

Topper: Welcome to the DiploSport Podcast.

This week, we're actually releasing two parts to our extended interview with Gregor Gillespie, a NCAA national champion wrestler who is making his UFC debut this weekend at UFC Fight Night 95 in Brasilia.

A couple notes -- this is the most unique interview we've done, and it's more for young wrestlers and fans of mixed martial arts than our typical audience. Gregor and I also spoke for so long that I broke it up into two parts, and we'll release part II on Thursday.

Last thing before we go to the interview - I reference a couple of matches and previous interviews. I'll put links in the show notes.

And to catch Gregor's UFC debut, you can watch him online via UFC Fight Pass. Again, he's fighting Glaico Franca on Saturday, Sept. 24.

Gregor: 155 pounder lightweight for the UFC.

Morgan: You were a two-time state champ out of New York. You were also a three-time finalist and a five-time place winner out of Webster High School, which is a Rochester suburb. How did you get into wrestling in the first place?

Gregor: My dad got me and my brother on a tour of wrestling when we were young. I was probably 4 or 5 and my brother, a couple years later, was around the same age when he started. My dad wrestled in high school and junior college. He was successful. He's a (inaudible) All-American. He got us some mats in the basement and it became our youth coach. Up through high school he was the one...we didn't have a huge Rochester based club at the time like a lot of the clubs on Long Island have...(Inaudible)..the Barnes brothers. We didn't have that upstate. Fifteen, twenty years ago we didn't have stuff like that. My dad built us a 20x20 or 22 or 24 wrestling room in the basement and he coached and had local kids over. Kids came from Spencerport, surrounding Pittsburgh and surrounding areas coming over to wrestle in our basement. Up through high school, that was where off-season and even in-season training took place. On a Sunday, some of the local kids would come over and practice. During the high school season, a lot of times we would be short for partners. My dad got certified as a coach and would come in and, not run the team practice, but wrestle with me and my brother. I had a couple good workout partners that were a few years older than me so when they graduated my dad became my primary workout partner for the last 2 years of my high school wrestling career. There really wasn't anyone in the room that could compete. My high school coach, Steven (inaudible), and my dad, Brad, were my two main workout partners along with a couple of (inaudible) kids that would come in and wrestle with me. My dad is the one that got us involved in the sport. All the way up to when we went to college he was our coach.

Morgan: I mention you are a 5-time place winner in New York and that is because we let middle schoolers wrestle in New York. When did you know you were something special on the mat? How did you have the confidence as an eighth grader to go to state?

Gregor: It's funny you say that. At the time, I was definitely an anxious kid and I didn't realize how good I was. I think a lot of that has to do with my dad being very hard on us. He was the guy that told us never underestimate anyone. That guy is tough. This guy is tough. I'm not sure that style of coaching or mental warfare is perfect for everyone but it worked for me. Although, as an eighth grader I wasn't super sure I

was that good. When I was in sixth grade, when the talk started, I wrestled JV half of the year and varsity half of the year in seventh grade. I was a 35 and 0 and 33 10s on JV and they finally decided to bump me up. The reason I wasn't bumped up was I wasn't physically mature enough to have a ten or tester or whatever they call it. When they did decide to bump me up, I was second at class sectionals and I went to the state qualifier and I went 2 and 2. I didn't place, but at that age I just expected to be on varsity. I didn't know that was something special as a seventh grader. As an eighth grader I came back at the same weight. There was a kid ahead of me, Andrew (inaudible), who always beat me in the Pee Wees. He ended up beating me part of the way through my eighth grade year and I had to beat him to go to states. I didn't really understand that what I was doing was special at the time. I think a lot had to do with my dad being very tough on us mentally. It's a different strategy as a coach. You never underestimate anyone. That guy is super tough. A lot of kids need to hear, you are the man, that kid isn't as good as you. I got the opposite. It worked for me. I think it created a little anxiety about wrestling before I realized how good I was. When I placed as an eighth grader I realized that I was good. The scare tactics came from dad the next year going up 2 weight classes, going up to 112 as a ninth grader. From 96 to 112, you are now getting guys that at 112 might be juniors and seniors when the majority of the 96 pounders are 8th, 9th, 10th graders. Those guys are going to be bigger and stronger and you better get on the weights. You're going to really have to perform this year. You are wrestling bigger, better guys. You are going to get seniors. He was right. As a 9th grader, I wrestled a senior in the class sectional finals and county finals. I think the way he presented it where I was at made me take everyone seriously and it put a pressure on me. Fortunately, for myself genetically I'm more apt to perform under pressure. I think that was good for me. Again not for everyone. I think some people would have pulled it in. For me, it worked. My coach now he's almost the exact the same way with fights. You don't know this guy. You can't predict that he's the same when you watched the last film on him. He might be 100% better. This might be the toughest fight of your life. When you start relaxing and think I'm the best, I do believe I'm the best. When you start thinking that no one can touch can me your training is affected. I always that he is super good. That applies to all my wrestling. Whether I was wrestling a guy who was 10 and 10 or 30 and 0, I always felt exactly the same. I think that is something that my dad instilled in us.

