

# Ridgefield Honors Long-Time Wrestling Coach & Mentor, Gary Tiger.

Ridgefield High School conducted their 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Ridgefield Challenge Wrestling Tournament on January 28<sup>th</sup>. There was one individual missing from this event, long-time wrestling coach Gary Tiger, who passed away in February 2022. The event was renamed this year to The Gary Tiger Ridgefield Challenge, as a way to solidify his legacy.

Before the finals, Dwight Blaha, emcee and former youth wrestling coach and booster club president, preceded over a tribute to Gary.

Following the tradition of those wrestlers that have wrestled their last match, Dwight invited Jordan and Travis Tiger, Gary's sons to place Gary's shoes in the center of the mat and the entire gym paused for a moment of silence...

Dwight went on to say the following about Coach Gary Tiger:

"Gary was incredibly involved with Ridgefield Wrestling from the youth program through the high school program. In 1998, soon after the Ridgefield Youth Wrestling Program was started, Gary began coaching. He progressed from the youth program into high school and assumed the head coaching position in 2003. Throughout his 2-decades tenure, he coached hundreds of wrestlers - producing numerous champions at the FCIAC, Class LL State, and Open Championship tournaments. He was also instrumental in growing this tournament, working very hard to make it a destination tournament for teams across New England and New York. Gary had a tremendous impact on wrestling at Ridgefield High School.

More importantly though, Gary had an incredible impact outside of these four walls. Gary understood that wrestling is more than a sport, it is a community, a family. And the coaches, opposing teams, officials, athletic directors, and support staff were always part of this wrestling family. Being part of this wrestling family was most noticed by the wrestlers who had the privilege of being coached by Gary. Gary taught his wrestlers technique and strategies, but what he really taught his wrestlers was how to be the best person they could be. He taught them hard work, dedication, mental toughness, competitiveness, and compassion. And these lessons are now being carried out outside of Ridgefield High School and into our broader

community. He literally impacted hundreds upon hundreds of people and for that we will all be grateful.”

After a full day of wrestling, the audience was treated to one of the most iconic finals ceremonies in Connecticut high school wrestling. A grand entrance and parade of champions, into the spotlight lit arena. One mat, one spotlight, highlighting some of the best wrestlers in New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Connecticut.

It was a final performance that would have brought a smile to Gary’s face.

Congratulations to the Ridgefield High School Wrestlers on their outstanding achievements at the tournament; Senior Varsity Captain, Andrey Kosygin (182) and Junior Varsity Captain, Victor Petkov (138) on winning first overall in their weight classes. Also, to Varsity Freshman, Johnny Carrozza (126) on winning second in his weight class. Shout-out to Ridgefield’s Varsity James Westrick (106) for placing 4th, Ryder Dadasovich (160) for placing 4th, Alec Rogers (113) for placing 5th, Leo Moore (132) for placing 5th and Lorenzo Lanzilli (145) for placing 5th. Our other Gary Tiger Ridgefield Challenge Tournament awards went to New Milford for the Most Team Points, Bethel for the Best Sportsmanship Award and to wrestler Hayden Myers of Coventry, RI for MVP & Most Outstanding Wrestler.



Coach Gary Tiger's Wrestling Shoes During a Moment of Silence



From Left to Right

John Carrozza – Booster Club Co-President & Assistant Varsity Wrestling Coach

Jordan Tiger – Highly Decorated Former RHS Wrestler & Son of Coach Gary Tiger

Travis Tiger – The Most Decorated RHS Wrestler Still to Date, Former RHS Varsity Head Wrestling Coach, and Son of Coach Gary Tiger

Joe Regan – Current Ridgefield Youth & RHS Varsity Head Wrestling Coach

Larry Lanzilli – Booster Club Co-President & Assistant Varsity Wrestling Coach



138 lb Tournament Champion, Victor Petkov



182 lb Tournament Champion & Senior Varsity Captain, Andrey Kosygin