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Schleich has two speeds: 'Stop and fast-forward'

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Submitted photo

Dave Schleich deadlifts weights as Niko Hulslander, background, spots him while doing a drug-free program at a church in area in 2001. More than 10 kids gave their lives to Christ that night after the program.

Dave Schleich has had a positive influence on more students and athletes than he can recall.

Schleich was the strength and conditioning coach for Ethan Brownback in 1998 when he wrestled at UPJ and finished second in the nation at 184 pounds. Brownback called Schleich "a light in a dark, dark world."

“People are drawn to the light,” the current Pennsylvania state trooper stationed in Reading said. “When you find someone like that you always want to be around them.

“Coach Schleich has two speeds — stop and fast-forward. He always gives 110 percent. Dave, Niko Hulslander and I used to do drug-and-alcohol-free assemblies for the kids. We had a routine called ‘Skip out of Drugs and into Fitness.’ One time Dave was squatting and we were on stage at Johnstown High School with 400 to 500 kids and he kept going heavier and heavier. He said this is for you, and after pumping the kids up, he lifted the heaviest weight I ever saw him lift. The kids rushed the stage and were emotional. It was one of the best moments for me.”

Hulslander approached Schleich about coaching him in 1995 after seeing him at a powerlifting competition in 1994. Hulslander had just returned from London, where he lifted a combined total of 1,673 pounds at an international competition.

“We were corresponding regularly and he wrote me a letter saying he believed I could lift 1,950 to 2,000 pounds,” the York County resident said. “I went beyond that to a combined squat, bench and dead lift total of 2,133 pounds. He coached me until 2001. ... He’s like a brother to me. The admiration and honor I have for him is not just on the platform. It’s about life as well. He is not only genuine, but honorable, loyal, respectful and dignified in every aspect of life. I did drug-free programs with him as well as state prison demonstrations and Christian camp motivational speaking. He loves planting the seeds and reaching people with the gospel.”

Justin Capouellez, a Greater Johnstown student-athlete from 2007-11, said Schleich paid for both of his powerlifting state championship appearances out of his own pocket.

“Coach taught me how to become a winner,” Capouellez said. “His positive mental attitude and drive to succeed rubbed off on me. I didn’t know how to win and he passed on to me a winning mindset. He got me hooked on reading and it has unlocked doors to my future. I’m set to graduate from IUP with a psychology degree and I want to be a professional speaker.

“He’s been through a lot, and it helps him understand people. He has a genuine interest in people and wears his emotions on his sleeve. He believes in people. Coach will listen to your negativity and help you take the steps to make your goals complete. He clicks with Johnstown students because of his history. People would rather talk to him than any counselor. He just recently joined Facebook and past students have been contacting him and thanking him for everything he did for them them. One even wrote a 17-page letter to him.”

Schleich said he can’t take credit for anyone’s success. He credited the kids and God for making success possible.

“Justin is a kid who is a real hungry kid,” Schleich said. “He is passionate about lifting and passionate about speaking and getting the most out of his education. At one time in his life, he didn’t know God and was getting in trouble. Through Fellowship of Christian Athletes and a couple of good teachers and myself working with him in school, we got with him and he is now on fire. He’s going to be very successful. He’s a two-time state champion in powerlifting.”

Hulslander referenced one of the lessons he learned from Schleich.

“When I asked him to coach me, he asked me if I am ready to coach,” Hulslander said. “I said ‘I asked you to coach me; I don’t understand why you would ask me that?’ Dave said there will be a time when someone is watching you workout and I want to know if you are willing you take time to answer their questions. You have to pass on what I am giving to you — you can’t keep it. He wants others to flourish.”

Brownback went one step further with his description of Schleich.

“UPJ head wrestling coach Pat Pecora taught us that you want to be the kind of person when someone is hanging off a cliff, you want to hold the end of the rope and forget the pain,” Brownback said.

“Dave is that person. You can count on him to hold on to you and never let you go.”