Morgan: That is one thing that I notice in your personal bio that psychology and the mental toughness between the years played a huge part throughout your life. We'll get to Edinboro in a second here. There are a lot of times in your career that...say you won states as a sophomore then junior the guy you beat the previous year at state came back and beat you in the semis. That must have been tough to come back from but you did senior year. Was that a mental toughness thing to get back to the top of the podium?

Gregor: I would say this. My senior year is when I become comfortable with how good I was. That match that you are talking about, my junior year match that I lost is the only match I lost in my last 3 years of high school. I was undefeated as a sophomore and I was 45 and 1 as a junior and 46 and 0 as a senior so I had one blemish on what would have been a perfect record for 3 years straight. My sophomore year I didn't realize how good I was. I didn't realize as a 10th grader that you shouldn't be winning states. I look now and (inaudible) and that kid is super good. I didn't think of myself as that. I didn't realize how special it was at the time. By the time I was a senior, I was more relaxed about my position as one of the top dogs. I don't know if that is a product of maturity or enough matches under my belt or enough people telling me how good I was. I'm not positive of what that was about, but I was much more relaxed and confident as a senior than I was any other year. I definitely had more fun that year. Maybe part of that came with the fact that I signed with Edinboro that year. There really wasn't as much pressure. I didn't have to perform to everyone's expectations and I think I performed better. I don't really know. I can't give you an absolute on that one. I would say that one match that was a tough one. I was on a 100

match win streak..almost 100 matches at that time. Everyone was like who was that kid that beat you? He actually turned out to be a really good, Steve Brown. He was the last guy to beat Jordan Burrows in college. He went to be an All American in college. He was very good.

Morgan: He's a stuntman in Hollywood now, right?

Gregor: Yeah..he's living a super cool life. I follow him on Facebook and I talk to him occasionally. We are actually friends and he will call me every once and a while. Where you at? Albuquerque. Where you at? California. Where you at? New York. He's all over the place doing crazy stunts. He's done some movies I've seen. I don't realize it when I'm watching it and I'll figure it when I'm watching it and go back and say there's Steve.

Morgan: Did you ever beat him? Did you ever wrestle him again?

Gregor: I wrestled him in college and I beat him at a tri meet at Hofstra and Central Michigan, that is where he wrestled. I ended up beating them there. I think he might have majored (inaudible) in college.

Morgan: Did you ever get tired of wrestling Long Island kids at the state tournament?

Gregor: I didn't really realize it when I was that age. We just assumed that the Long Island kids would be tough. We didn't really understand. I'm not sure people that are from upstate understand Long Island is a different place when it comes to wrestling. Your 6th place guy in Suffolk County would probably beat the Section 6 champ or the 2nd place guy from Section 6. Long Island wrestling is so deep its incredible, especially Suffolk County. Nassau County the same, but on a lesser tier. It's unbelievable how deep and how serious they take wrestling on Long Island. When I was in 8th grade, I lost to Troy Nickerson so my loss as an 8th grader was not to a Long Island guy. The following year I lost to Pat Flynn who was a Huntington guy. My sophomore year, I was in the quarters and losing to another Huntington guy, Shawn Riley, who ended up winning my weight the next year after I lost to Steve Brown. So Steve Brown beat me, then Shawn Riley beat him. My 10th grade year when I wrestled Riley in the quarters I think he was beating me like 6-2 at one point and I ended up getting on top and tilting him 3 times to win. My final year, I was the big shot that year. My senior year there was no one from Long Island who was close to me. I think I (inaudible) my way through states my Senior year. I look back at it and a lot of the guys I wrestled were very tough Long Island guys. Even my 8th grade year to place in the county, the blood round they call it, I wrestled a kid from Brentwood and I beat him in overtime. Long Island has always been tough and will always be tough. It's a serious sport here. It definitely is a way of life of wrestling on Long Island.

