

Salvatore "Sal" Annese, '60



Part ballet icon and part movie star, Salvatore "Sal" Annese was a mesmerizing image whenever he donned his purple singlet and ventured out onto the wrestling mats.

Lithe of movement with lightning quick reflexes, he mirrored the great Russian ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev and his chiseled body with those dark

good looks reminded one of silent film heartthrob Rudolph Valentino. No wonder he was nicknamed "Borgeous Boy" in the 1959 Archive in stark reference to Gorgeous George, a 1950s "pro" wrestler, or should we say showman.

Annese, however, was no showman as he was all business on the mats, evidenced by his career record of 44-1—the greatest winning percentage in Tornado grappling history at .978. That near-perfect record is why he is one of this year's inductees to the seventh annual Norwich High School Sports Hall of Fame.

Near perfect is the ideal way to describe Annese as he not only lost but one match during his Tornado career, but yielded only 27 opponent points along the way. Seventeen of those markers along with his sole defeat occurred during his sophomore season. After that, he was literally unstoppable as a junior and senior. In compiling a 34-0 record his final two years as a Purple grappler, he allowed only 10 points to be scored against him.

"I was good on my feet, and used the takedown to my advantage," said Annese when queried as to what were his strengths when on the mat. "Other than that, I just tried to wrestle hard in every match."

As a senior, Annese captured his third straight Iroquois League title, second consecutive Section III crown and an intersectional championship, all at 141 pounds. After a season-opening forfeit win in a 26-16 victory at Little Falls on Dec. 4, 1959, he suffered a dislocated ankle that forced him to miss nearly six weeks, which included five league matches and the Auburn Invitational.

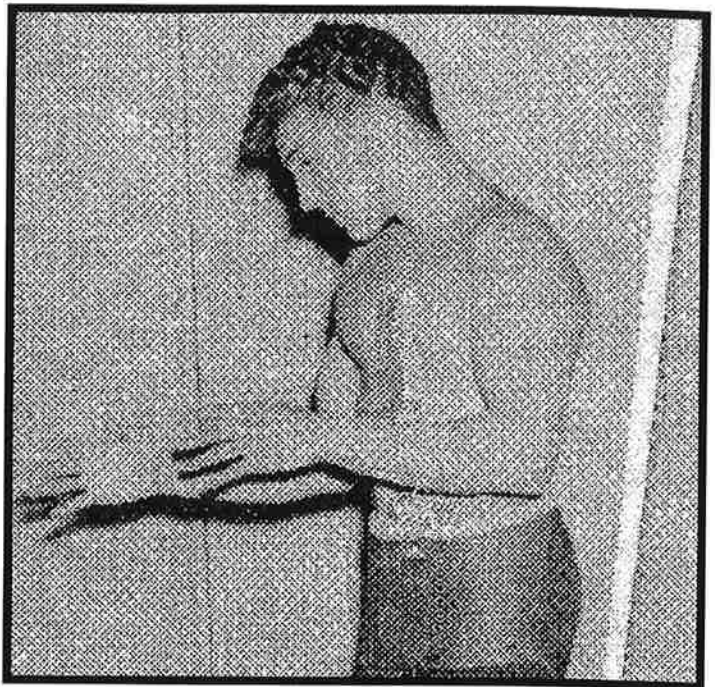
"It was comical in a way that during the course of our senior season in which we were co-captains we were both injured," recalled Larry "Turney" Lawson, who co-captained that 1959-60 squad with Annese. "We had to limp out on the mat and welcome our opponents with Sal in a foot cast and me in a leg cast."

After recovering from that ankle injury, though, the next two months belonged to Annese, and his subsequent return on Jan. 15, 1960 resulted in another forfeit win at home, again versus Little Falls. Following that forfeit victory, the final 14 matches of his career resulted in nine pins and five

decisions, the latter coming by a resounding 50-6 edge. His third Iroquois League title came via a 12-0 whitewashing of Herkimer's Coffin, while five consecutive victories culminated in his second straight Section III crown when he outpointed Watertown's Dupree 8-2.

Annese's Norwich tenure came to an end on March 12 in the intersectionals at Watertown when he pinned Massena's Sally. Massena employed eight of the 12 wrestlers representing Section X, but like Sally succumbed to Annese and his Section III mates 32-14. Following that 1959-60 campaign, Annese was awarded the Weller Award as the Purple's Outstanding Wrestler.

Another intersectional championship could have been in the offing, but a snowstorm put an end to his 1958-59 season following his second sectional crown. Not only did



SAL ANNESE

League Champion—3 years

Sectional Champion—2 years

Annese, who allowed foes only four points all year, produce an undefeated 18-0 record as a junior, but he did the best he could to avenge his only defeat of a year earlier. That sole loss came during Norwich's final dual meet of the season when the Purple narrowly edged Rome Free Academy 17-16 in Rome on Feb. 14, 1958. Wrestling at 136 pounds, Annese fell 5-3 to RFA senior Joe DiBella. Despite the defeat, Annese regrouped to post three straight victories in securing his first Iroquois League crown, but a bout with the measles ended any chance of avenging that lone loss in the sectionals.

