

## INTRODUCTION

We as Americans are a hard working, hard drinking and hard fighting nation of immigrants. People immigrate to this country for the promise of a better life and through hard work and perseverance many find what they are looking for. Those immigrants were instrumental in creating a style of grappling that has been proven repeatedly to be the most effective the world has ever seen. After reading this book I hope that you too are proud to be an immigrant.

As Americans many of us tend to look to a foreign land to find the most lethal martial art. These foreign countries create mystical images in the mind and we have been conditioned to recognize these images through television shows like Kung Fu and through Bruce Lee movies. In reality we don't have to look to the Far East or the jungles of Brazil to find the most lethal hand to hand combatants. We need look no further than the carnivals of the early 20th century, professional wrestling of the late 1800's and early 1900's and the wrestling rooms at our nation's colleges and universities. USA Wrestling, the governing body of amateur wrestling in America, has recently began sanctioning submission tournaments which will bring American amateur wrestling back to its roots. The roots of these athletes will be examined in great detail on the pages that follow and provide an insight into the most dominant martial art the world has ever seen.

There is no doubt that Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is an effective style of grappling however as you will read in this book not all grappling is Jiu Jitsu. American Submission Wrestling predates BJJ and the Rough and Tumble fighting and Lancashire Catch as Catch Can style that combined with Indian and Persian submission wrestling to form American Submission Wrestling have an even longer history.

We have heard many amateur wrestlers say that when they watch Brazilian Jiu Jitsu that it appears to be lazy wrestling. The truth is that there is a lot to learn from Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and BJJ has a rich and storied history. We provide you with a detailed history of BJJ in this book. The amateur wrestlers are making an honest observation and there is also something to learn from the BJJ practitioner. Both styles have something to offer but there is one style that is uniquely American that encompasses both ideologies. American submission wrestlers believe it is important to train so that you don't end up on your back but if you do they incorporate techniques to re-establish a dominant position or even begin a submission. Contrary to popular belief American Submission Wrestling traditionally did not frown upon the "guard" position and foot and leg control have always been a part of the style. The pinfall in catch wrestling was longer than the folkstyle pin of today and foot and leg control was used to re-establish dominance and often begin a submission. American submission wrestling has an exciting and

rich history taking from Irish, English, Indian and Greek immigrants. The real life stories told here are of tough gritty men willing to take on all comers which will fascinate and enlighten you even if you aren't a fan of submission wrestling or mixed martial arts. We will examine the impact that these men and their styles had on international competitions and how their influence can be felt to this day.

We begin this book with a unique look at some of our most popular American presidents. After reading our American Presidents section you will learn that there was a lot you weren't taught in school. The presidents we highlight embodied the spirit of early Americana. They displayed a level of toughness that seems to be lacking today. From there we will introduce you to a brutal form of fighting founded on America's frontier known as Rough and Tumble. Rough and Tumble was as brutal and rugged as the men who expanded the frontier of America. From there you will hop on a roller coaster ride through carnivals and learn about what the wild world of the carnivals was like from firsthand accounts from the last living take on all comers carnival wrestlers. Then we journey to the smoke filled arenas of late 1800's and early 1900's professional wrestling. This was professional catch as catch can wrestling and vaguely resembles the sports entertainment being marketed today by Dixie Carter and Vincent Kennedy McMahon. From there we sit you down face to face with the living legends as we provide our accounts from our face to face interviews with America's last living take on all comer carnival wrestlers. Before we bid you farewell we will introduce you to some of the New Leaders of the Old School that is to say the men that are carrying on the rich storied tradition of American Submission Wrestling. Keep your head up and your elbows in because you're about to enter a wild and wooly world and learn about a unique American art form.

## I. PRESIDENTIAL PUGILISTS

**George Washington** "Worry is the interest paid by those who borrow trouble"

America's first president became famous for his dignity and reserve. His best training however was given him by practical men and outdoor occupations. He mastered tobacco growing, stock raising and he was sufficiently familiar with surveying. At his farm in Mount Vernon he spent hours in the saddle and he came to love horses and was regarded as the best horseman in Virginia. He enjoyed horse racing and even bred race horses. When it came to sports Washington excelled at games like quotos and rounders, which called for hurling stones and iron bars. Washington was a champion wrestler (collar and elbow). At 18 Washington won a collar and elbow wrestling championship that was at least county wide. Washington never lost his touch, at 47 then commander of the Continental armies he still had enough to defeat seven consecutive challengers from the Massachusetts Volunteers.