Morgan: Speaking of your sophomore year, I was looking at the picture before we got on the phone, if you turned around and looked over your shoulder there is a guy by the name of Gian Villante who was also a state champion that year. I thought it was nuts that both of you have gone from high school wrestlers in New York to the largest state in Mixed Martial Arts in the UFC.

Gregor: It's funny you say that because John trains at my gym. He's one of my teammates. We have the same head coach, Steve Trimble. I see John almost daily at the gym. It's funny how that plays out.

Morgan: It's a small world. New York wrestling has made a huge impact on the sport and we'll get to this in a second. The John Jones of the world, the Wiedman's of the world all started out wrestling with the sectional singlets up at the state tournament.

Gregor: It's funny.

Morgan: Before we get to that, after your high school career you went to Edinboro. What drove you there? Were you a big fan of Coach Flynn? What was attractive about going to Edinboro?

Gregor: It's such funny circumstances that led me to Edinboro and the fact that they recruited me. My tenth grade year...I don't know if they do this anymore, but we are talking 2003 now, where I was in the state finals and they had you fill out finalist sheets so the announcers could talk about stuff. You put your record, you put your high school coaches' names, any extracurricular activities they could talk about. They put college choice and I think they assumed you are in the state finals, you must be 11th or 12th grader. I was a 10th grader who didn't even realize he would be wrestling in college at that point. I didn't give it 2 seconds of thought. The kid in the weight above me was turning his in and his name was (inaudible). He wrote down Edinboro on his finalist sheet and the guy said you have to fill it in. I said I don't know where I'm going, I don't have any idea. He said just fill something in. I wrote down exactly what was on (inaudible) sheet which said Edinboro. When Coach Flynn from Edinboro watched my highlight tape that I was sending around to colleges he got his hands on it. He saw that his college plans are Edinboro. The commentator actually said it on the video of the state finals. Coach Flynn recruited me after that. At that point I didn't know where Edinboro was, I didn't know who Coach Flynn was. I didn't know anything about that, but fast forward a few years

I was ranked like third in the country after my junior year. I placed fourth in Fargo in a loaded weight class. Tsirtsis was there, Craig Henning was there, Brent Metcalf was there. I was fourth in a weight that was Brent Metcalf, Alex Tsirtsis. The older Tsirtsis, and then Craig Henning.

Well, Brent Metcalf, as you know is a two-time national champ. Tsirtsis is an All American for Iowa. And then Craig Henning was a National Finalist for Wisconsin. And I was fourth at that weight at Fargo.

You know, two of those three guys had graduated. Now Brent Metcalf, myself, and Dustin Schlater and were all in one weight. And I believe at that time they were the number one and two guys pound for pound.

So I was at the weight class where I was the third-ranked guy, but the two guys that were ranked ahead of me were the two pound for pound number one and two guys. So I was a little bit in their shadow. I think a lot of colleges were hunting those guys.

I had decent grades, I had a decent SAT score. I actually had a pretty good SAT score. I just felt like I was getting really shoved under the rug as far as recruiting was concerned. Not a ton of colleges that I was interested in were interested in me. And it was weird to me. And I say this to this day. I still hold a grudge against John Smith for not recruiting me cause at the time he was the guy at Oklahoma State that I really idolized as a youth wrestler. You know, we joke about it now when I see him and when I talk to coach Esposito. And one of my guys, Nick Picininnini, who goes there. I still hold a grudge against him not recruiting me.

That was the sticker I put on my headgear as a little kid. I wanted to be a John Smith guy. Everything happens like it's supposed to happen. They didn't recruit me; no other serious colleges were recruiting me. It was Bloomsburg and Buffalo and Kent State. Kent State actually has a pretty decent team now, but at the time I wasn't interested in going there.

