

Danbury High hall of fame to honor wrestling program's 'Decades of Dominance'

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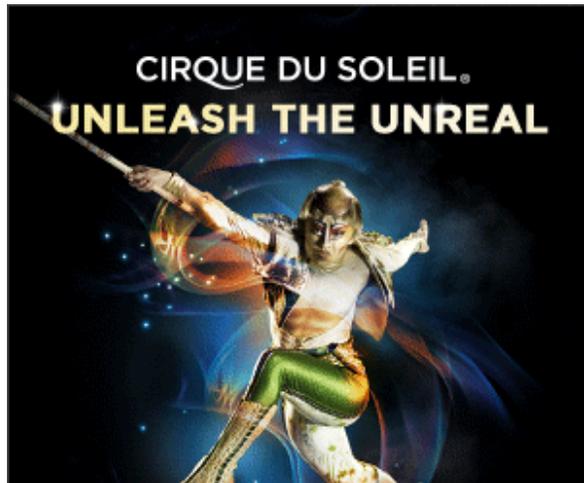
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IMAGE 1 OF 23

FILE PHOTO: Mike Morris, left, celebrating a victory with his Danbury wrestlers. Courtesy of Mike Morris Jr.



Few high school sports programs in Connecticut have ever matched the sustained dominance or the championship tradition of the **Danbury High School** wrestling program.

And with such an impressive body of work since the wrestling program first took to the mats in the late 1960s, the Danbury High School Athletic Hall of Fame's board of directors decided to do something extra-special in its honor. As such, the 2016 hall of fame induction class will simply be the entire Hatter wrestling program, past and present. That includes all the wrestlers, coaches, volunteer

and families who have joined forces through the years to build the Danbury High wrestling program into a perennial New England powerhouse and, at the same time, develop a blueprint for success which many other programs have since followed.

The Hall of Fame induction ceremony – dubbed “Decades of Dominance” – will be held Oct. 21 at 6 p.m. at the Amber Room Colonnade in Danbury. It’ll be a celebration and a history lesson all rolled into one as the many generations of Hatter wrestling greats gather in one room.

“It’ll be interesting to see some of the old guys,” said current Hatter coach **Ricky Shook**, who was a Class LL state champion in 1983 under the direction of coach **Mike Morris**. “We’ve got guys coming from everywhere. Even the old school guys are coming because they want to see the new guys.”

It would have been difficult for the hall of fame to single out and honor one or two individuals, or even one or two teams, from a program that has won so many championships and seen so many memorable moments. The wrestling program could fill a hall of fame by itself.

The Hatters have won 29 of the last 30 FCIAC championships and 16 of the last 20 Class LL state crowns. Since the State Open started adding up team scores in 2001, Danbury has won 12 of those 16 titles as well. The 1990 Danbury team is one of only two Connecticut teams to win a New England championship (Windham won in 1992). The program has also produced 10 **High School NHSCA All-Americans** since 2006.

More Information

Danbury High School Athletic Hall of Fame

2016 induction banquet

“Decades of Dominance,” honoring the Hatter wrestling program

Oct. 21, Amber Room Colonnade, Danbury

For tickets, contact Betsy Merullo at 203-744-1223.

“Coach Shook, his staff, the **Danbury Youth Wrestling Association** and the DHS wrestlers themselves are a cornerstone for hard work, tradition, superior performance and the character values we want to instill in all our athletes and teams across the board in the Danbury High School Athletic Program,” Danbury High Athletic Director **Chip Salvestrini** said in an email. “To have Danbury High School wrestling inducted into the hall of fame as a program is a clear reflection of all the hard work, dedication and effort of every wrestling coach, every wrestler, and every parent over the last 40-plus years.”

After 11 years as an assistant coach with the Hatters, Shook took over as the head coach for the 1999-2000 season. He has posted a 324-19 record in dual meets and, among his many accolades, has been named the Class LL Head Coach of the Year 10 times.

Still, he is quick to deflect the credit for the program's continued success.

“It was Mike Morris who pretty much started the whole thing,” Shook said. “He started getting all the right people involved, and he built a program that was very small and very average to a great program. We’ve had a lot of help from a lot of parents, athletic directors, everywhere.”

"It takes so much more than coaching kids," Shook continued. "It's building a program that can sustain longevity, and that's what we've done. We had a system that we believed worked, and we've adjusted as the years have gone by, making things harder and better and always striving for bigger goals.

"It's a lot of work, and it's every day, year-round."

And it starts when the kids are barely old enough to fasten their own head-gear. Through the well-established elementary-school and middle-school feeder programs, kids in Danbury could have a good eight or nine years of top-level wrestling experience under their belts before they even reach high school. Year after year, they're groomed to be the next group of Hatter champions.

"It's become a tradition around here, and all the banners in our gym show that," Shook said. "The little guys coming up can't wait to be there."

With hard work and perseverance, they'll get their chance.

For tickets to the hall of fame banquet, contact [Betsy Merullo](#) at 203-744-1223.

Online link to purchase tickets.

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