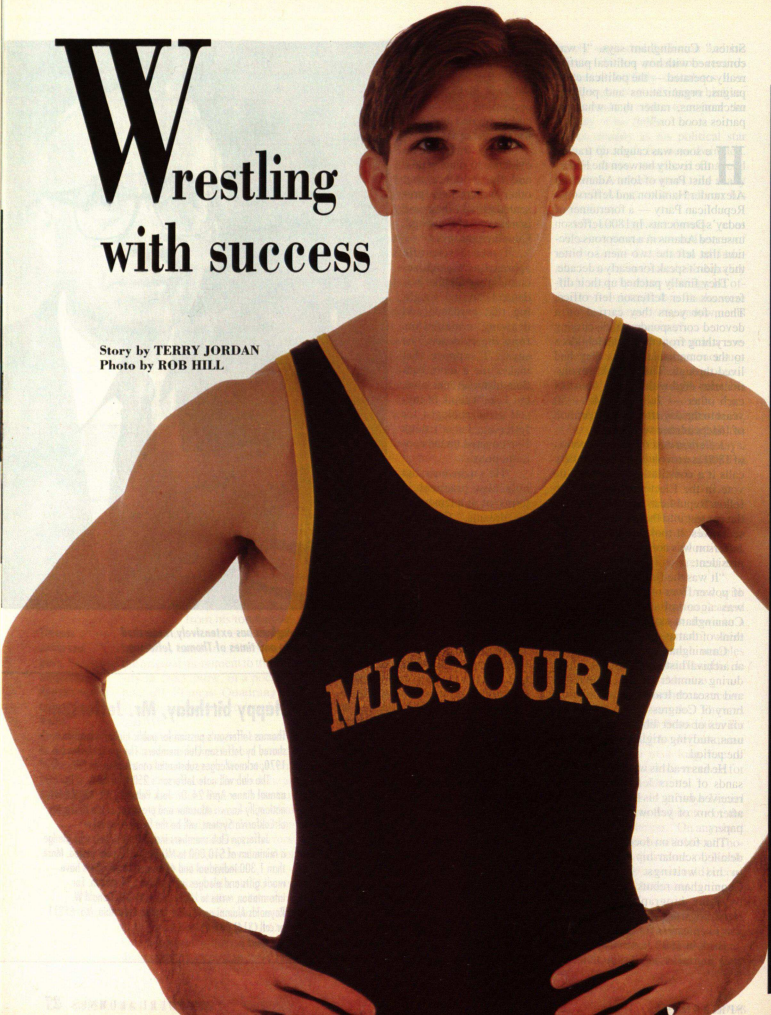


# Wrestling with success

Story by **TERRY JORDAN**  
Photo by **ROB HILL**



## "Wrestling is one-on-one. If I lose, it's my fault. If I win, it's my victory."

To those around him, the only thing less than perfect about Shaon Fry, Mizzou's 167-pound wrestling sensation, is the unusual spelling of his first name.

"He's one of the most solid, down-to-earth guys you'll ever meet," roommate Jeremy Lay says of Shaon (pronounced Shawn). Fry's girlfriend, Shannon Wells, a co-captain of the Golden Girls, echoes those sentiments and adds, "He knows what he wants in life, and what it takes to get there."

Coach Wes Roper, BS '81, MEd '83, believes Fry has a good shot at becoming Mizzou's third All-America wrestler in recent years, following Bobby Crawford, BS IE '89, MS, MBA '91, and Greg Warren, BJ '90. Fry has advanced to the NCAA tournament each of the past two seasons, and in late January stood 22-8 and was ranked seventh in the nation in his weight class. "Shaon has an exceptional talent and is the hardest worker on the team," Roper says.

Combine all those qualities, apply them to scholastics, and it's easy to see why Fry was a second-team Academic All-America selection last year. Can an All-America title in wrestling — bestowed upon those who finish in the top eight at the NCAA tournament — be far behind?

"I try not to think about it," says the soft-spoken junior from Oak Grove, Mo., 25 miles east of Kansas City. "It just adds to the pressure. But the truth is, if I don't make All-America this year or next, there are going to be a lot of people, including me, who will be disappointed."

Disappointing people has not been a part of the game plan for Shaon Fry. One of three boys in his family, he was an ideal child, says his mother, Susan, a health and physical education instructor at Oak Grove Middle School. Adds his father, Dave, a science teacher and baseball coach at Fort Osage High School: "We never had to tell him to do his homework. He always has pushed himself."

The family moved from St. Jo-

seph, Mo., to Oak Grove when Shaon was 5, and he began wrestling at the mat club level four years later. "A friend dragged me to wrestling practice, and I was hooked," he says. Young Shaon also played baseball and football, but wrestling held a special interest.

In high school he finished second in the state in wrestling as a freshman and took the state title in his sophomore, junior and senior years. Fry chalked up points in the classroom, too, finishing his senior year at Oak Grove High as salutatorian of his class. He earned straight A's in high school, and *The Kansas City Star* named him its 1990 Scholar-Athlete of the Year.

Perhaps it was inevitable that a down period would follow such high achievements. After choosing Mizzou over Drake, Clemson, Nebraska and Pennsylvania, Fry found himself in a blue funk midway through his freshman wrestling season. "He called us one night, and I never had heard him so depressed," Dave Fry says. "He says, 'Dad, I've lost more matches here this year than I did in all of high school.'"

The elder Fry, who coached the Fort Osage baseball team to a 4-A state title in 1991, was ready with advice. "I told him to consider the level of competition at MU — that he was only a freshman and was wrestling the very best people in the country. I told him not to worry, that he would start winning more."

Dad was right. Fry came back from that "disappointing" 18-15 freshman season to register a 34-13 record last year, leading the Tiger squad to a 16th place national finish. Most impressive, he raised his record in decisions — a win by less than eight points — from 10-13 to 22-4. "I've never been a big pinner," he says. "I like to win by points."

His strong suits are his 6-foot-2 height and his physical condition; less than 5 percent of Fry's body

composition is fat, and he works hard to keep it that way. "I load up on carbo (carbohydrates) during the season," he says, particularly pasta, rice and bagels. "We very seldom go out to dinner," Shannon Wells laughs, "because Shaon is on such a strict diet." And how does he unwind at the end of a long day? "By doing push-ups and sit-ups," says roommate Lay, a heavyweight on the team. "He's training all the time."

Fry admits that his occasional lack of a "killer instinct" gets him into trouble on the mat. "He can be intimidated by a top wrestler, and you can't do that," says Roper, a former wrestling All-American who still holds the MU record for most victories in a career, 131. "Talent will take a wrestler through the first period, but you've got to have a mental edge in the second and third."

The two are working on the dilemma. "I tell him, 'Shaon, if you took that guy and put him in our wrestling room, you'd beat him every time.' A lot of pressures on wrestlers are self-induced, and you need to keep reminding them of their true talents. Shaon has been working hard and is getting better with it all the time."

He also is working toward a degree in physical therapy and currently sports a 3.7 grade-point average. Five years hence, he'd like to be a sports therapist in the Kansas City area. "You know, I think I've accomplished everything I've ever set out to do," he says. "I've been lucky. My career is important, but first I want to make All-America."

And how about the spelling of that first name, Mom and Dad? Where did that come from?

"I wanted to spell it S-E-A-N, and Susan wanted to spell it S-H-A-W-N," Dave Fry says with a laugh. "So we decided to do something really different and spell it phonetically, and Shaon was the result. It's special, unique — just like he is." 