



## DR. KURT J. NELLIS MEMORIAL AWARD

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By Ken Wunderley  
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When Dan Megaludis and his family moved to Murrysville, the Franklin Regional wrestling program was in shambles.

"I wanted my son Nico to wrestle, but Franklin Regional's program was in bad shape. It was depressing," Megaludis said. "They had only six kids on the varsity team and went 0-10 three years in a row."

Megaludis was referring to a three-year stretch from 1997-2000 when the Panthers compiled a 1-34 record.

"The booster club consisted of two parents and hardly anybody attended their matches," Megaludis said. "The school board was actually considering dropping the program."

At that point, Megaludis decided to step into the picture and help rebuild the program.

"I asked the school board to give us a chance to rebuild the program from the bottom up," Megaludis said. "The key to success in any program is to have a good feeder program."

Megaludis started working with the Franklin Regional Youth Program and became its head coach.

"I never coached until Nico started wrestling," Megaludis said. "I was determined to keep the program alive, because I really loved Murrysville and didn't want to move."

Slowly but surely, Franklin Regional's program improved. "A million practices later" and Franklin Regional has one of the strongest programs in the state. The Panthers won WPIAL and PIAA team tournament titles, along with the team title at the PIAA individual tournament in 2014 and matched that feat again this year.

"I tried to make it fun for the kids," said Megaludis, who has a wrestling mat in his cellar. "We worked hard, but had fun at the same time. I could see improvement every year when we attended the state Junior Olympic tournament. We actually took 18 kids one year."

Megaludis headed up Franklin Regional's youth program for eight years, then moved up to the junior high to follow his son. He eventually became a varsity assistant for head coach Eric Mausser for a couple years after Nico moved up to the varsity.

"As soon as I left the youth program, the numbers went down," Megaludis said. "So when Nico became a senior, Eric asked me to go back down and help the youth program again."

It's been five years since Megaludis returned to the youth program.

"I really enjoy working with the little guys," Megaludis said. "They actually listen to you, most of the time. It's so rewarding

to teach a young kid in the youth program and see him blossom into a quality wrestler in high school."

For his many years of service to the sport of wrestling, Megaludis will be recognized at the Dapper Dan Wrestling Classic with the Dr. Kurt J. Nellis Award.

"When I first received the news that I had been chosen, I wondered whether I deserved it," Megaludis said. "It's really flattering to be recognized for doing something that I love."

The Nellis Award was created to memorialize Dr. Kurt Nellis for his community service and dedication to amateur wrestling. The award recognizes one individual each year to who has served their community through the sport of amateur wrestling from Western Pennsylvania.

"This award is not about me," said Megaludis, who is quick to share the award with the other coaches who have played a part in rebuilding Franklin Regional's program. "I couldn't accept it without recognizing the efforts of Ralph Petrarca, one of the youth coaches, and the current coaching staff at Franklin Regional. I got the ball rolling, but I can't take all the credit. Eric and his staff picked up where we left off and took the program to the next level."

Megaludis began his wrestling career at Gateway High School and was a two-year starter for former coach Dick Bane. He graduated in 1980, but resumed his career years later on the open circuit.

"After college some of my buddies and I started attending open masters tournaments," Megaludis said. "We've been doing that off and on for 15 years."



Dan Megaludis