By his own admission, that loss to DiBella was the only match during Annese's NHS career that he did not produce a takedown.

DiBella, meanwhile, lost out to Don Oldick of Richfield Springs by a 6-4 margin in the Section III finals. With DiBella having graduated, Annese had to wait an entire year before exacting some sort of revenge. After having produced six pins, 10 decisions by a devastating 64-4 margin and one forfeit victory, Annese met Oldick in the 141-pound sectional finals. There he disposed of the Richfield Springs grappler 31 seconds into the second period to not only secure his first of two Section III titles, but to somewhat avenge that only loss of a year earlier.

In suffering that sole defeat to DiBella, Annese went up against another highly-respected matman. Following his graduation from RFA, DiBella went on to a stellar collegiate career at the Coast Guard Academy, where he lost only one dual-meet match in four years. He was inducted into the Coast Guard Academy Hall of Fame in 1988, the Rome Free Academy Hall of Fame in 2006 and the New England Wrestling Association Hall of Fame in 2013.

During his dominant junior season, Annese did not yield a point until his 13th match when he decisioned Ilion's Ted Coriale 11-3 in the Iroquois League semifinals. Prior to that, he posted seven whitewash decisions by a cumulative count of 43-0, scored four pins and was awarded the other triumph via a forfeit. After his victory over Oldick in the sectional finals, Annese's attempt at his first intersectional crown came to an abrupt halt when that aforementioned snowstorm prohibited Norwich from making the long trek to Watertown.

"Sal was a great wrestler and team player. He was exceptionally good on his feet and very quick which accounted for his many takedowns," recalled Lawson. "He always showed excellent sportsmanship both on and off the mat, which made Coach (Sam) Elia very proud."

Annese's wrestling career could have been even more remarkable if not for a freshman "love story." Following an undefeated year (1955-56) as an eighth grader on the Norwich junior varsity squad, Annese opted to play basketball the following year. Why, you might ask.

"There was this girl in Endicott that I really liked, so I thought about going to live with my grandparents, who lived there," admitted Annese. "Since they didn't have a wrestling team, I decided to try basketball."

At that time, Union-Endicott was still four years away from a wrestling program, one that was eventually started by the late Frank "Sarge" Soroichinsky in 1960. And, as for Annese, well you know he went on to greatness during those next three years, much to the delight of the Norwich wrestling fans who are forever thankful that he decided against that move to Endicott.

One move that Annese did make was to follow his older brother Julius (Ron) into the sport of wrestling. While Ron (1957) set the wrestling train in motion, Sal was duly followed by Fidele (1963) and Rich (1966).

"No one in our family ever wrestled. Ron was the first and we all just followed suit," said Sal. "Another guy who taught me a lot was Jerry Annesi – no relation to the Annese family – who was a great leg wrestler. Whenever he was home from college, he'd stop by practice and show us what he'd learned."

Annesi, who graduated from Norwich in 1956, was a three-time Iroquois League champion and Section III winner his senior year when he pinned all four men he faced in the first period. He went on to wrestle collegiately at Michigan State.

Following his graduation in June 1960, Annese listened to the advice of his friend Steve Snover and followed the latter, a 1959 NHS grad, to Iowa Wesleyan University in Mount Pleasant. Iowa Wesleyan, which was founded in 1842, was Iowa's first co-educational institution of higher learning and the oldest of its type west of the Mississippi River. Even though the colors of the college were Purple & White, Annese decided to return to Norwich after one semester.

"I really wasn't into school too much, plus I had a girlfriend back home," explained Annese of his decision to forego college.

That girlfriend was a fellow 1960 classmate—Laurie Favorita—and shortly after returning to the hills of Norwich, Annese, like he did so many times as a grappler, "took her down" the aisle as they were married on Dec. 3, 1960. Now nearly 57 years later, they have been blessed with six daughters—Brenda, Catherine, Elizabeth, Karen, Maria and Sherri—not to mention nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

For the past 49 years, Sal and Laurie have made Miami Shores in Florida their home. After exchanging those aforementioned matrimonial vows, Annese worked at Victory Markets until the infamous "Blizzard of 1966" made up his mind to move south. For those not in the meteorological know, that three-day storm (Jan. 30-Feb. 1) produced as much as 102 inches of snow in Oswego with wind gusts over 60 miles per hour and temperatures as low as 30 below. Two years were spent in North Carolina before moving to their present location in Florida. There, Annese worked as a contractor and is still employed today as a building inspector.

Like the ballet dancer (Rudolf) Nureyev and the movie star (Rudolph) Valentino who were alluded to at the outset of this article, Sal Annese will long be remembered for his wrestling exploits and "will go down in history" much like another Rudolph, the one that showed the way through a snowy Christmas night with his bright red bulbous nose.

—Tom Rowe