

Clay Lewis

Honors English 9

Wrestling with Defeat

I am not a perfect Quaker. My family discovered Quakerism when I was two years old; I grew up with Quaker values, went to Meeting for Worship every Sunday, and have gone to a Friends' school for quite a while. One of my passions, though, is wrestling. A naturally competitive combat sport, wrestling seems to be the opposite of the amicable motivations of Quakerism. People frequently ask me why I wrestle when Quakers are supposed to be peaceful and nonviolent. To be frank, this question has rattled in my brain for years because I have never had a perfect answer to it. Wrestling is a sport where two people fight to see who has the most physical, mental, and technical prowess. At the end of a wrestling match, one person is inherently less equal in a wrestling context than the other - so how can this sport acknowledge both people's strength?

At first, I could find little overlap between Quaker values and wrestling values, but as I began to hone my wrestling skills and learn more about the sport, it struck me that when applied correctly wrestling can bring people closer than many other more team-oriented sports can. If you speak to any wrestler, the first thing they are likely to tell you is how physically demanding the sport is. It originated over 15,000 years ago in Ancient Greece and Egypt as one of the world's first forms of combat. Now, it is recognized as such an arduous sport that it is often used as an effective way to train the military. Becoming a great wrestler requires brutal workouts every day, and despite the conflicts that can arise during a match, every wrestler will acknowledge and respect the effort it takes to go out on the mat. This respect creates a

community where even if someone loses a match, everyone recognizes that both wrestlers worked doggedly to get to where they are. When I first started wrestling, I knew I was horrible at the sport. I lost every match by quite a lot, and I would have easily gotten discouraged if after every match the coach from the other team hadn't come up to me and said, "You did a great job, I can't wait to see what you can do." These coaches showed me that I didn't need to defeat every opponent to be worthy of recognition. That kind of equality guides my actions on an everyday basis. I am now able to recognize the energy that people put into their work, and even if I think it is not the best, I don't see it as any worse than something I could do because I know it took a lot of effort to complete. Any good wrestler must also accept defeat. We learn to take both victory and loss respectfully; in wrestling, winning dishonorably is worse than losing graciously. This helps to hold up other's qualities because even if they lose, they are treated as an equal.

I may not be a perfect Quaker; I trip, tackle, and slam people to the ground in order to win a match, but wrestling is about how you present yourself outside of the sport. It's about encouraging your teammates whether they win or lose, It's about helping someone get up after a workout because they have no strength left, and most importantly, it's about seeing the best in anyone and everyone. When I think about how wrestling has made me a better person, I'm glad to be both a Quaker and a Wrestler.