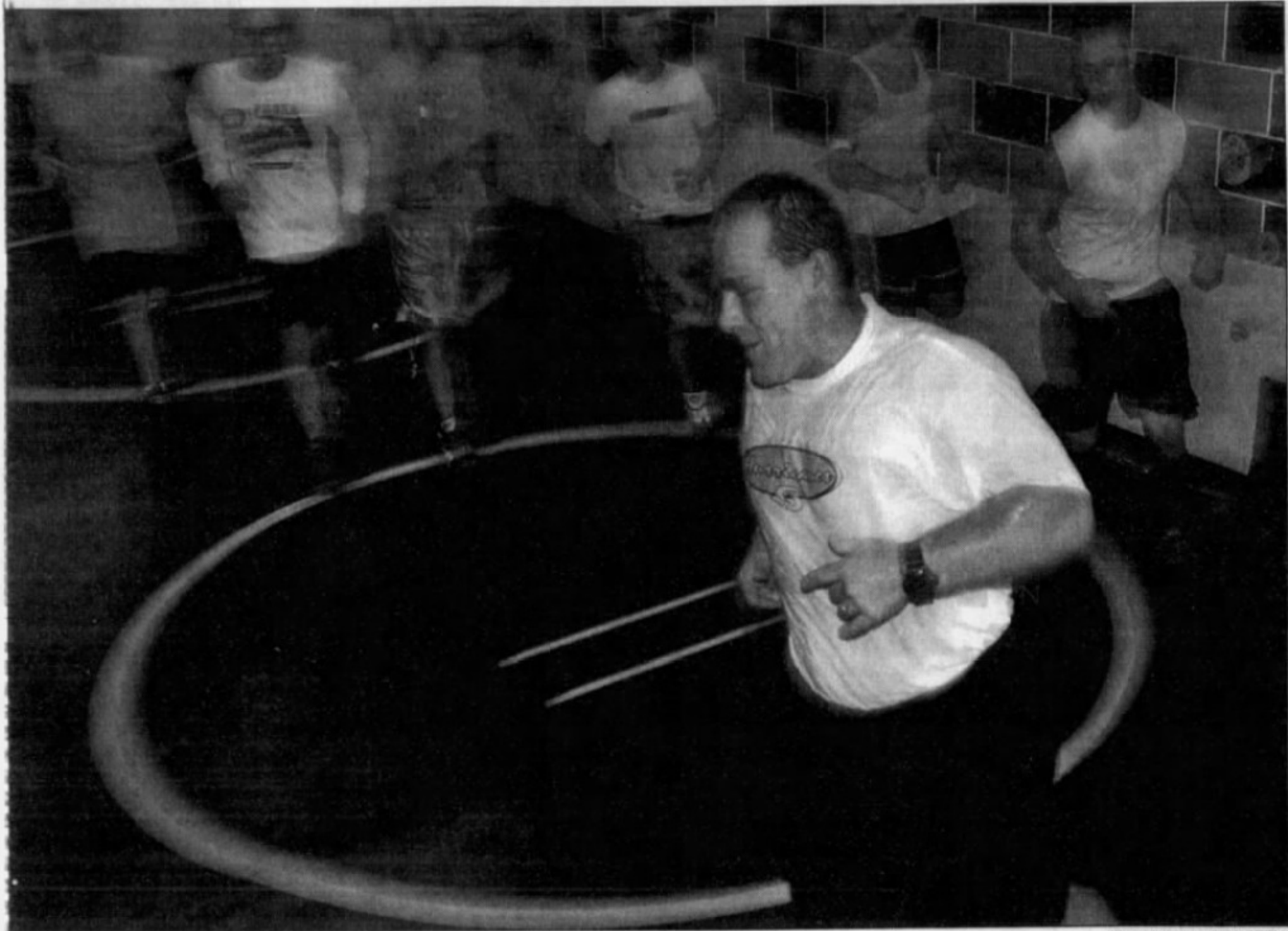


# SPORTS

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Times photos — MAX BITTLE

Coach Mike Porcelli warms up with the Citrus Three-Style Club at Citrus High. He worked as a 'Canes assistant before starting the organization in January.