And Edinboro, I didn't have any interest in them either at the time and Coach Flynn was really pressuring me to take a visit, and I told my dad, I was getting pissed. I'm not going there. I'm not going to that Podunk, small Pennsylvania town, I've never heard of them, I don't want to go there. I'm angry at this point and my dad says, "Well listen, if you're not going to go there, there they want to come visit you at the house."

So they came to the house. Actually Lou Roselli was on the staff at the time there with Coach Flynn. And it was like the Dynamic Duo. They were a pair. They were the two best in conjunction coaches in the country, I believe. They paid me a visit at my house in Webster. I absolutely loved them. I thought they were super funny and super cool. People that I could relate to and it was totally a different impression than I thought that I was going to get from them.

And I agreed to go on a visit. Shortly after I went on a visit and it was on Halloween weekend. It's really funny how details of life work out like this, but I ended up getting put with on my recruiting trip with Mike Labella from Massapequa. I now live in Massapequa. It's crazy how things kind of happen like that. They put me with Mike Labella who was also a State Champ the same year that Gian and myself were state champs in 2003.

They put me with him and he took me out and showed me a great time. I watched a practice, and Coach Flynn was going around the room, "This guy is ranked number three and this guys is ranked number five." That guy Shawn Bunch over there, yeah he is ranked second in the country right now, we expect him to win a national title this year.

I think he ended up losing to Travis Lee in the finals in a close match. I was like, "this program actually has a lot of really good guys."

The next morning, I remember getting in the car after breakfast with Coach Flynn and I said to my dad, "I'm going to go here". I think I verbaled later that day, signed my papers the next week or whatever it was. That's kind of how I ended up there. It's just like the funny little details. I went on a college visit to Edinboro and my host was a kid from Massapequa and now I live in Massapequa.

MO: What attracted you to studying psychology when you were there?

GG: I wasn't a huge school guy. I hate to say that because I'm fairly intelligent, but I didn't love school. The only thing that sort of piqued my interest was psychology, and typically, it's kind of funny how this worked. But the harder the psychology class and the more engaging it was, the better I did.

Classes that were very generic - you know the core, like English, Math 101, those I did very poorly in. It wasn't due to lack of brains, it was lack of interest and lack of effort. I just didn't enjoy them, so a lot of times you know I (inaudible). I'm not proud of this but a lot of times, it was tough to go to those classes, so I didn't do too well in those, but the ones that were a little tougher, like the abnormal psych or the experimental psych, or the psych statistics even. Those are tough classes. And go figure, drugs and human behavior, I really did well in that, which were like 400 or 500 level class, a senior level class as a freshman. They stopped putting extra credit on my tests because I was messing the curve up, I was doing so well. Those kind of classes are fascinating. And I think I've naturally been drawn to stuff like that.

Even TV, I like a lot of those science psychology. Anything that's psych thriller--if it's a movie or documentary. Anything about abnormal behavior I enjoy. I don't know, I've always been kind of drawn to that.

Also the sports side, the sports psychology, you know it's fascinating to me to see the best guys, what they do, prior, during, post competition. You know, what's their mindset. I just love that kind of stuff. I'm sure later on in the interview here, we'll get to that, what I plan on doing after fighting, but I think a lot is going to have to do with will be going back to psych.

MO: You have a fantastic freshman year, you end up on the podiums at NCAA's as an All American. Then you come back for sophomore year. You dominate the regular season, you're at NCAA's again. You have this killer bracket. And you know that you're going to face...I was a high school wrestling coach in Dayton, Ohio, probably when you were still in high school.

When I got there from NY, all I heard about were the Schlater brothers CP and Dustin.

And they were unstoppable and their dad had to put 'em in a cage at night with a live wire. They never ate hamburgers. And there you have Dustin in the semis. He's on a 65 match winning streak. What is the mindset? And you did a really interesting interview with Flo right after the match. You talked a little bit about your preparation and how you...you clearly did film study and knew what to expect.

All the preparation in the world is great but how do you get yourself in the headspace to know that you're going to be the guy that snaps the 65-match winning streak?

GG: It's funny you say that, because I think there's probably two or three people in that arena - and let's say that there's 20,000 people in that arena, you know, whatever 17,000 people in that arena - I'd bet there's three people, maybe four if you count me. Me, Coach Flynn, Kyle Cerminera, who is now my wrestling coach and best friend in fighting, and maybe Lou Roselli who was my coach the previous year and ended up at Ohio State the next year. But I bet that was the extent of people who thought I was going to win that match. I truly believed going into that match that I was going to win that match. I don't know why; I don't know what justified that thinking because if you look at the history.