**Abraham Lincoln** "Leave nothing for tomorrow which can be done today."

Renowned for his wrestling skills was young Abraham Lincoln, who was the wrestling champion of his county as early as 1830, at the age of 21. Lincoln was an impressive physical specimen, thin but wiry and muscular, strengthened by hard work in the fields and towering to a mighty 6 feet, 4 inches in height. It was at this time that Lincoln had his celebrated bout with Jack Armstrong, the local tough and county wrestling champion. Lincoln was keeping the store at New Salem, Illinois, when his boss backed him to out-wrestle the feared Armstrong. For a time, the two scufflers circled each other warily. They did some grappling and twisting, but neither man could throw the other to the ground. Slowly, Armstrong began to get the worst of it. Finally, Lincoln grabbed the bully by the neck, held him at arm's length, and shook him like a little boy. This aroused the Clary's Grove boys, and it suddenly appeared Lincoln might be attacked by an entire crowd of people. He backed up against the wall of Offutt's store and offered to take them on one at a time.

Jack Armstrong was impressed with Abraham Lincoln's display of courage. He came forward, took Lincoln's hand and shook it heartily. He looked at his friends and said, "Boys, Abe Lincoln is the best fellow that ever broke into this settlement. He shall be one of us." A couple of years later, while serving as captain of a company of the Illinois Volunteers, raised

because of the Indian uprising by Black Hawk, Lincoln suffered his only recorded defeat in a wrestling bout. He fought a soldier from another unit and lost a rugged struggle by the odd fall. This time it was Lincoln who averted the free-for-all which seems of have been the customary follow-up to an individual wrestling bout. Often forsaking the "common British" style of collar and elbow for the free-for-all style of the frontier, Lincoln undoubtedly was the roughest and toughest of the wrestling Presidents. Also known as "catch-as-catch-can," this style was more hand-to-hand combat than sport. Lincoln progressed rapidly between the ages of 19, when he defended his stepbrother's river barge from Natchez thugs, throwing the potential highjackers overboard, and 29, when he cautiously mentioned himself as possibly the second best wrestler in southern Illinois. Lincoln certainly did not achieve any national fame as a wrestler, but his career was typical of the way the sport was conducted in the first half of the 19th Century.

**Teddy Roosevelt** "It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

Teddy Roosevelt introduced a new era in the sporting presidency. As president, his life of active pursuits would raise athletic and outdoor sports never associated with the presidency. He devoted two and a half hours each day to physical activity. Teddy was a well known hunter but he threw himself into becoming a skilled boxer, wrestler and even learned Ju Jitsu.

Here he writes a letter about his boxing and wrestling to one of his buddies and discusses Japanese Ju Jitsu vs American Wrestling

Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919). Theodore Roosevelt's Letters to His Children. 1919.

## 59. ON COUNTING DAYS AND WRESTLING

White House, Feb. 24, 1905. 1

DARLING KERMIT:

I puzzled a good deal over your marks. I am inclined to think that one explanation is that you have thought so much of home as to prevent your really putting your whole strength into your studies. It is most natural that you should count the days before

coming home, and write as you do that it will only be 33 days, only 26 days, only 19 days, etc., but at the same time it seems to me that perhaps this means that you do not really put all your heart and all your head effort into your work; and that if you are able to, it would be far better to think just as little as possible about coming home and resolutely set yourself to putting your best thought into your work. It is an illustration of the old adage about putting your hand to the plow and then looking back. In after life, of course, it is always possible that at some time you may have to go away for a year or two from home to do some piece of work. If during that whole time you only thought day after day of how soon you would get home I think you would find it difficult to do your best work; and maybe this feeling may be partly responsible for the trouble with the lessons at school.

