

## Mark Hoesly - From Farmboy to Worldwide Wrestler

Many of the locals know that Marie Blumer Hoesly competed as a gymnast in the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, Finland at the age of 35. I remember as a young boy in 1955 that we had to hurry and finish the farm chores one evening so we could get to Recreation Park in Monroe where Marie and her husband, Mark, were performing aerial exhibitions in which Mark held a pole with Marie balancing on top while doing handstands and acrobatics. Many may not know that Mark was also a weightlifter and professional wrestler as well as a gymnast. They lived at N805 Highway 69 a few miles south of Monroe, where they had much gymnastics apparatus to do their training.

Mark was born June 4, 1910 on the family farm at N629 Clarno Road in Clarno Township to his parents Mathias (a Swiss immigrant) and Barbara Figi Hoesly. He and his brother, John, a year younger than Mark, were schooled down the road and around the corner at the West Clarno School. They probably only attended school through the eighth grade, if they even went that long. The 1930 census shows that both young men were farming with their parents.

Mark probably became involved with the Monroe Turn and Schwing club about 1930. He was “discovered” there by George “Monk” Stauffacher, a well-known Monroe wrestler. Mark heeded Stauffacher’s advice to go to Chicago after winning the championship of southern Wisconsin schwingers for two years. Stauffacher took him to Chicago in February where he worked at West Side Professional gymnasium.

After six weeks in Chicago, Mark, 22, returned home late in March 1932 with the title of Illinois state amateur heavyweight wrestling champ, having accomplished that on Saturday, March 26 at the Victor Lawson YMCA. He had lost a “time decision” to Ed Howell, amateur champ of Chicago, a week earlier. He then pinned Frank Leahy, state champ, and won two other matches on Saturday night to take the gold medal.

Hoesly entered active wrestling competition again in the Chicago wrestling tournament on March 17 and 18, 1933 weighing 197 pounds. This was followed by the Illinois state championship later that month. He had narrowly lost the Chicago amateur title the previous year, but later threw the man who had beaten him in Chicago and won the state title. An article on June 16, 1933 stated that the Clarno township farmer had again returned from Chicago “with a medal showing that he won the third place in the heavyweight section of the international wrestling championships sponsored by the YMCA of the world in conjunction with the world’s fair sports congress.” Mark also had “a painfully injured knee that prevented him from participating in the second place contest” after having wrestled nine times during the weekend.

Mark went east to Brooklyn and New York City to get some advice from Wladek Zbysco (a Polish catch wrestler) and Ed “Strangler” Lewis (in the WWE Hall of Fame) before returning to Chicago early in March 1934. At 214 pounds, he captured the YMCA meet felling opponents who outweighed him by as much as 30 pounds to take the title in Chicago.

It was reported on July 3, 1934 that Mark had taken first place in the “heavy” athletics at the American National tournament in Cleveland, Ohio. This included “two types of wrestling, rock throwing, handling weights, jumps,” and more. The Monroe group placed seventh at the meet with nine or 10 groups or sections competing. These “honors are the best gathered yet by a local delegation at the national meet and are considered especially fine since the club is not an old one and some of the members have not practiced over a long period of time.”



Clarno farmer Mark Hoesly, shown here in a wrestling pose, traveled much of the world in the 1930s as a professional wrestler before moving back to Green County. This photo is from the collection of Nancy Krattiger Ziltener.

Mark had a busy year in 1935 starting with a competition in Chicago on Saturday evening, March 16. He took first place in the heavyweight class at that meet in the city YMCA. He had to win 10 matches in dual meets around the city just to be eligible to compete in this meet. He pinned one man in two minutes 40 seconds in one of the final meets, then pinned his opponent in the final match in eight minutes. This made him eligible to participate in the state YMCA finals the following Saturday, which he also won. He then started training for the sectional AAU meet the following weekend.

It was reported in Monroe on March 28 that Mark had placed third in the AAU meet, being defeated by a man from Gary, Indiana. Mark was not discouraged and continued to train at the YMCA in Chicago, where he was also an assistant engineer. The following month Mark won the state Y wrestling meet in Illinois and was again trying to compete in a sectional AAU meet.

While Mark was still living in Chicago his mother passed away on Sunday morning, February 2, 1936 at the age of 49 after helping her husband milk. Having had heart trouble for about a year she came in from the barn to prepare breakfast; her husband found her seated at the kitchen table when he came in. Mark's obituary said that Mark "was a candidate for the United States Olympic wrestling team in 1936, but was unable to try out because of his mother's death." It is unknown how long Mark was home after his mother's death; he may have remained for the rest of the year as he was included in an exhibition for the Turn and Schwing Club at the Armory on December 10. He was the anchor for a quintet of gymnasts, including Jacob Rattin, Marie Blumer, and her two sisters, Martha and Rosa, who showed their feats of strength and balance on him.. Admission to the program was 40 cents for adults and 25 cents for children. Music was provided by the Edelweiss Orchestra.

Mark would experience many more adventures before he returned to his life on the farm, many of which will be shared next week.