Basically, I think he was like 85-1 total, on a 65-match win streak, and the one kid that had beat him the year before, he'd avenged that loss. I actually beat that kid for seventh and eighth the year before. It was kind of one of those fluky losses, I think he probably should have been 85-0. That one kid that beat him, I don't know if that was, of the guys he wrestled, it was like how'd he lose to that guy? And then he beat Esposito three time or two times and he beat Ty Eustice. And he beat all those other guys.

It was just amazing. Dustin Schlater at that time, I didn't have any business beating him. I don't know, call it naive or I don't know.

I think you would have had to chop my head off for me to lose that match. I just wasn't losing that match. I was sure of it. And I think a lot had to do with I had kind of brainwashed myself and Coach Flynn had kind of brainwashed me. You can't win every match against the best guys by one or two points.

I think that's actually something I said in that interview on Flo.

MO: It is, it is.

GG: I haven't seen that in years, but I remember thinking, "You can't beat everyone by one. Someone's going to sneak one out on you. And that guy - why can't I be that guy? Why can't I be the one that sneaks that in?"

All I need is one takedown, you don't score enough points. If I get one takedown and I pick down and get one escape you're not scoring more than three points a match. I'm winning that match."

I just kept telling myself. I remember very vividly, "you can't win every match by one point. If I put up three points I'm winning this match."

That's precisely what happened. I kind of told myself, "I need one takedown. I need one solid shot."

He doesn't do enough to win if I get a solid shot off in the beginning. This isn't the way the match played out, but I figured I'd ride him too. Actually in the third period he chose neutral, he respected my top enough to not go down.

And Coach Flynn had a huge part of that too, like mentally. He brainwashed me into thinking why can't you be the guy that beats him? Why not you? You know? You're explosive, you're athletic, you compete well. Why can't you beat him?

He'd mess around in the summer, I'd go home for a weekend or something, he'd call me, Coach Flynn would call me. He'd pretend to be Dustin Schlatter, "Hey, I just did 200 pullups, are you going to do 300?"

Fuck it, yeah I will.

I remember Coach Flynn just brainwashed me. "You're going to be the guy that beats Schlatter. You're going to be the guy," I remember him telling me.

This was definitely obviously a joke when he said it, but I remember him saying to me, "If you wrestle Schlatter in the finals of the Southern Scuffle, I want you to walk out there, shake his hand and punch him right in the face". He was kidding when he said that, but the moral of that story is "show him no respect". You're going to get DQ'd for punching him, but let him know someone else is here and that you don't care who he is.

Obviously, he didn't mean to go out and punch him in the face, what he meant was, "I want you to wrestle him and show him that he's not the only guy in the weight class. Show him that this isn't going to be a cake walk this year."

I ended up losing in overtime to Jordan Leen in the semis of the Scuffle so I didn't get to wrestle Schlatter in the finals, but you know I got him in the semis of the Nationals like you mentioned, and I guess that's the one that counted. I'd rather have a national title than..I'll put it this way, I won as many Southern Scuffle titles as I did national titles.

But I know which one I'd rather have.

MO: Talking about being in the zone, in the Flo interview, you make it clear that you heard the announcer say, "That's only the third time Dustin's been taken down all season".

And if you watch the match, you made it sound like you had heard that right after you went out of bounds. If you watch the match, you're wrestling, it's not a break in the action. You were just on a different plane mentally in that bout.

GG: It's a tough thing to replicate and if you want to talk about sports psychology it's like how do you get yourself to that point where you can do that consistently? I'm not sure I know the exact answer to that.

Not just that match, that was the entire tournament. I would say that was the best mentally and physically I've ever felt in my entire life. I don't know how to describe it. I was very relaxed; I remember very vividly what I said when I walked out on the mat too.

Coach Hassey and Coach Cliff Moore were in my corner for that one. Coach Flynn was over with Deonte Penn who was wrestling at the exact the same time I was. And I remember slapping the coaches' hands and saying, "here we go, this is it."

I remember saying that out loud, "Here we go." I just knew, I don't know how I knew.

