



Chicago's Mat Dynasty: The Mayor Daley Youth Foundation

How a 1960s municipal athletic initiative operating out of a Navy Pier Quonset hut built the blueprint for modern American Olympic success.

THESIS: Before the Regional Training Centers (RTCs) and multi-million dollar mega-clubs, there was MDYF.

**Municipal/
Community
Access**

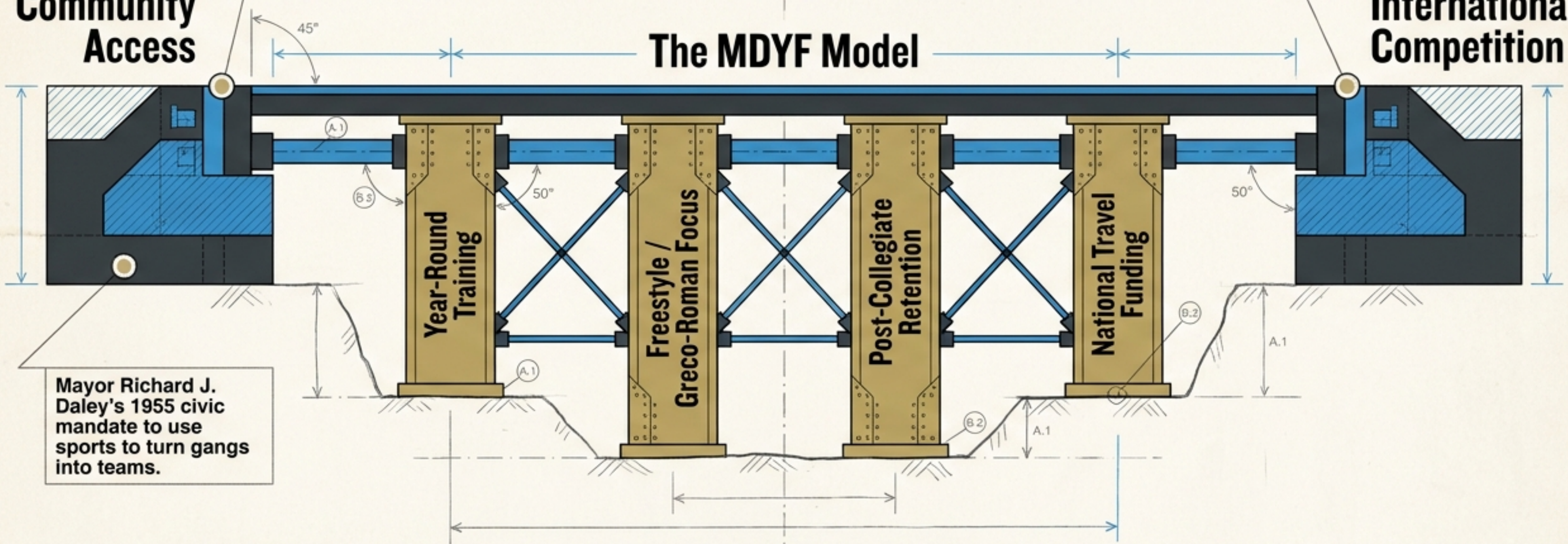


Mayor Richard J. Daley's
1955 civic mandate to
use sports to turn gangs
into teams.

The MDYF Model

Olympic Games,
Pan Am Games,
World
Championships.