# Pinning hopes on a seasoned coach

A wrestling club hopes to raise the sport's profile in the tri-county area with Mike Porcelli, a Seoul Olympics alternate, at the helm. **N**

By **DAWN REISS**  
Times Staff Writer

INVERNESS — Stale sweat permeates the air. Feet pound the black mat as heavy breathing steadily becomes louder. The drops of excessive energy drip down shirts as pools begin to collect by the wrestlers' feet.

It's the dog days of summer, and athletes from Pasco, Hernando and Citrus counties are driving to Citrus High to train with Mike Porcelli, an Olympic alternate for the 1988 Seoul Games, at the newly created Citrus Three-Style Club.

"I've learned a lot from him," said Anthony Walls, a rising Crystal River sophomore. "He's a funny guy who cracks jokes and comes down to our level. It makes it easier. He's really patient, and if you mess up he gives you individual attention to fix the problem."

A transplant New Yorker, Porcelli, 44, moved with his wife, Kim, and children, Michael, 6, and Ashley, 12, last summer to Citrus County to be near his parents in Inverness. It didn't take long for

Porcelli went on to be a two-time California State Junior College champ at San Diego City College. Then he became an NCAA qualifier, receiving Big 8 Conference honors at Iowa State.

After failing to make the Olympic team in 1984, Porcelli went to the 1988 Olympic Trials and beat NCAA champions Dan Chaid and Bill Hyman, among others.

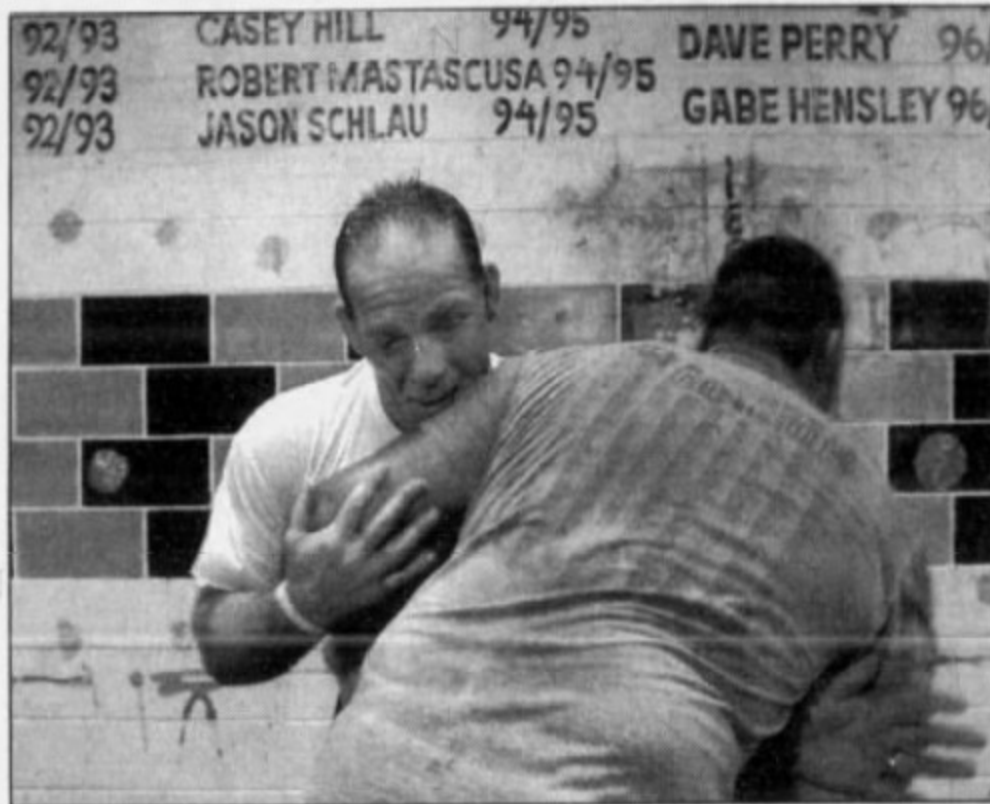
Porcelli was among just four wrestlers, with the top three advancing to the Olympics. He was defeating former Iowa State teammate Wayne Cole 3-0 when Porcelli went for a double-leg take down.