MO: Two years later you run into one of the greatest wrestlers of our generation with Jordan Burroughs.

I was wondering, maybe you could walk me through the mindset of when you knew that he was just a special wrestler and if there's anything that you would change in your approach to wrestling him in the national semis.

GG: Well, obviously, I've had many many years to think about that match, that year, that period of my life. And it's taken me quite a few years to accept; this is one of those matches which has haunted me for a long time. I still haven't watched the entire match. I've watched a lot of my losses.

A lot of my matches on YouTube and Flo are losses, I'm not sure why that is.

MO: We'll have to get them on the phone.

GG There's too many wins to post, it's easier to post the losses, I guess.

Jordan Burroughs, nothing but respect. I think he is...right now he's definitely the greatest guy. Kyle Snyder is up there with him, obviously. Jordan Burroughs has won four world titles and an Olympic title that's something special and I think he'll be back.

Again, I really feel for him, after this last Olympics it's tough to be the best guy for that long. He had a bad day; it's not like he's a bad wrestler, it's not like he's gotten worse. He had a bad day. And I really feel for a guy who has had two losses in five years. And has two in the same day.

I'm sure it's baffling for him...it's probably more baffling for him than for anyone else. But you know, it's Jordan Burroughs, he'll win a world title next year, I'd bet a lot of money on that.



That's Jordan Burroughs now. If you want to go back to 2009 when I was in the same weight class as Jordan Burroughs, and I was the guy who was ranked number one most of the year. I didn't think that of Jordan Burroughs. Jordan Burroughs had only placed in the country one time at that point.

I was getting kind of ticked off that everyone was ranting and raving about Jordan Burroughs and not about me and how good his double was and how he was unstoppable on his feet, blah blah blah.

It's like, again, I'm talking now from the standpoint of 2009 when I was the man I was the guy that was ranked number one at that time and he was number 2 and we were flip-flopping during the year and Poeta was in the mix, too, he might have been one at one point.

I was getting kind of ticked off. I'm not just a top guy, I can wrestle on my feet too you know. That was I think that was my best season up until the Conferences. I was 34-0 going into the Conference Finals. 35-0, or whatever it was, the mid thirties with zero losses going against a guy I was 9-0 against, Matt Moley from Bloomsburg, who actually was very tough. He was a two-time All American, really should have been a three-time All American.

I was literally 9-0 against the guy and I ended up losing in the Conference Finals to Moley. You know, you can't be the #1 seed if you lose in the Conference Finals. So I ended up being the fourth seed whereas I probably most likely the guy who was coming back with a national title under his belt. If I had won that match I would have the one seed. So I ended up going to the national tournament as the four seed; Burroughs was the one and you know where that meets, in the semis.

We prepared for stopping doubles. My workout partner was Jarrod King who won the national title at 165 that year. So it's not like he wasn't fully capable of shooting hard doubles on me. We felt very prepared that I would be able to stop the double and be able to take him down. I thought I was equally as explosive and fast and as athletic as Burroughs. We always figured I'd get the takedown and get on top. I didn't think he was super good on bottom at that point in time. If I remember correctly I believe he had gotten ridden out by Michael Chandler, someone who wasn't specifically super good on top. I always had that in my back pocket, but the match time came and he took me down first period which surprised and bothered me in the midst of the match.

I remember very vividly looking over in my corner. I think he deferred to me in the second period. My coaches being very adamant about me picking top. I was losing 2-1, I got out after he took me down and I was against picking top. Even though top is 99 percent of the time what I picked when I had my choice. And I said, "No, I'm going down."

I can't give you the best explanation of why I did that. I believe it was probably something to do with pride. You took me down, I'm going to pick down, I'll get out, I'll tie it 2-2, and then I'll take you down and you'll be on bottom, no harm done.

My coaches were screaming, "What are you doing? Pick top. No, No bottom, no bottom. Top, top, top. What are you doing?"

I said, "Nope, I'm going down". He basically, he didn't try to ride me, I got to my feet, I think he kind of gave me a little shove and then that's where I've stopped watching the match. I don't really know what happens after that. I know the score went something like 12-4 after that or maybe higher. I don't really know. It got ugly.

MO: Really where it got away was right at the end of the second period he got a take down with like three seconds left.

