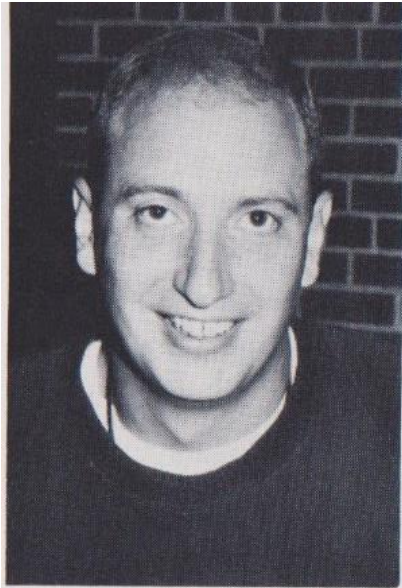


# The stuff of legends



**Chuck Panerio learned the sport of wrestling to become a successful mat coach**

**BY STEVEN SMITH  
of the Journal**

EPHRATA – The numbers of the late Chuck Panerio, in his years as the head wrestling coach at Ephrata High School, were impressive.

He guided the Tiger mat program for 14 years, finishing with a dual meet record of 184-53-3. His teams won 11 conference championships, two sub regional titles, one regional crown. Panerio sent 37 wrestlers to state – 18 earned medals; one was a state champion; one went on to win three national wrestling titles.

Then consider one last fact about Chuck Panerio that will turn all that greatness into complete astonishment.

Chuck Panerio never wrestled. He was a self-taught wrestling coach.

For all of his success, Panerio, who passed away in 2013, will receive one final reward to cap his outstanding career. On Sept. 28, Panerio will be inducted into the Ephrata High athletic Hall of Fame, a member of the first class that features 13 inductees.

The induction will be another honor for the Cle Elum native who grew up playing basketball and baseball in the Cascade Mountain town – at the time, amateur wrestling in Washington state high schools didn't exist. For his efforts to make the Tiger mat program grow and prosper, Panerio was inducted into the Washington State Wrestling Coaches hall in 1985 and the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in Stillwater, Okla., in 2010.

It was during his induction to the national hall that he honored the memory of his wife, Helen. The couple was married for 38 years before she passed away in 1999 and had three children – their son, Tony, was killed in an auto accident in 1983.

Panerio's daughter Krista, said that being around her dad during his coaching days was a huge part of her early life. "I grew up in that annex, where it all started. I was three, four years-old during the strongest part of his career."

Panerio took over in 1963, three years after he was hired as a wrestling assistant. It was at a time when there were no classifications for high school sports, no single-A or class 2A – Panerio's teams would wrestle dual meets against the schools in the region, from Soap Lake to Moses Lake and those in Wenatchee and Yakima.

"Kids and administrators today talk about Ephrata going up against larger schools. When my Dad started, he made it a mission to put Ephrata and the community on the map," said Krista Panerio. "The history of Ephrata wrestling and what my parents did was phenomenal. The kids talk about the larger schools they compete against but it's all been done before."

Part of that history for Panerio came against the wrestling program at Moses Lake, the most decorated high school mat team in state history. The Tigers faced the Chiefs many times in Panerio's years but only beat them twice – the wins in 1963 and 1970 handed Ephrata the conference championship.

In 1976, he guided Dave DeLong to the only state individual championship of his tenure. Prior to that, he coached Lanny Davidson, who started in Ephrata but really shined in college – at Eastern Washington State College, Davidson was a three-time NAIA national champion.

And at the end of the 1972-73 season, Panerio was honored to be named the state wrestling Coach of the Year.

Legendary EHS baseball coach Dave Johnson, who will join Panerio in the first Hall class, got the job coaching the baseball team when he arrived in Ephrata in 1970. Panerio had been the diamond coach since 1963 – in 101 games, Panerio's teams won 58 and captured a league title in 1969.

"He told me one time that he was debating if he should give up wrestling or give up baseball," said Johnson. "As a young coach, he showed me that Ephrata could win. I think if there had been classifications for wrestling back then, Chuck would have won two or three state championships.

"Chuck was a basketball guy and a good baseball player. But he got involved with a

wrestling camp at Central (CWU) and learned a lot," Johnson continued. "He did know calisthenics – his kids were always in the greatest shape. Chuck was a great guy and he showed us we could be successful in Ephrata."

And it was the attitude Panerio showed during his entire career, said his daughter.

"He was a man who would show up at the school at 5 a.m. and wouldn't leave until 9:30 at night. He loved the student athletes as much as he loved his own children," she said. "He was a father figure to so many. The time he put into his athletes went way beyond wrestling.

"He took it upon himself to feel that if a kid lost a match, he lost. It was very personal to him," she added. "He loved Ephrata and Ephrata loved him."

**The following article appeared in the Ephrata Alumni Association's "Tigerville News" which was published in conjunction with the Ephrata High School 100 year reunion. To view: [EphrataTigersAlumni.com](http://EphrataTigersAlumni.com), 100 Year Reunion, Newsletters-December 2013.**

### **EHSChuck Panerio remembered** Grant County Journal August 22, 2013

BY RANDY BRACHT  
of the Journal



EPHRATA — If you were to paint a portrait of a successful wrestling coach, it's unlikely you'd conjure up the image of a slightly built, hard-of-hearing former basketball player of Italian ancestry whose distinctive style of speech left him subject to affectionate mimicking by scores of athletes.