"I'll never forget it," Porcelli said. "I felt like the world was my oyster. Everything was extremely clear. Then I felt a pop. He went down and I scored, but I separated my left shoulder."

Battling with one arm, Porcelli tried to continue but without success. He lost and finished fourth in the 220-pound class.

"I didn't handle it well," Porcelli said. "I felt like a failure — to me, to my hometown, to my club.

"I was depressed," he said. "I



Porcelli, an ex-Olympic Trials competitor who has garnered praise from fellow coaches and athletes, works on a few moves during practice.

## CITRUS THREE-STYLE CLUB

**WHO:** Boys, girls, kindergarten-age children; adult open divisions.

**WHEN/WHERE:** 6-8 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays. Citrus High School.

**COST:** \$30 for yearly membership, \$30 for USA Wrestling membership.

**UPCOMING EVENTS:** The organization has a folkstyle tournament July 23 at Citrus High for kindergarten-age children and an open division and a folkstyle camp July 18-22 at Citrus for boys and girls in grades 2-9.

**LOCAL STATE QUALIFIERS:** Eight Citrus Three-Style Club members

recently competed in the Florida State Freestyle and Greco-Roman Championships. Josh Rutherford (135) finished 2-2, Dan Allmond (155) 1-2, Lee Carey (190) third in freestyle, Eric Vega (215) second in Greco-Roman and fourth in freestyle, Bobby Severin (265) second in freestyle and third in Greco-Roman, Tom Newman (191) fourth in Greco-Roman, John Koney (112) third in freestyle and Kevin Drawdy (155) second in freestyle.

**FOR INFORMATION:** Contact Mike Porcelli, (352) 860-2592, 634-4303 or [www.floridausawrestling.org](http://www.floridausawrestling.org).

people to notice there was a knowledgeable wrestler in town.

"His daughter goes to my middle school, and during the first week of open house I saw him walking in with his cauliflower ears," said Citrus High coach Rob Hermann, who teaches at Inverness Middle. "I know what that means, and I practically jumped over my desk to go over and talk to him." (Wrestlers sometimes are identifiable by their protruding ears, a result of constant contact through competition.)

Porcelli worked as Hermann's assistant during the prep season before starting the Citrus club in January. Hermann, who had created the smaller Citrus Wrestling Club for middle and high school students, merged his organization with Porcelli's. It's among 177 Florida Amateur Wrestling Association groups, which include the Spring Hill Wrestling Club, Zephyrhills' Wesley Chapel Wildcats and The Villages' USA Takedown.

"Nobody in Citrus County knows as much," Hermann said of Porcelli. "And if you go to the surrounding counties, you'd be hard pressed to find someone with his knowledge. He's just that good."



The oldest of four children,

didn't want to deal with my friends. I didn't want to deal with life. I felt cheated. Long after my shoulder healed, I had a hole in my heart."

The grieving process continued when Porcelli returned to C.W. Post University (N.Y.), where he had been taking classes for his second undergraduate degree. He was listening to Dr. Finbar O'Kane in an ethics class when Porcelli's head began to clear.

"That whole class, it seemed like he was trying to get me to understand, to make me believe that life is not like looking through a peephole but a bigger picture," Porcelli said. "When I left class, he left me with parting words of wisdom: 'Mike, I just want you to be ready.' That's all he said, but it really woke me up. It forced me to re-evaluate myself and made me become ready for anything I needed to do.

