

MDYF Wrestling Club: History, Impact, & Legacy

By Coach Shan AI

Executive Summary

Founded in Chicago in the mid-1960s, the **Mayor Daley Youth Foundation (MDYF) Wrestling Club** (informally known as the Mayor Daley Wrestling Club or Mayor Daley Youth Squad) stands as one of the most significant postwar elite club programs in American wrestling history. Operating out of a Quonset hut on Navy Pier, MDYF was established under the broader umbrella of Mayor Richard J. Daley's municipal youth foundation—a multisport initiative designed to offer athletic opportunities & combat juvenile delinquency.

Under the leadership of founder **Werner Holzer** & head coach **Terry McCann**, MDYF evolved into a powerhouse for elite freestyle plus Greco-Roman wrestling. The club served as an early structural prototype for contemporary Regional Training Centers (RTCs) & national club pipelines by bridging the gap between collegiate wrestling plus international competition. Across its operational peak, MDYF won between 11 & 15 national freestyle and Greco-Roman team championships, including a historic double victory at the 1966 Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) national championships. Over its history, 15 MDYF wrestlers represented the United States on Olympic, World, or Pan American teams a combined 41 times.

Beyond its competitive accolades, MDYF played a central role in the structural transformation of American wrestling governance. Leaders from the club were instrumental in establishing the United States Wrestling Federation (USWF) in Chicago in 1965/1968, initiating the movement that ultimately broke the AAU's governance monopoly & led to the creation of **USA Wrestling**. Programmatically, MDYF's legacy persisted through a direct organizational merger into Northwestern University's **Wildcat Wrestling Club**, while its community-rooted development model serves as an explicit historical inspiration for modern non-profit initiatives such as **Beat the Streets Chicago**.

1. Organizational Origins, Leadership, & Operations

Founding & Civic Mission

The Mayor Daley Youth Foundation was launched shortly after Mayor Richard J. Daley took office in Chicago in 1955. Conceived as a broad civic effort to support youth through sports (such as baseball & track), the foundation aimed to "turn gangs into teams." The wrestling

program was established around 1964–1965 to provide centralized, elite training, equipment, funding, & travel support for athletes in Chicago plus the broader Midwest.

Stage / Layer	Organizational Focus	Key Achievements & Details
Founding Era	Mayor Daley Youth Foundation (1955)	Municipal youth sports initiative backed by Mayor Richard J. Daley. Designed to redirect urban youth into organized athletics
Operational Hub	MDYF Wrestling Club (1964–1965)	Established at Navy Pier Quonset Hut. Co-founded by Werner Holzer; coached by Terry McCann
Core Pillars	1. Community Access & Youth Pipeline	"Gangs to teams" neighborhood engagement. Centralized training hub for urban athletes
	2.Post-Collegiate Retention	Financial, travel, and coaching support after college. Supported 41 World/Olympic team slots
	3. International Styles Mastery	Focused on Freestyle & Greco-Roman discipline. Captured 15 National Team Championships
Legacy & Impact	Institutional Governance & Lineage	Catalyst for founding the USWF (now USA Wrestling) in 1968. Direct lineage to Northwestern’s Wildcat Wrestling Club. Blueprint for modern Regional Training Centers (RTCs)

Operational Headquarters

The wrestling club operated out of a large Quonset hut located on Navy Pier in Chicago. This facility provided a centralized training site that brought together local high school stars, collegiate champions, & post-collegiate wrestlers training for senior-level national plus international championships.

Key Organizational Figures & Leadership ↓

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- **Werner Holzer:** Founder/co-founder, primary fundraiser, competitor, & club president from 1965 to 1971. An NCAA All-American & two-time Big Ten Champion at the University of Illinois, Holzer competed for MDYF in Greco-Roman at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics (finishing 6th). He later served as the first president of the USWF in 1981 & was inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in 1993.
- **Terrence "Terry" McCann:** Head coach & key organizational leader. A 1960 Olympic freestyle gold medalist & 2X NCAA champion at Iowa, McCann returned to Chicago to lead MDYF. Under his 7-year coaching tenure, the club won 6 national freestyle titles & 5 national Greco-Roman titles. McCann co-founded the USWF in 1965 & served as its president.
- **Ken Kraft:** Longtime Northwestern University coach & administrator who helped found the MDYF wrestling program. Kraft identified MDYF as the institutional predecessor that eventually became the Wildcat Wrestling Club.
- **Brad Glass:** Original secretary-treasurer during MDYF's early era; an NCAA champion, 2X All-American, and 2X EIWA champion at Princeton.
- **Bill Peterson:** Served as MDYF Wrestling Club president & tournament director on multiple occasions; later founded the Chicago Wrestling Foundation.
- **Terry Stanton:** Key continuity figure who was instrumental in the "resurrection" of the Mayor Daley Wrestling Club & facilitated its eventual merger into the Wildcat Wrestling Club.
- **Ron Oglesby:** Post-collegiate MDYF competitor who placed multiple times at AAU nationals in both styles; 2X junior college All-American & NAIA runner-up at Winona State.
- **Don Ledin:** Selected for the MDYF Navy Pier-based team in 1970; contributed to the club's coaching & institutional history.
- **Emil "Butch" Diewald:** Directed the Mayor Daley Wrestling Club under Werner Holzer's leadership.