Jordan was an important marker in your life, too because life after Edinboro, you got on the Olympic ladder. You were doing freestyle wrestling. But it came to a point where you realized...kind of like wrestling in Suffolk County, if you have a Nick Picininni in your weight class, and they're only taking one person up to states, you're not going to get to go wrestle in the Olympics.

For as mentally tough as you were, how did you recognize that hey, this Olympic dream is not the right path for me to keep pursuing.

GG: It was a tough decision. I wasn't really in the mix in freestyle wrestling for that long. I was out of competing from March 2009 at the National Tournament until April 2011, that was my first tournament back. I went to the U.S. Open. I picked a tough one to make my return to.

My first tournament in two years was the U.S. Open in 2011 and I fared fairly well there, but I really only wrestled about a year freestyle and I worked my way onto the ladder, low on the ladder.

I thought that of all the guys at that weight that were there, at that time, Dake was at that weight. Poeta was at that weight, Schlater was at that weight. You know, Marable, Howe. Those guys, oh, Kirk White, Morningstar, JP O'Connor. It was really a hammer of a weight of a weight class. But I thought for sure that I could beat all those guys. I won whatever you had to do...I made it to the semis the way they used to do the U.S. Open, you had to place in the mini tournament or make the semis of the mini tournament the first day. And then go to the second day against the top 8 guys on the ladder.

Being that I hadn't wrestled in two years, I wasn't on the ladder yet. I had to place in that mini tournament, so I made it to the semis, and then you're forwarded automatically to the next day of the tournament.

So there's a 16-man bracket the second day of the tournament, and they have 8 guys in the mini-tournament that go on to wrestle the top 8 guys on the ladder and I got Dustin Schlater first round the next day.

MO: Hello, old friend.

GG: He was the world team member from the year before. He was the one seed. I go out there and we're talking my fifth match...my fourth or fifth match back in two years and I'm wrestling the world team member from the year prior.

I went out and it was the old freestyle rules where you had the three periods and you had to win 2 out of 3 and they had to...you know...if it was 0-0 after any period, the one guy reaches into the bag and picks a colored ball out and you go to the leg clinch and one guy starts in on the high crotch. The old funny freestyle rules.

0-0 first period. He picks the color out of the bag, he gets his color, he gets my leg, takes me down off of the leg clinch.

Second period, I took him down in a double leg. I won the second period 1-0

Third period 0-0, I went and picked the ball out of the bag, I picked his color, he got my leg again, so he took me down. So he won off of two leg clinches.

Again a very tight match.

This is the world team member? I'm right in the mix now. I definitely can compete with these guys. Jordan Burroughs ended up winning that freaking weight class that year, right out of college. It was so crazy to me. He just won a national title last month and he's now winning the world team trials. And he went on that year and he won the Worlds.

MO: kind of like J'den Cox this year.

GG: Yeah, precisely. J'den Cox is...his is an Olympic year, maybe a little tougher but he didn't win. So Burroughs won in a world year, but he won. He won.

Now, ok, so you gotta think, well, Hell, I got the best guy in the world at my weight in my country. So to even to go to the worlds or to the Olympics, I have to beat the best guy in the world.

I did a few more tournaments, I beat some tough guys at the world team trials. I lost to some tough guys at the world team trials. After that, I ended up moving to Long Island and taking a coaching job at Hofstra. I started thinking this isn't this ideal place to train to beat guys like Burroughs.

Against Burroughs, it's exclusively a feet match. There isn't, "oh, I get rewarded by riding if I get a takedown."

You get a takedown...if it were a folk style match, one takedown could be the match if I wrestled a guy like Burroughs.

If...if I got a takedown, I don't imagine that he would have gotten out. But now you've taken my best position away from me.

In freestyle, if I happen to get one takedown on Jordan Burroughs, we're back on our feet. In 10 or 20 seconds. All right, we're back on our feet. Let's say I got two takedowns. Alright, they're only one point takedowns at that point, you're back on your feet.

Now, he gets one takedown with back exposure three points. Match over. It's like this is his best position, I can't even utilize my best position after takedowns.

It was just a tough decision because wrestling's my first love. It is definitely my favorite sport but I started dabbling in MMA down here. Threw some gloves on, started punching; taking people down off punches.