Wednesday, Washington's Birthday, I went to Philadelphia and made a speech at the University of Pennsylvania, took lunch with the Philadelphia City Troop and came home the same afternoon with less fatigue than most of my trips cost me; for I was able to dodge the awful evening banquet and the night on the train which taken together drive me nearly melancholy mad. Since Sunday we have not been able to ride. I still box with Grant, who has now become the champion middleweight wrestler of the United States. Yesterday afternoon we had Professor Yamashita up here to wrestle with Grant. It was very interesting, but of course jiu jitsu and our wrestling are so far apart that it is difficult to make any comparison between them. Wrestling is simply a sport with rules almost as conventional as those of tennis, while jiu jitsu is really meant for practice in killing or disabling our adversary. In consequence, Grant did not know what to do except to put Yamashita on his back, and Yamashita was perfectly content to be on his back. Inside of a minute Yamashita had choked Grant, and inside of two minutes more he got an elbow hold on him that would have enabled him to break his arm; so that there is no question but that he could have put Grant out. So far this made it evident that the jiu jitsu man could handle the ordinary wrestler. But Grant, in the actual wrestling and throwing was about as good as the Japanese, and he was so much stronger that he evidently hurt and wore out the Japanese. With a little practice in the art I am sure that one of our big wrestlers or boxers, simply because of his greatly superior strength, would be able to kill any of those Japanese, who though very good men for their inches and pounds are altogether too small to hold their own against big, powerful, quick men who are as well trained.

## Other Presidential Wrestlers

### Andrew Jackson

Andrew Jackson indulged in wrestling (collar and elbow) as a young man. In wrestling matches, a former schoolmate recalled "I could throw him three times out of four but he would never stay down. He was dead game even then, and never would give up."

### Zachary Taylor

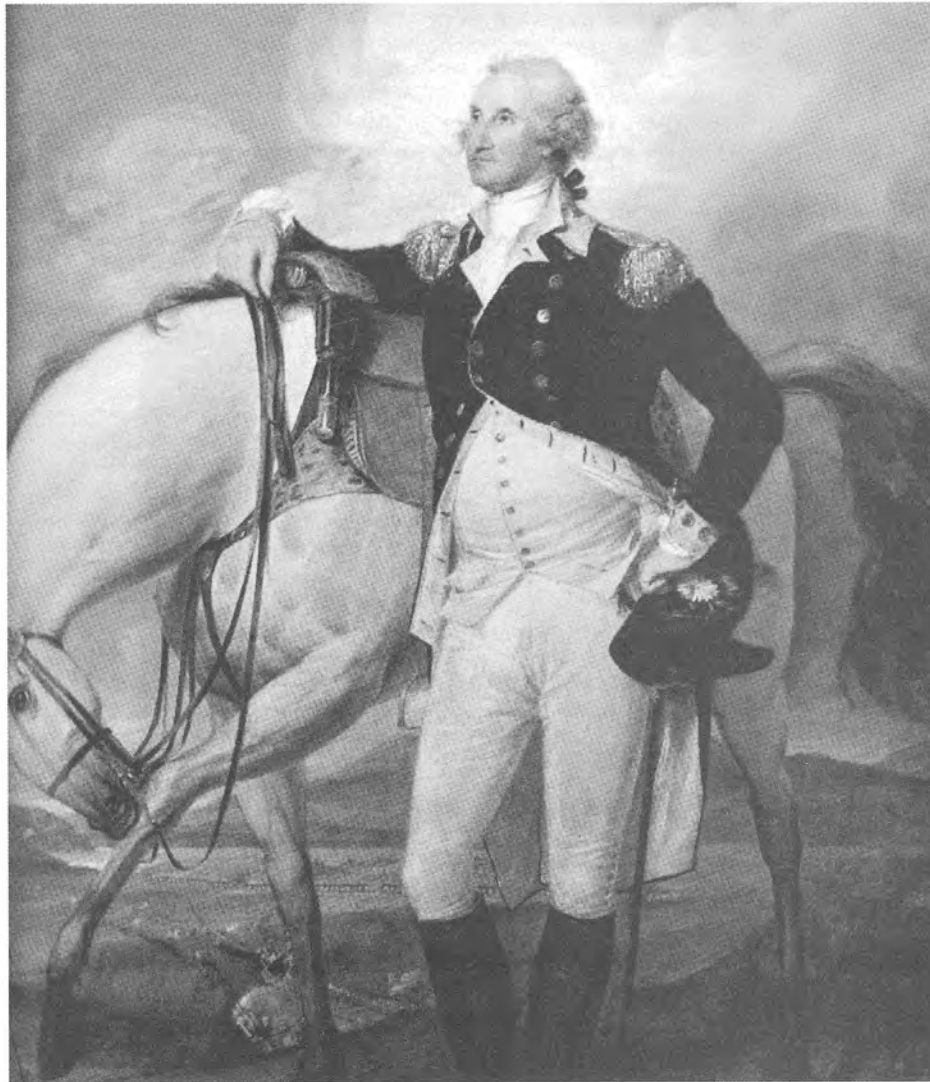
Zachary Taylor was a skilled competitor in collar and elbow during his service with the Illinois Volunteers for the Black Hawk uprising. He always favored wrestling as an army sport.