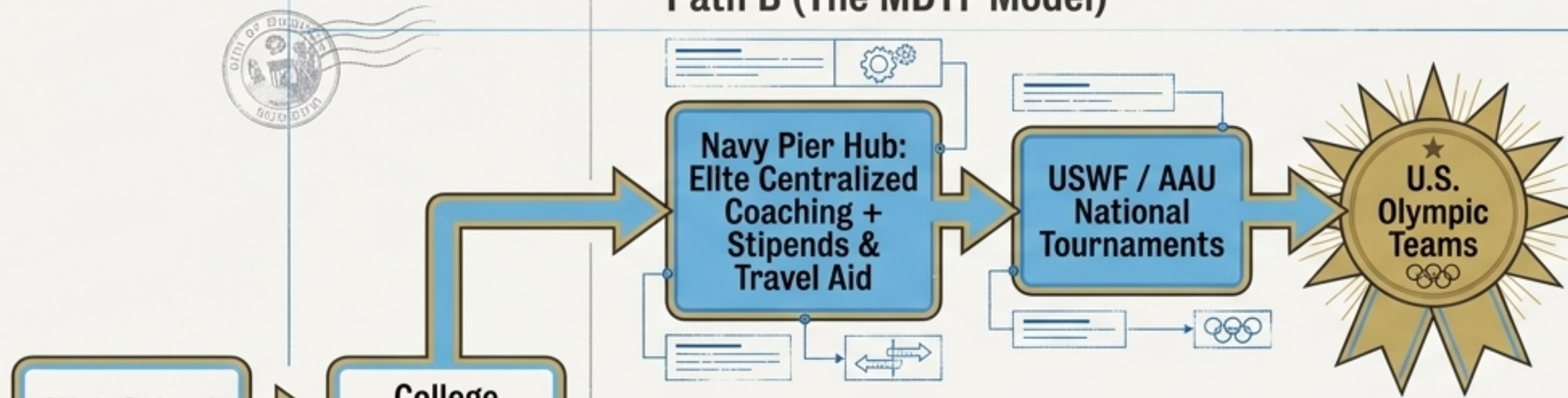
**Elite
International
Competition**



Mayor Richard J.
Daley's 1955 civic
mandate to use
sports to turn gangs
into teams.

MDYF was the first "full pathway" club in America, marrying civic funding with elite athletic retention.

Path B (The MDYF Model)



Path A (The Era's Standard)



The Gap: No centralized infrastructure. Athletes either quit the sport or join the military.

Strategic Advantage: MDYF deliberately targeted international styles (Freestyle and Greco-Roman) at a time when American infrastructure was overwhelmingly focused on collegiate folkstyle.

Architect Profile

WERNER HOLZER

The Builder



CREDENTIALS:

1968 OLYMPIAN (GRECO-ROMAN); NCAA ALL-AMERICAN AT ILLINOIS.

ROLE DETAILS:

FOUNDER, FUNDRAISER, AND MDYF PRESIDENT (1965-1971). BUILT THE 18-AND-UNDER PROGRAM AND ENGINEERED THE CLUB'S STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK.

Architect Profile

TERRY McCANN

The Master Coach



CREDENTIALS:

1960 OLYMPIC FREESTYLE GOLD MEDALIST; 3X NCAA ALL-AMERICAN AT IOWA.

ROLE DETAILS:

RETURNED TO CHICAGO POST-OLYMPICS TO LEAD MDYF TO 11 NATIONAL TITLES IN 7 YEARS, DEFINING THE CLUB'S ELITE COMPETITIVE STANDARD.



BOTH MEN LEVERAGED MDYF'S SUCCESS TO CO-FOUND THE UNITED STATES WRESTLING FEDERATION (USWF) IN CHICAGO IN 1965.

15

Total National Freestyle & Greco-Roman Titles won by MDYF.



Record	
Reproduction	Gen

41

Combined appearances on Pan Am, World, or Olympic teams by MDYF athletes.



Record	
Reproduction	Gen

15

Number of unique MDYF athletes who made international teams.



Record	
Reproduction	Gen

THE MONOPOLIES BREAK: THE 1966 BREAKTHROUGH



MDYF captures the 1966 AAU Greco-Roman national team title, shattering the San Francisco Olympic Club's 6-year monopoly.

Year	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
MDYF	0	0	0	0	0
San Francisco Olympic Club	1	1	1	1	1



Days later in Lincoln, NE, paced by Steve Combs, MDYF wins its first AAU Freestyle national team championship.

Year	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
MDYF	0	0	0	0	0
San Francisco Olympic Club	1	1	1	1	1

Record	
Reproduction	Gen

A Roster of Legends

The Icons

1

Bobby Douglas | 2x Olympian ('64, '68 Captain), World Silver/Bronze. Wrestled for MDYF in 1966.

2

Don Behm | 1968 Olympic Silver Medalist (57kg). Multiple World Medals.

3

Steve Ducken | 1964 Olympian (Greco-Roman).

The Heavyweights

3

Larry Kristoff | 2x Olympian ('64, '68), 1967 Pan Am Gold. MDYF anchor.

4

Bob Roop | 1968 Olympian (Greco-Roman).

5

Bob Pickens | 1964 Olympian (Greco-Roman).

The Pacesetters

6

Steve Combs | 1968 Olympian, paced the 1966 AAU title.

7

Willie Williams | 5x USWF Greco titles, 1972/76 Olympic Alternate.

8

Pete Lee & Bob Buzzard | 1976 and 1972 Olympians, respectively.

