



Sonja Stanbro

Year of Induction: **2023**
Contributor

Unlike many of us, Sonja Stanbro did not grow up in the wrestling community. She was drafted into it as a result of her marriage to her husband, Jack. Yet few have so embraced it. First, Stanbro earned a BS in Health, Physical Education, and Recreation. She has raised six children, three daughters, and three sons, with significant input during the process from Jack. Their three daughters, Kathleen, Christine, and Audra, served as scorekeepers, team managers, pairers, and tournament aides. The oldest son Tom, middle son Bill, and youngest Jack, Jr. (J.J.) all wrestled as little kids, junior high students, high school students, and college varsity athletes. Each son attained All-American recognition as a college wrestler. Each son has also continued to contribute to wrestling through coaching, as a career, or as a volunteer. Stanbro, up to her elbows in wrestlers of all ages and sizes and dealing with all the issues faced by a parent of six, also taught junior high and elementary school pupils at Lindenhurst on Long Island and at Johnson City for thirty-three years. Along the way, she learned a bit about the sport. For instance, she learned how to run a wrestling tournament. She has been running Sectional-level, State-level, and National-level tournaments since 1962.

Stanbro took a love of photography and focused it on wrestling. She has produced more than forty cover photos for national wrestling magazines. Not many understand how difficult it is to capture an exciting and interesting shot during a wrestling match. One must be able to anticipate the movements of the athletes and position oneself accordingly to catch the moment of action that conveys the drama and athleticism of the contest. Stanbro has covered both World and Olympic Championship matches on assignments from USA Wrestling Magazine, and she was designated the Official Photographer for the World Championships in New York City in 2003. She has been the photographer for the National Wrestling Hall of Fame and Banquet in Stillwater as well as the New York State Chapter. In part because she had to organize and administer tournaments, Stanbro learned about pairings; and she became an expert at it. She gets it right and bases her choices upon defensible criteria. Today she is still the New York State Pairing Director. Stanbro is an active member of NY-USA Wrestling. She belongs to the USA Wrestling Officials Association as a PIE pairing official. She is a FILA Pairing Master. She is a sitting member of the USWOA Pairings Advisory Board, and she has served two terms as Vice President of the National Wrestling Media Association.

In 1999, Stanbro and her husband Jack were appointed as Northeast Regional Co-Directors of the State Chapters for the National Wrestling Hall of Fame. All this talent and effort has not gone unrecognized. In 1993, Stanbro was named Photographer of the Year by Wrestling USA Magazine. (Her husband won this award in 2002, demonstrating what a good teacher can accomplish if given enough time.) In 1994, Stanbro was honored as the Amateur Wrestling Photographer of the Year. The National Wrestling Media Association honored her as Photographer of the Year in 1996. She received the Northeast Regional Appreciation Award in 1993 and the NY-USA Wrestling Appreciation Award in 1998. In 2001, Stanbro was given the Bernie Norris Memorial Award as Pairing Master of the Year. Perhaps the greatest rewards Stanbro has received are the expressions on the faces of the parents of wrestlers; and on the faces of those wrestlers when they see her pictures.