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Bob Wittneben, Former SHS wrestling coach

Car and to see us do well was to me and the team. They was the spark that third at the Class LL went 14-1 as a sophomore, competition. Fernandes applied all of those smarts. You could teach people to do things that he would never ask other attitude," Wittneben said. He worked really hard, and he applied himself as a deceptively strong kid with a street fighter's toughness. Wittneben hoped to tap that toughness in his rook- er's toughness.

"He would never ask other things, and he would work with guys, work with guys, work with guys. It was all practice, situational stuff." The hard work paid off. Fernandes was a three-time all-American as a division III wrestler. In 1982, he earned a national title in the 134-pound division.

"I don't know how you'd find this out, but I believe that he was the first wrestler from Connecticut to be a national champion in wrestling," Wittneben said. "He would still be an outstanding wrestler today. Steve was exceptional, and he would still be excep- tional. He was strong. He was fast, and he was dedi- cated. If you take those combinations, I don't care if you're 6-foot-4 and 250 pounds or 5-foot-4 and 100 pounds, you'll be good.

That's why Fernandes was selected to the first class of the Southington Sports Hall of Fame. Few athletes in town history were more committed, more successful, or more important to a program.

On Wednesday, Nov. 10, he will be honored in an induction ceremony at the Aqua Turf in Plantsville.

"I'm very excited. There are a lot of tremen- dous athletes that have come through the Town of Southington for years," he said. "To be in the first class is an honor.

To comment on this story, email John Goralski@ southingtonob- server.com.