In other words, it's unlikely you'd conjure up Chuck Panerio — a man who constantly proved that looks can be deceiving.

Panerio profoundly influenced and inspired a generation of high school athletes — and many others — during his 30-year tenure as a teacher and coach with the Ephrata School District.

Panerio's legacy will be fondly remembered tomorrow during a memorial service, following his unexpected and perhaps inexplicable death last Friday at age 75.

News of his passing continues to reverberate in a community that he dearly loved, and loved him in return.

“Upbeat, hardworking, honest, loyal, a heckuva teacher, good for kids, good to be around,” said his longtime friend and former boss, Don Gordon, a retired grade school principal and high school athletic director.

Last night, at the Ephrata City Council meeting, mayor pro tem Bruce Reim — one of Panerio’s former wrestlers — asked for a moment of silence to remember and honor the longtime coach.

The son of a coal miner, Panerio’s blue-collar work ethic developed while growing up in the hard-knock communities of Roslyn and Cle Elum, where he was a standout baseball and basketball player in high school. He then attended Central Washington University in Ellensburg, graduating in 1960 with a degree in physical education.

He and Gordon both came to Ephrata later that year. In 1963, Panerio became the high school’s head wrestling coach — teaching a sport in which he had never competed as an athlete.

But he was a quick learner. Panerio was among a handful of coaches from central Washington — others included Ron Seibel of Moses Lake, Bill Elliott of Cashmere and Larry Gibson of Omak — who were formative in shaping the sport at the prep level statewide.

In the 14 years that he coached, Panerio’s Tiger mat men — who often competed against larger schools, including Seibel’s perennial powerhouse Chiefs — compiled a dual-meet record of 184 wins, 53 losses and three ties.

“Charlie had the only team to beat Moses Lake at home in its heyday,” recalled Gordon.

Before stepping down as coach in 1977, Panerio produced 10 conference championships, two sub-regional and regional champions, and had five teams place among the top 10 in state tournaments. He also coached 37 state qualifiers and had 10 wrestlers go on to compete at the collegiate level, including 1971 EHS graduate Lanny Davidson, who attended Eastern Washington University and won two individual national championships.

Panerio was selected as Washington State Wrestling Coach of the Year in 1972-73, and was inducted in the Washington State Wrestling Hall of Fame in 1985. That honor was followed up in 2010, when Panerio was recognized for lifetime service to the sport and inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame.

He was deeply moved by the recognition, and by the number of community members and former wrestlers who attended the ceremony in Spokane.

For several years, Panerio also coached the Ephrata Tigers’ baseball program, until he was succeeded in 1971 by then first-year teacher Dave Johnson.

“Chuck was a mentor to me and several other young coaches,” said Johnson, now a retired Hall of Fame coach himself.

At the time, said Johnson, there was a coffee-shop perception among some coaches and community members that Ephrata kids were “too soft” to compete in athletics because of their upbringing in the white-collar “government town.”

“Chuck showed that wasn’t true,” said Johnson, recalling how Panerio built a successful program — in perhaps the toughest sport of all — through his passion, dedication, hard work, preparation, and discipline.

“... all those things that sports can teach,” said Johnson, who counted Panerio and another Tiger coaching legend, the late Marty O’Brien, as the most influential figures in his career.

At times, Panerio could be candidly blunt: he was not, in Johnson’s words, “an elegant speaker.”

But with his candor came his passion for competition and his sincere belief that it was a noble pursuit. And because of that sincerity, the message was respected by his wrestlers and his P.E. students — an often-squirrely lot — despite the nature of the times: the late 1960s and early ’70s, when young people across the nation were challenging authority figures.

“He was old school,” said Gordon. “If Charlie said it, you could count on his word. If you went to war, he’s the guy you’d want in your foxhole.”

Both Johnson and Gordon said Panerio viewed his wrestlers as members of his extended family.

“He took a lot of borderline kids and kept them in school, because of wrestling,” said Johnson. “Some of those kids grew up in tough situations at home, and he was a father figure to them.”

“He showed how a man was supposed to act ... He taught ’em a lot of stuff about life. And a lot of those guys are successful today,” Johnson continued.

“Chuck was humble. He took a lot of pride in what he did, but he didn’t brag about it. He always thanked the people who helped him.”

At the time of his induction into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, Panerio reserved special thanks for his late wife, Helen, who died of cancer in 1999, in memory of her unflagging support and “great wrestling banquets.” Panerio, who also lost a teenaged son, Tony, in a vehicle accident in 1983, was proud to be accompanied at the induction ceremony by his two grown daughters, Krista Panerio and Deona Behrens.

But the loss of his wife and son profoundly affected Panerio. They will be reunited tomorrow with his burial at the Roslyn cemetery.

“Nobody loved their family more,” observed Gordon. “He always put on a strong, outward appearance, an outward facade. But ... he went into a spiral after Helen’s death.”

“He went through a lot of tragedy,” agreed Johnson. “Helen and Tony, I know he thought about them every day.”

Still, Panerio continued to reach out to others, said neighbor Brenda Follett, who spoke fondly of his invitations to meals or trips to the movies, even in recent months when his health faltered in part due to low sodium levels.

Gordon — his voice choked with emotion — summed up Panerio’s legacy with these words:

“Do your best. Always be fair. Think like a winner, and that’s what you’ll be. Set a high goal, and you’ll reach it. And never give up.”