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Former Sailor, Hawkeye Yagla chooses to step away as official

By JIM NELSON, Courier Sports Writer

WATERLOO --- Chuck Yagla figures he's got four or five more good officiating years left in him.

But over the past couple of seasons, Yagla has been torn between being one of the best collegiate wrestling officials in the United States and his relatively new role as a grandfather.

Being a grandpa won out in the end.

Thursday will mark the beginning of the end of Yagla's 24-year run as a college official with the start of the NCAA Division I National Wrestling Championships at The Palace of Auburn Hills, Mich.

"It's going to be kind of weird when it is all said and done," said the 53-year-old Yagla, a former wrestling star at Waterloo Columbus High and the University of Iowa. "But ... it's time to move on."

More and more during the last two years, Yagla has felt the pull to retire.

"There are a couple of reasons why, but primarily I have one grandson who just turned 2," explained Yagla. "He lives about 40 miles away so, typically, the only time I get to see him is on the weekends.

"Well, I officiate just about every weekend, and it was getting tough to call back home, talk to my wife and hear her say, 'I'm watching Justin.' He's just so much fun to be around and spend time with, and I just don't want to miss any more of that time."

Yagla will be working his 11th Division I national tournament this weekend and has been a regular at some of the biggest tournaments over his 24 years, including the Pac-10, Big Ten and Big 12 meets, as well as numerous Division II national tournaments.

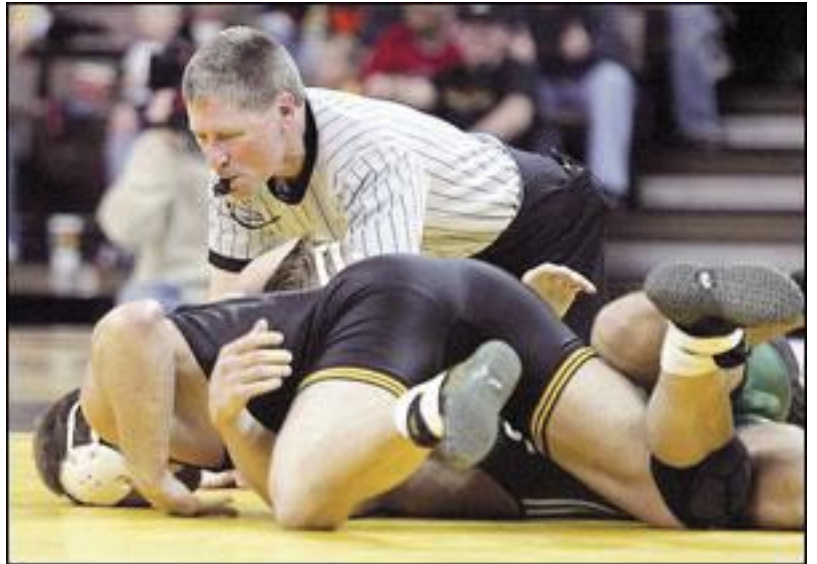
In fact, he's officiated the Big Ten tournament at each of the 11 Big Ten schools, beginning in 1995 at Indiana. Two years ago at Iowa City, he completed the circuit.

"Another reason I feel it's time to quit is I believe I'm going out at the top of my game," said Yagla. "I do feel I'm at my best right now after 24 years and feel like I could officiate four or five more years, but I don't want to be one of those guys who sticks around too long and his skills start to deteriorate."

After a standout career at Columbus, Yagla became a three-time all-American at Iowa, including back-to-back national championships in 1975 and '76.

Over the next five years, he continued to wrestle competitively while also serving as an assistant coach to Dan Gable. He qualified for 1980 U.S. Olympic freestyle team, but didn't compete because the U.S. boycotted those games.

Yagla moved back to Waterloo in 1982 and began working for the National Bank of Waterloo.



Forced to retire from wrestling because of a shoulder injury, Yagla was looking to stay involved in wrestling upon his return to the Cedar Valley.

“I always thought I had a good knowledge of the rules and felt like officiating would be a natural way for me to stay involved,” said Yagla.

Yagla’s first tournament as an official was at Luther College. He also officiated a few high school events, but with his connections to the collegiate ranks, Yagla was able to focus strictly on college wrestling after a while.

He was an alternate official for the 1994 nationals before finally catching on fulltime in 1996 at Minneapolis.

Yagla has had a lot of highlight moments during his career, including a 1998 dual between Iowa and Oklahoma State at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. He calls that meet the best he’s witnessed.

“It was probably the most exciting dual meet I’ve ever been involved with,” he recalled. “Doug Schwab beat Eric Guerrero, Jeff McGinnis got pinned, and I disqualified the guy wrestling Lee Fullhart for stalling.

“It eventually came down to Oklahoma State’s heavyweight (Ben Lee) escaping in overtime to win it. It was the funniest meet I’ve ever officiated. I guessing there were well over 10,000 fans, and it was the most noise I’ve ever heard at Carver-Hawkeye.”

Yagla, now the director of business development at the Kirk Gross Company in Waterloo, said he’s not done with the NCAA tournament. He hasn’t missed a national meet since competing in his first one in 1974.

“I can’t imagine I will stop going,” he said. “It is one of my favorite things to go to. I actually miss being able to sit and watch.”