2. Competitive Record & Strategic Innovation

National Championships & Breakthrough Achievements ↓

National Championships & Breakthrough Achievements

During an era when American high school & collegiate wrestling focused almost exclusively on folkstyle, MDYF specialized in year-round freestyle & Greco-Roman training. This strategic focus transformed the club into a dominant force on the national stage:

- **1966 AAU National Double:** MDYF broke the San Francisco Olympic Club's 6-year dominance by capturing the 1966 AAU Greco-Roman National Team Championship. Days later, in Lincoln, Nebraska, MDYF won the 1966 AAU Freestyle National Team Championship, led by Steve Combs & Bobby Douglas.
- **Championship Totals:** Hall of Fame records credit McCann's coaching tenure with 11 national championships (6 freestyle, 5 Greco-Roman) over 7 years. Broader foundation records credit the club with up to 15 total national titles (including 7 freestyle & 5 Greco-Roman titles cited in IWCOA profiles, & a first U.S. Senior Freestyle Open team title in 1969).
- **International Pipeline:** According to the Illinois Wrestling Coaches & Officials Association (IWCOA), 15 MDYF wrestlers earned spots on U.S. Pan American, World, or Olympic teams a combined 41 times.

Strategic Role as an Early Elite Club Blueprint

MDYF served as a vital structural link in American wrestling history. Before its establishment, elite wrestlers had few options to continue training post-college outside of military athletic units. MDYF provided:

1. Financial & travel support for post-collegiate athletes competing in international events.
2. Centralized, elite coaching in non-scholastic styles (freestyle & Greco-Roman).
3. Corporate & municipal backing integrated with local talent pipelines.

This model directly foreshadowed modern USA Wrestling-affiliated Regional Training Centers (RTCs) & senior-level club structures.

3. Roster Analysis: Key Athletes & Olympic Connections

Documented Olympic Athletes Affiliated with MDYF

At least 8 U.S. Olympic wrestlers have direct, documented affiliations with the Mayor Daley Youth Foundation program:

Athlete	MDYF Connection & Primary Accomplishments	Olympic / World Credentials
Bobby Douglas	Represented MDYF in 1966 (placing 4th at 154 lbs at AAU Nationals); 1968 MDYF teammate. Died Feb 23, 2026, at age 83.	2X Olympian (1964, 1968 Captain); World Silver (1966), World Bronze (1970); legendary coach at ASU & Iowa State.
Donald Behm	Michigan State standout; listed with MDYF affiliation during his senior competitive peak.	1968 Olympic Silver Medalist (Freestyle 57 kg); 2X World Silver (1969, 1971); 1971 Pan Am Gold; Tbilisi Champion.
Larry Kristoff	SIU-Carbondale heavyweight; foundational anchor for MDYF's initial national team titles.	2X Olympian (1964 7th, 1968 5th Heavyweight); 3X World Silver, 2X World Bronze; 1967 Pan Am Gold.
Steve Combs	Collegiate standout at Iowa; paced MDYF's 1966 AAU national freestyle team title victory.	1968 Olympian (Freestyle 78kg); 1985 Hall of Fame Distinguished Member; later executive and author.
Werner Holzer	Club co-founder, president, & active competitor; 6X MDYF All-American.	1968 Olympian (Greco-Roman 70kg, 6th place); 1966 AAU Greco Champion; 2x World Team member.
Bob Roop	Southern Illinois collegiate standout; trained and competed for MDYF in post-collegiate ranks.	1968 Olympian (Greco-Roman Heavyweight); later professional wrestler & trainer.
William "Pete" Lee	Ball State graduate (1974); trained out of the MDYF Chicago club setup.	1976 Olympian (Greco-Roman Heavyweight); World Team member

		(1977, 1982, 1983); 1984 Olympic Alternate.
Bob Pickens	Competed for MDYF from 1964 to 1967; Evanston high school standout, State Champ, & All-American.	1964 Olympian (Greco-Roman Heavyweight, 6th place in Tokyo); 1964 Freestyle Alternate.
Bob Buzzard	Iowa State 2X NCAA All-American; relocated to Chicago specifically to train with MDYF.	1972 Olympian (Greco-Roman).

