

Trip to Russia alerts Johnson

By Jim Hughes
staff writer

As Mike Johnson recalled the days he spent last summer in Russia, his eyes were as wide as a 5-year-old's on Christmas morning. The former Troy High wrestler, now a member of the United States National Team, found his two-week stay in the Soviet Union to be an eye-opening experience.

Johnson, a December graduate of Central Michigan University, has his sights set on the 1984 Olympic Games. As part of his training, he joined the U.S. team last July to compete in the Moscow International Wrestling Tournament.

"I had this friend, Alexander Katochich," Johnson said, stopping to spell the name of the 163-pound Russian grappler. "He told me if you're ranked in the top six in amateur athletics (in Russia) in any sport, you receive 250 rubles per month (which averages to about \$340 per month in American dollars)."

Although it's no great secret that athletes in communist countries are subsidized by their governments, Johnson was under the impression that the aid was more substantial.

"If an athlete is a world champ, then he would get an extra 160 rubles (about \$218) per month for one year from the day he won the world championship," Johnson said. His Russian friend and counterpart told him, "There's a big misconception about that, though. I always thought they got cars and received a lot more compensation than that."

Although Johnson's conception of Soviet athletes was destroyed by his friend's information, the fact of the state subsidies is one that handicaps athletes from the United States.

"That's why we're at such a disadvantage," Johnson said. "They (USSR athletes) are subsidized by their government, and that takes care of their own living and training expenses."

"I'd prefer that," he added with a grin. "Athletics is a way of life for them. It enables athletes in the communist block countries to train at a later age. Americans have to become settled and earn a living, and we're unable financially to make sacrifices and continue in the sport."

"Since they're getting money for being an athlete, they can concentrate solely on training."

JOHNSON, A 1978 graduate of Troy High, was a state champion his senior year at 155 pounds. He shares the Colts'



Mike Johnson
Journey to Russia

season pin record of 30 with senior Steve Brown, who is currently rewriting the wrestling record book at Troy. In Russia, Johnson did not encounter the same amount of success he had in previous ventures to other parts of the world. Wrestling in the Padudne Tournament in Novo Sibirsk were world, Olympic and European champions.

"I got my butt kicked," Johnson said, as a sheepish grin crossed his face. "It certainly had a high level of competition. It was a learning experience for me."

Johnson, who wrestles at 165 pounds, is one of the top three wrestlers in his weight class. He is ranked behind No. 1 John Matthews — a friend of his who graduated from CMU in 1974 — and No. 2 Dave Butler. Butler, a member of the U.S. Navy from south California, defeated Johnson by a 2-2 criteria decision in the AAU Nationals last May.

This year, he plans to take part in the Pan American Games in July, and in August the World Games in Moscow.

As he looks to the future and works toward his goals, Johnson said he is inspired by former coach Don Hill. Hill, who used to coach wrestling at Troy High, currently is the school's athletic director and president of the Michigan Wrestling Club.

"He has given me a lot of support in attaining my goal of making the 1984 Olympic team," Johnson said. "He's done so much for me. When you have someone that much behind you, it gives you the drive to keep working hard."

Still swinging Gates Brown recalls the glory days

By Eric Waxler
special writer

Two out in the bottom of the ninth and the Tigers trail by a run. Up to the plate steps Gates Brown with runners on second and third. Gates swings and hits a sharp drive to the gap in right center. Both runners score as the Tigers continue their winning ways.

For the Detroit Tigers and Gates Brown, that was a familiar scene in that thrilling summer of 1968. Those were days that Brown fondly remembers.

As one of baseball's premier pinch hitters, he helped Detroit win the American League championship and the World Series with a come-from-behind effort against the St. Louis Cardinals.

"We didn't know how to quit. Life is the same way. If you keep a positive attitude, there won't be any reason you can't attain your goals."

—Gates Brown
Tiger coach

"My greatest thrill was the World Series," said Brown, who spoke to a group of youngsters recently at the Temple Emanuel in Oak Park.

"We didn't know how to quit," said Brown, offering reason for the Tigers' success that year. "Life is the same way. If you keep a positive attitude, there won't be any reason you can't attain your goals."

The 43-year-old Brown, now the Tigers' batting coach, was once described by TV announcer Joe Garagiola as "a man who happened to be a ballplayer," because he was forced to overcome adversity early in his life.

In 1963, Brown was brought up from the Tiger farm system and was an instant success. On June 19, in his

first major league at bat, he hit a pinch-hit home run.

"It was the eighth inning in (Boston's) Fenway Park. On the second pitch the ball was gone. I was so excited that I rounded the bases in (about) five seconds," Brown said.

From 1963 to 1975, Brown amassed 108 pinch hits to become the fifth all-time pinch-hitter in baseball history.

Brown said his 13 years as a major-league ball player was more of a mental than physical struggle. He often had to learn how to perform "under the gun" because he never played on a regular basis.

Brown, who is beginning his 23rd year in the Tiger organization, says his greatest thrill in coaching is to "get a young kid like (Tiger second baseman) Lou Whitaker and watch him improve his skills."

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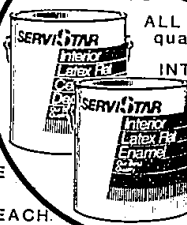
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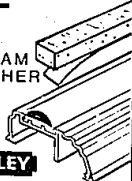
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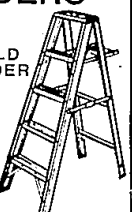
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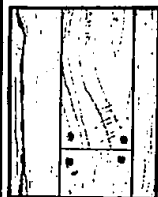
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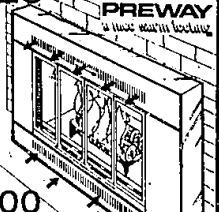
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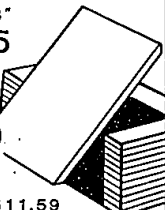
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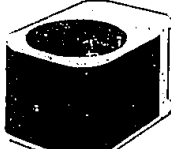
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