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Filmmakers to shoot documentary of BU wrestling's 45th and final season

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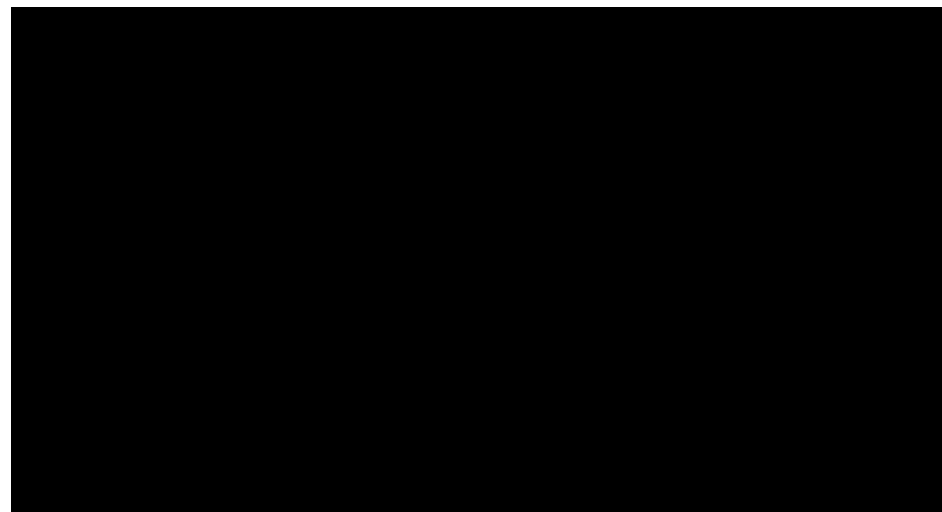


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(Brandon Lavoie, Michael Abelson / YouTube, Indiegogo)

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A trio of current and recently graduated local college students plan to closely follow Boston University's wrestling team this year to create a documentary of what is scheduled to be the program's 45th and final season.

"It Hurts to Win" will, starting with the first practice next week, follow the Division 1 team as they train at BU, compete in home and away matches and as the team and its supporters push to save the program.

The group behind the documentary said they will tell "a story of love, loss, betrayal and perseverance in the face of adversity."

"What really enticed me about it was the fact that the story had so many layers to it – the players, the coaches, the alumni, the parents," said one of the filmmakers, Brandon Lavoie, a 22-year-old Salem, N.H. native and second-semester junior studying film at Emerson College. "There are so many individuals that are affected by this."


In April, about one week after the last season ended, the university abruptly announced the program will be discontinued after the 2013-14 season. Coaches, players and incoming recruits were among the many who were left **stunned and bewildered** by the news.

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Among them was Michael Abelson, a friend of Lavoie's and a lifelong wrestling fan who graduated from the University of Rhode Island in covers local sports for outlets including the Eagle-Tribune and ESPN Boston.

"We were like whoa, that came out of absolutely nowhere," said Abelson, a 22-year-old Methuen native who regularly goes with his father to see wrestling matches at BU. "When a team is dropped, they never get a last season." "We just thought this story needs to be told. This doesn't happen."

About a month ago, Abelson and Lavoie started to come up with a plan and a budget for the documentary.

They e-mailed head coach Carl Adams to pitch their idea. Within 20 minutes Adams replied to say he was interested. They all met a few days later.

"He said 'that's fantastic, and he'd give us 100 percent access,'" Lavoie said.

At the meeting, Adams talked about something he often says to motivate his players. Lavoie and Abelson scrapped their working title, "Pinned," and instead have named the documentary after the coach's slogan, "It Hurts to Win."

The filmmakers also shot a short video to explain their project and to help fundraise for it.

In the video, Adams endorses the documentary.

"We're in the process of trying to save our program, and we feel we have a compelling story," Adams said. "Our goal as a program is to be the best we can be. And we just want to get as much support as we can."

"Sacrifice, discipline, hard work, humility, a sense of fairness," he added. "I feel and I think a lot of wrestlers feel that wrestling teaches us how to compete in the game of life better than any other sport and almost by far."

Lavoie and Abelson said they will introduce themselves to players at the first practice on Monday. They have already had some positive interactions with BU wrestlers over social media.

The filmmakers have recruited Lavoie's roommate, Brady Darragh, a senior post production major at Emerson, to be the documentary's editor.

The group created [a page on the crowdfunding website Indiegogo](#) to try to raise money to support their effort. Their goal is to collect \$25,000 to cover the costs of equipment, product and to travel with the team from November through late March.

So far, they've received about one-tenth of their fundraising goal. But, the team vows they will make the documentary on whatever resources they have available to them.

"We're both committed to this," said Lavoie, who scheduled his classes this semester to allow him a four-day weekend and more time to work on the documentary. Abelson said his schedule also tends to allow for some flexibility.

They expect to complete the documentary next summer and hope to submit their work to film festivals.

"Our main concern is telling the wrestlers' story about how it is affecting them and the coaches as well," Lavoie said. "To tell their story, the team's story, as a collective group and as individuals."

They also plan to try to get interviews with some of the university officials who made the call to shut down the wrestling program as well as with some players, fans, parents, alumni and other BU wrestling supporters who have [rallied to try to save the program](#).

Lavoie said he started his college career at Merrimack College, a school he chose in part to play in its lacrosse program. His decision to later transfer to Emerson to study film and focus less on lacrosse was his own.

But, seeing what is happening to the BU wrestling team has caused Lavoie to reflect on the [turmoil some of the team's student athletes are facing](#).

"These kids were just like me a few years where they picked a college in large part to play a sport. Out of nowhere they were blindsided by a decision they didn't make," he said.

"If this were to happen at a school I was playing for, there would be a huge amount of thinking and consideration of 'do you stay for your senior or junior year and don't wrestle, or transfer somewhere else.'"

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mjrochele@gmail.com. Looking for more coverage of area colleges and universities? Go to our [Your Campus pages](#).

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