"I look back now, and I'm proud to be an Olympic alternate. It just seems like if you're not No. 1 in America, no one remembers you. It's just like the Super Bowl, no one remembers who took second and that's sad. It should be all about the process, more than the product, what it took for you to reach that level. . . .

"As an adult, (that lesson) helps me," Porcelli said. "Not every child will be a state champion,

national All-American (1986-88, 1992-93). In the mid '90s, Porcelli returned to Bay Shore High, where he taught and coached for 10 years before moving to Citrus County.

Through it all, Porcelli continued to guide the Long Island All-Stars Wrestling Club, which he started in 1988 with Wade Genova.

During Porcelli's tenure, the organization produced 10 USA Wrestling All-Americans and national champions in Alton Lucas (2003), Porcelli's younger brother, Alex (1991) and Mike Patrovich (2000).

Porcelli, a Hernando Elementary physical education teacher, hopes to build the Citrus Three-Style Club as he did in New York.

"I was very concerned when I came down here and realized there was nothing," Porcelli said.

In January, he started the program with grade school children before adding the middle, high school and open division in March. Porcelli hopes to create a year-round program and said he plans to start a female-only group in September.

"It's about raising the standards," he said. "I'm trying to get these boys and girls to think nationally and globally, not just locally."

play host to a folkstyle tournament and camp in July.

The wrestlers have participated in three tournaments since March, including the Florida State Freestyle and Greco-Roman Championships, in which six members placed in their weight classes.

"Having this club has made a big difference," said Crystal River's Corey Neal, who went to a FHSAA state championship in the 130 division. "Everyone takes a break in the summer, so I'm sure I'll be ahead next year."

Even if Neal wanted to take it easy, Porcelli wouldn't let him.



It has been almost two hours, and 18 wrestlers have dropped to the floor, competing in white circles painted on the mats.

The participants are clustered in groups of three, rotating in and out with a minute break after facing two other athletes. Two roll out of their circle and head off the mat toward the cement floor to the right of them.

"Keep turning right, keep turning right," Porcelli yells. "There's no out of bounds in wrestling."

"Even if you are up against the wall," he says, with a hard hand smack to the cinderblock wall, "you keep going."

Porcelli grew up on a farm in Long Island, N.Y., and was competing by 6 at Bay Shore Kid Wrestling Club. He won a USA Wrestling national title at 11, breaking family furniture along the way while wrestling his brothers.

By his senior year at Bay Shore High, Porcelli was a two-time state champion (1978-79) and captured three consecutive conference crowns. As a junior, he finished sixth in the USA Wrestling freestyle nationals and second as a senior.

but they can train like a champion, act like a champion and be a champion. Everybody can deal with the wins, but it's how do you deal with the losses and disappointments."



Porcelli earned his master's in physical education from Adelphi University, then coached at Hofstra University and Georgetown Preparatory School in Washington, D.C., during the early 1990s.

He continued to compete and became a five-time USA Wrestling

"I believe this is going to be one of the best clubs in the state, and on a yearly basis we are going to put Citrus County on the map by having high school All-Americans who will be national champs and help increase college coaches' awareness of this area."

The Citrus Three-Style Club — named for the types of wrestling it teaches, Greco-Roman, freestyle and folkstyle — has grown from 12 or so athletes to 52. The organization receives 18-30 participants at the twice-a-week practices and will

Though he seems indifferent at times to the pain and exhaustion of his athletes, Porcelli's personality has been embraced — evident from the large crowd of parents and wrestlers packing the gym hours after the practice started.

"It's been a season of knowledge, passion and learning," said Josh Rutherford, an incoming Citrus sophomore. "It's just been amazing."

Dawn Reiss can be reached at (352) 564-3628 or dreiss@sptimes.com.