Note: These athletes hailed from different collegiate backgrounds (Michigan State, Iowa, Southern Illinois) but centralized in Chicago specifically for MDYF's elite international-style training.

Then vs. Now

Cond	
Sorts	
Sorted	

MDYF (1960s)

Modern Elite RTC (2020s)

Core Mission	✓ Transitioning folkstyle grads to international Freestyle/Greco.	✓ Transitioning folkstyle grads to international Freestyle/Greco.
Talent Pool	✓ Centralized hub drawing post-grads from various universities.	✓ Centralized hub drawing post-grads from various universities.
Funding Source	Municipal/Civic backing via Mayor Daley.	Private mega-donors and University athletic funds.
Facility	Utilitarian Quonset Hut on Navy Pier.	State-of-the-art campus biomechanics facilities.



Sorts	
Sorted	

Synthesis: The \$40 billion youth sports industry dramatically altered the economics and facilities, but the structural blueprint of the elite American wrerican wrestling pipeline was finalized on Navy Pier.



Mayor Daley Youth Foundation Wrestling (1960s Peak)

The Governance Lineage

MDYF Leaders (McCann & Holzer) found the USWF in Chicago (1965) to bypass the AAU multi-sport model.

USWF wins 1982 federal court order.

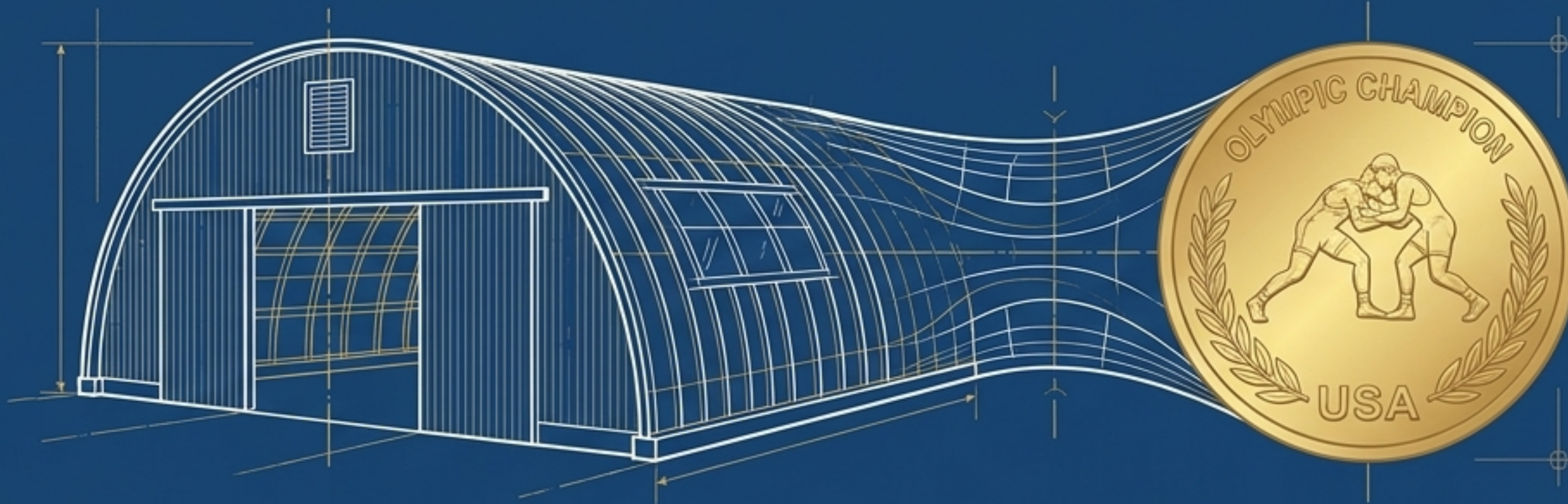
Officially incorporates as USA Wrestling (1983).

The Club Lineage

MDYF is revived and merges into the Wildcat Wrestling Club (via Terry Stanton/Ken Kraft).

Inspires modern urban non-profits like Beat the Streets Chicago (explicitly cited as a historical descendant by MDYF alum Bobby Douglas).

MDYF was the crucible that forced American wrestling to professionalize.



By proving that a foundation-backed, centralized training hub could consistently manufacture World and Olympic medalists, a municipal initiative designed to keep kids off the streets inadvertently, permanently altered the trajectory of American grappling.

Today, USA Wrestling is the dominant force in international grappling. Its roots trace directly back to the men, the system, and the Quonset hut of the Mayor Daley Youth Foundation.