### Ulysses S Grant

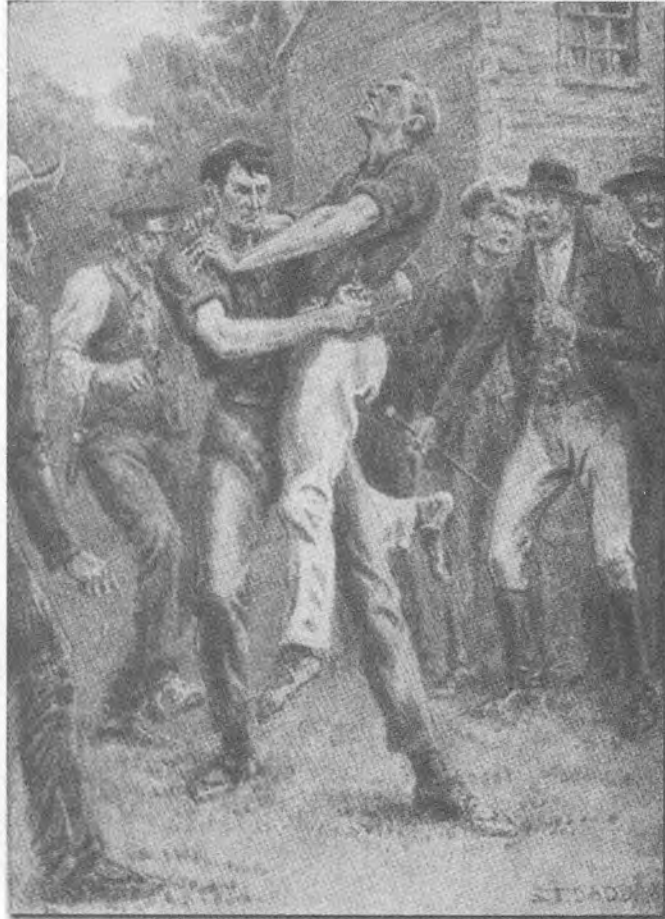
Ulysses became the first president to play golf; he was also an accomplished wrestler (collar and elbow).

### William Taft

Taft was known more for playing golf. Taft however followed collar and elbow his whole life. Big Bill as he was called was a heavyweight intramural champion at Yale and a fourth generation wrestler in the Taft family.



**GEORGE WASHINGTON WAS A COUNTY WRESTLING CHAMPION WHO ONCE WON 7 CONSECUTIVE CHALLENGES AGAINST THE BRASH YOUNG GRAPPLERS OF THE MASSACHUSSETTES VOLUNTEERS WHEN HE WAS AGE 47! PERHAPS HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN KNOWN AS GEORGE "THE NATURAL" WASHINGTON.**

