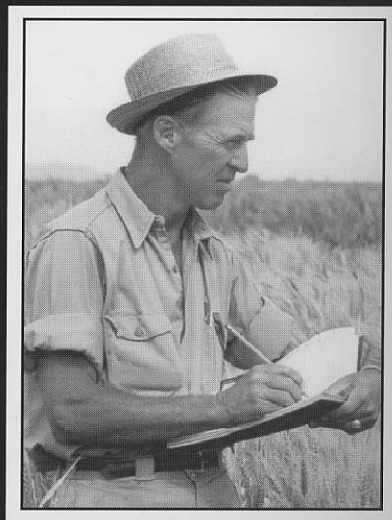
As for wrestling accolades, he was inducted into the National Collegiate Hall of Fame in 1992, and in 1994 he was inducted into the University of Minnesota National M Club Lifetime Achievement Hall of Fame. Additionally, in 1992 Borlaug was honored as an "Outstanding American" by the National Wrestling Hall of Fame for his contributions to the sport and in 2004 Borlaug had a homecoming of sorts when he was inducted into the Iowa Wrestling Hall of Fame, which is located in his hometown of Cresco.

"Wrestling taught me the willingness to never give up," said Borlaug. "The lessons I learned from my time on the mat have helped me deal with adversity all over the world."

Borlaug, 91, presently resides in both Mexico City, where he has worked for 60 years, and also in Texas, where he remains active in his efforts and contributions to feeding the hungry. Nowadays, however, he primarily wears three hats: He is a Distinguished Professor of International Agriculture at Texas A&M in College Station; president of the Sasakawa Africa Association, which is working to increase farm production in Africa; and senior consultant to the director general of the International Maize and Wheat Center in Mexico. He also continues to travel the world, lecturing nine months of the year, speaking out against hunger and bureaucracy.

Through it all, however, Borlaug still shows his true colors proudly as evidenced by the fact that Gopher wrestling posters adorn the walls of his office. The sport of wrestling has truly taught Dr. Borlaug how to grapple with hunger — and he is still trying to pin that foe more than 70 years later.

"Some people say I've saved more lives than any other person in the world, but I take that with moderation," Borlaug would



later say. "A lot of people have been saved, but my main contribution has been teaching. It was the teamwork of all these young scientists I've worked with that made the difference."

Borlaug is optimistic about the future, but realistic about the present.

"Millions of people still are undernourished in the world today," he said in a recent article entitled "Bread and Peace, by Vicki Stavig." "Predictions are that the world population will reach about 8.3 billion by 2025. In order to feed those people, I calculate that we will need one billion more tons of grain. That means more tons per hectare are needed. There is much work that still needs to be done."

"Hunger and peace are interrelated," he added. "Have you ever been hungry—hungry for three or four days? One needs to have that experience. When people are hungry, it disrupts everything. If you were hungry and your children were starving, you would breach the laws pretty easily. You would steal for those children. When you have poverty, hunger, and misery, it's easy to plant terrorism and all other kinds of 'isms.' The world has shrunk. We can't ignore these problems."

The good doctor also still finds time to follow his Gophers as well, something that has always been near and dear to his heart. "I still follow the Gophers as much as I can," said Borlaug. "Coach Robinson and his entire coaching staff have done a wonderful job with that program over the years and I am real proud of that. For him to lead the team to two national championships the way he did was just remarkable. Whenever I am back in Minnesota I always try to stop in and see J and the team, it is always such a thrill. It was a real honor to be a member of the Gopher wrestling team and the lessons I learned there have been with me ever since.

"You learn a great deal about hard work and discipline being a wrestler and I just think it is the greatest sport in the world. Competitive athletics has given me so much over the years and I have never forgotten that. I even helped get little league baseball going for kids here in Mexico too. They are what it is all about, kids, and that is what has been most rewarding for me in my career, helping children in any way that I can. So, if I had to say what I would like my legacy to be, it would be that I helped children."