

## HUNGRY MACHINES

Kevin Kiefer

[Assignment: Write a narration that will show and tell (and in a variety of ways make your reader feel) how you learned something important completely by accident.]

(1) The class was filled with thirty wrestlers sitting on top of the desks joking and talking to one another. We all looked forward to meeting our new coach. The door opened and a hush fell over the room. In walked a mountain of a man. He looked about 6'3" and had to be pushing 230 pounds, all of which was muscle. He needed no introduction--we all knew who he was and what he would do for us. "As I understand, only two people from your school have ever qualified for state. Last year I coached four men who qualified for state, two of them became state champions. Those men succeeded because they were hungry to win." He looked over each of us as he paced back and forth, staring at us until we dropped our eyes. "I know what it takes to win and I know how to make good wrestlers into champions. But you have to meet me halfway. Besides the obvious rules concerning drugs and alcohol I have two new rules. For the next three months you have to give up women and your jobs--both of them drain too much energy." He cracked a small smile and looked around the room to see if there were any objections. No one moved. "I have three months to turn this group of young men into a team of hungry machines. Practice starts tomorrow after school; I expect to see everyone there." With that the meeting was adjourned and the quiet room erupted into cheers and the sound of high-fives being exchanged. With the thought of "hungry machines" echoing in our minds, we all went into a frenzy.

(2) Later that night I thought about the things Coach Cruz had said. How would I be able to pay off my car loan and pay for insurance without a job for three months? How would my girlfriend handle being put on a shelf for the season after going steady for the last eight months? Would I be able to handle two-hour practices Monday through Friday, with morning workouts every Tuesday and Thursday? Saturdays would be almost non-existent because we had tournaments until late in the evening. When would I find time to study for school? I was told that my junior year would be the toughest of high school. Could I wrestle and study and be successful in both? If not, which should take priority?

(3) I thought long and hard that night and thought of several good points favoring each option. As a wrestler you develop pride in your ability to make sacrifices, such a cutting down on food. I remember eating no more than 1000 calories two to three days a week to keep my weight down. If I was overweight when arriving at a meet I would throw on two jackets, scarves, hats, a pair of gloves, and several sweat bottoms so I could sweat off my

excess weight. I would have despised all of this were I not successful, but I was. As a sophomore I was elected co-captain of the varsity team, and I became the first sophomore to qualify for the sectional finals. This year was promising to be very successful. I was stronger and quicker than I ever had been. I knew I had still one more year to improve. A college scholarship was not out of the question; neither was a state title. Did I really want to throw it all away?

(4) But what about school? As a sophomore I had let my grades slide lower than they ever had before. I had just received my PSAT scores, which were not at all impressive. I knew I could do better. I knew I had to if I wanted to go to college. Did I really want to be a "hungry machine"? I was enjoying life as an average high school junior.

(5) The next day before practice I talked to my coach about my grades and my future in school. I'm not sure why I went to him. I should have known he would have a biased opinion. Coach Cruz wasted no time getting his point across. "If you don't wrestle this year you can forget next year too. This is your big chance to do something only two others in your school's history have done. I don't think you should throw it away." The whole time I looked at the floor. I couldn't look into his eyes; they were too strong. "You're growing a lot physically and mentally," he said. "They say you've got what it takes to win and with my help you can be the best. Don't blow your one big chance!" Right then my decision was made. I knew what I had to do. Maybe this was a good opportunity for me, but how could it be my "one big chance"? I knew I had what it takes to make something of myself off the mat in real life. If I put my mind to it I could do anything and I would have several big chances to make something of myself in bigger ways.

(6) Over the next several weeks, I was branded a quitter by Coach Cruz and received a lot of harassment from my ex-teammates. I was told that in practice the team had a move in which they would roll on their backs and look at the lights until they were pinned. They named this move "the Kiefer" so they would remember what a quitter is--at least what they thought of as a quitter. Even friends and people I didn't know questioned my decision, as if they knew what was best for me. At times I had doubts about the road I had chosen and to this day I can't help but ask, "What if. . . ."

(7) My difficult decision opened new doorways for my future. I found time to apply myself more in school and received much higher grades. I also developed a new and healthier attitude towards my studies. I spent more time working with my father at our family's service station developing my talents as a mechanic. These talents I

hope to expand as I study to become an mechanical engineer. Only time will tell if my difficult decision will lead to a favorable outcome.