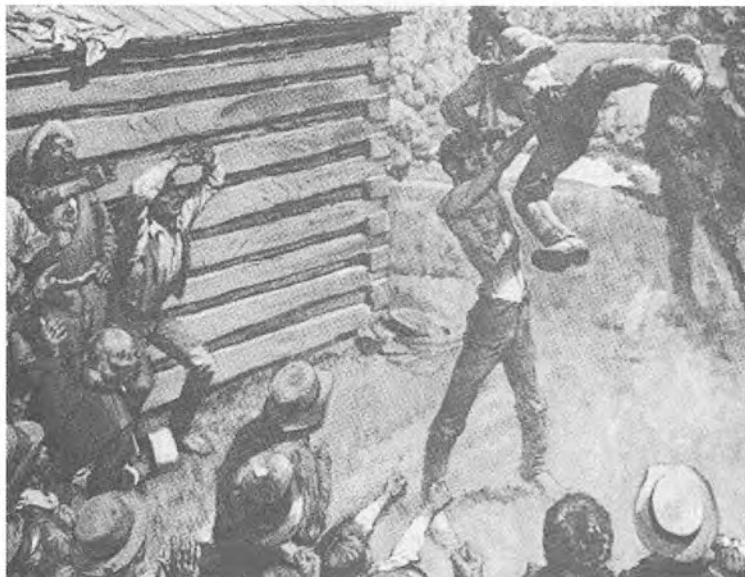


S.T. DADD'S ILLUSTRATION OF LINCOLN  
WRESTLING FROM THE  
STORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN (1906)

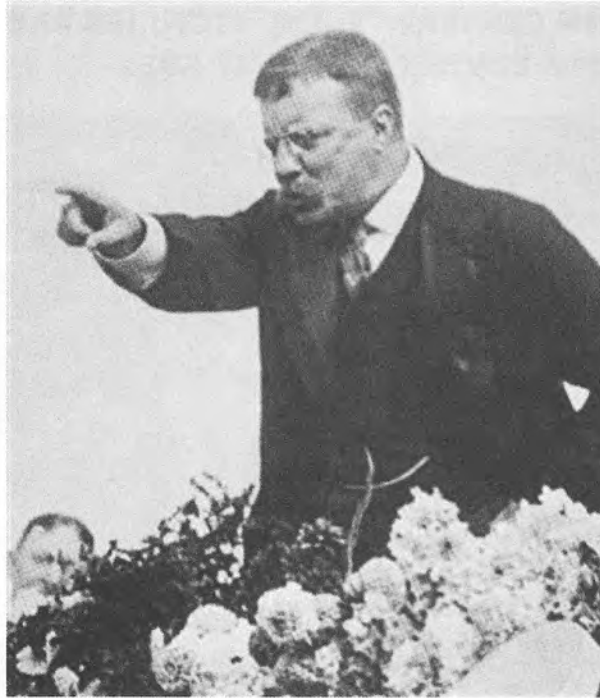
**THESE ILLUSTRATIONS SHOW A MUCH MORE PUGILISTIC PICTURE OF HONEST ABE. THE MAN WHO FREED THE SLAVES ALSO CONQUERED THE COUNTY AS WRESTLING CHAMPION. ABRAHAM LINCOLN WAS A FEARED WRESTLER IN THE CATCH AS CATCH CAN STYLE OF THE DAY AND ONCE BROKE A MAN'S NECK IN AN INFAMOUS BOUT. A YOUNG ABE IS PICTURED EXECUTING A BEAR HUG DURING A COUNTY CHALLENGE MATCH (TOP CENTER) AND IS SEEN DELIVERING WHAT APPEARS TO BE A MODIFIED**



**CHOKESLAM (BOTTOM CENTER). THESE PICTURES ARE A FAR CRY FROM THE WAY MOST PEOPLE ENVISION HONEST ABE.**



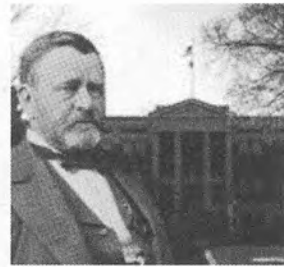
**TEDDY ROOSEVELT WAS THE ULTIMATE SPORTING PRESIDENT AND A SKILLED AND STUDIED GRAPPLER. ATOP A COMIC'S RENDITION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL PUGILIST AND THE BOTTOM PICTURE DEPICTS TEDDY LOOKING LIKE HE'S CUTTING A PROMO FOR AN IMPENDING BATTLE. "WATCHA GONNA DO WHEN TR RUNS WILD ON YOU!"**



THOUGH FAR FROM THE MOST GIFTED GRAPPLER ANDREW JACKSON WAS A TENACIOUS COMBATANT WHO AN OPPONENT PROCLAIMED "WOULD NEVER GIVE UP"



ZACHARY TAYLOR SKILLED ARMY WRESTLER



ULYSSES S GRANT GENERAL, PRESIDENT AND ACCOMPLISHED COLLAR AND ELBOW WRESTLER



WILLIAM TAFT YALE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMP AND 4<sup>TH</sup> GENERATION WRESTLER