Additional Notable Club Competitors & Contributors

- **Willie Williams:** Joined MDYF in 1968 under Terry McCann. Became one of the most decorated domestic Greco-Roman wrestlers in U.S. history, winning 5 USWF Greco-Roman national titles, 4 consecutive AAU national titles (1973–1976), & earning 1972/1976 Olympic alternate status.
- **Joe Cliffe:** Starred on multiple MDYF freestyle & Greco-Roman national championship teams before a distinguished high school coaching career in Illinois.
- **Norman Lovelace:** Competed for MDYF post-collegiately (placing 3rd at the Midlands); later coached 27 junior college All-Americans.

Multi-Sport Clarification & Olympic Totals

While database entries (such as Olympedia) list up to 10 or more Olympians under the "Mayor Daley Youth Foundation" banner, research shows that the foundation was a multi-sport organization. The non-wrestling Olympic contingent included elite track & field athletes such as:

- **Willye White** (Track & Field)
- **Maren Seidler** (Track & Field)
- **Mamie Rallins** (Track & Field)

Historical analyses must distinguish between total foundation Olympians, wrestling-specific Olympians, & athletes who represented the club formally versus those who utilized its facilities for cross-training.

Governance Transformation & Historical Lineage ↓

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The Genesis of USA Wrestling

MDYF was directly tied to the administrative restructuring of American amateur wrestling:

Year	Governing Milestone	Key Leadership & Structural Impact
1965	USWF Founded in Chicago	Co-founded by MDYF leaders Terry McCann & Werner Holzer . Created as a sport-specific alternative to challenge AAU control. Established the state-federation model in Illinois
1982	Federal Court Order	Stripped the AAU of sole administrative authority over wrestling. Ended decades of governance friction between broad athletic unions & wrestling reformers
1983	USA Wrestling	Formally incorporated USA Wrestling as the official National Governing Body (NGB). Unified Olympic-style wrestling under a single national framework
1983	Illinois Governance Ecosystem	IKWF (Illinois Kids Wrestling Federation) – Youth & age-group development. IL/USAW (Illinois USA Wrestling) – Freestyle & Greco-Roman international styles. IWCOA (Illinois Wrestling Coaches & Officials Association) – Coaching standards & honors

- Formation of the USWF:** In 1965–1968, wrestling leaders in Chicago—headed by MDYF figures Terry McCann & Werner Holzer—founded the **United States Wrestling Federation (USWF)** to provide a sport-specific alternative to the multi-sport Amateur Athletic Union (AAU).
- Legal & Structural Shift:** Tensions between the AAU & USWF culminated in a **1982 federal court order** that stripped the AAU of its exclusive governance over American wrestling.
- Establishment of USA Wrestling:** In **1983**, USA Wrestling was formally incorporated as the national governing body for the sport. Illinois served as the operational model, establishing specialized internal bodies:
 - **IKWF:** Illinois Kids Wrestling Federation (youth programs).
 - **IL/USAW:** Illinois USA Wrestling (international styles pipeline).
 - **IWCOA:** Illinois Wrestling Coaches & Officials Association.

Institutional Succession & Modern Lineage

The historical trajectory of MDYF connects to modern wrestling through 3 distinct pathways:

1. **Direct Institutional Lineage (Wildcat Wrestling Club):** Following a period of decline, the Mayor Daley Wrestling Club was revived through the efforts of Terry Stanton & subsequently merged into Northwestern University's **Wildcat Wrestling Club**. Longtime Northwestern administrator Ken Kraft explicitly cited MDYF as the institutional predecessor to the Wildcat Wrestling Club.
2. **Community Lineage (Beat the Streets Chicago):** Beat the Streets Chicago explicitly cites MDYF's Navy Pier operations as a historical precedent for municipal, community-based wrestling pipelines. While Beat the Streets originated independently in 1994 as the Midlands Youth Foundation (renamed in 1999) following a gap in city club infrastructure, key figures like Bobby Douglas explicitly drew a conceptual line between MDYF, the Harvey Twisters, & modern youth wrestling initiatives.
3. **Conceptual Lineage (Regional Training Centers):** MDYF demonstrated that combining municipal/civic backing, post-collegiate athlete retention, centralized facilities, & elite coaching could consistently produce international medalists—providing the operational blueprint for modern Olympic RTCs.

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