Man this is fun. I started getting into a little Jiu Jitsu...This might be the path for me. This is more exciting at this point. I could definitely get a lot better at this than I can at wrestling. There wasn't much improvement room as far as my wrestling was concerned. Once you get to a certain level, there's really only millimeters that you're going to improve. And in fighting I didn't really know much, but I knew that I

was excited about it. I decided at that point, it wasn't worth chancing it. If you're the second best guy in the U.S., you might be the second best guy in the world, but you're not going to the worlds.

MO: I'm struck by two things. One, the one thing I always feel about Daniel Cormier is, "what are the freaking odds that you get stuck behind Cael Sanderson in college in one sport. And then you come out and you're in MMA and your nemesis is Jon Jones. I mean, isn't that, for how great he is?"

GG: It's unbelievable. It's unbelievable. You talk about the pound-for-pound best wrestler of all time and the best pound for pound fighter of all time.

MO: IN any other generation, Cormier's an Olympic champion or at least an NCAA champion.

For Dake and Taylor, they fled Burroughs' weight class, in a quest to make an Olympic team. You've been in their shoes. Do you think that that made sense for each of them, even though it didn't play out the way either of them wanted it to?

GG: It almost played out for Dake. If you think about it, he lost 2-1 matches. He lost two matches to one. He beat in the series. You know, the series of three. In the Olympic trials. In the finals, they have a series of three matches. He lost two to one. So he has a match win over the Olympic bronze medalist. That was obviously the right choice for him. Taylor, sure, any other day maybe he beats one of those guys.

I think the disadvantage for Dake and Taylor at this point is the size. I'm not sure how much bigger they can get. Skill wise, sure, they have a better beating J'Den Cox than Jordan Burroughs. So yeah, it is the right choice. 100 percent.

MO: Is there anything wrong with a Greco medal? What would stop someone from saying, "Hey, maybe freestyle isn't my bag but maybe if I go across the aisle here and go Greco Roman, maybe I can make inroads."

GG: No. Each style has its specific following. You know, if you go win an Olympic medal, it's still an Olympic medal. It's an Olympic medal. You're the best at what you're doing. You're one of the best at what you're doing. So if you decide to do water polo, it's still impressive because you're the best at that.

It doesn't matter -- freestyle/Greco. The only difference is the following, Greco is not as popular. You may not be noticed or recognized at the frozen yogurt place. That's the difference. Not as many people know the Greco guys. I'm a wrestling fan and I couldn't name all the Greco guys on our team. Maybe not even half of them.

But again, it doesn't discredit the accomplishment. It's still super impressive. If you're a medalist at the Olympics in Greco wrestling, you're super good at what you do.

If Dake went in Greco and won an Olympic medal, he might even attract more spectators to the Greco sport. He's got a great following.

MO: Who knows, if anyone has the talent and the skillset to pick it up, I imagine he'd be right there.

GG: He is one of the most talented...I like to say...I was talking to someone about this previously. He's the most versatile and adaptable wrestler that I have ever seen. He still hasn't had a match like this against Burroughs since, and they've definitely wrestled again since then. A couple years ago when he threw Jordan Burroughs in that one match. He got teched that one match when they did the series. It was the World Team Trials maybe two years ago or three years ago, whatever it was. He got teched in the first match of the series.

In the second match, he lost in overtime. He threw Burroughs and it was a tight match. But you could see the difference. We're talking about a half hour or 40 minutes between the matches. The one match, he was getting run over with doubles. The next match he was stopping every double almost that Burroughs had shot. His hands were low. He was down blocking with two underhooks and lifting Burroughs up with those two underhooks.

It was like, "how on Earth do you learn something that quickly?" It's unbelievable. He definitely has the capacity. I think he'll be good at whatever he does. Dake is one of the most talented, fast learning, adaptable athletes I have ever seen, for sure.

MO: That's a real deep dive we just did there. Steering this back onto you. After you finished your eligibility at Edinboro, you stuck around and helped run the wrestling club there, is that correct?

GG: Yeah, I was the coach. After I was done wrestling. Do you want to get into this part of it now? I left school for a certain reason.

Closer: That's all the time we have for Part One. Part Two is coming on Thursday. Thanks for listening to the DiploSport Podcast. Please follow us on Twitter and Facebook at DiploSport and we'd love your feedback on iTunes, which will help us get noticed.