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Holiday Classic Will Return To Jamestown This Year

By Mike Frank

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Wrestling is a winter sport, but it doesn't usually deal with ice.

That will change this year as the Holiday Classic wrestling tournament has a new home - the Jamestown Savings Bank Ice Arena.

The tournament, which began in 1986 and is run by the Southern Tier Wrestling Officials Association, started out at Jamestown Community College. The past few years have seen it held at Fredonia State. This year's edition, the 24th, will be held Dec. 19 and 20 at its third site.

Current STWOA president Lou Golando said he was happy about the new arrangement at the JSBIA.

"The arena provides our athletes with a true sports arena experience," he said. "I'm sure we will impress our out-of-town competitors with both our facility and our communities."

He described the lineup, which currently includes 37 teams from New York and Pennsylvania, as "one of the most stacked."

Jamestown coach Craig Swanson is looking forward to the new venue as well.

"Everything is right there. It's absolutely outstanding," he said.

He said it reminds him of locations such as the Onondaga County War Memorial Arena in Syracuse, which hosted the state tournament from 1968 through 2003 (except in 1969 and 1973).

Swanson said the layout should allow up to eight mats in one area, allowing a variety of focal points for fans. He added, "The coaches will have space to talk with the wrestlers" separate from the spectators.

Falconer's P.J. Wendel compares the tournament to "kind of like a family reunion", saying it provides teams and coaches to see familiar faces.

"It's some of the best wrestling in the tri-state area," he said.

Regarding the move to the arena, Wendel said, "It's great to move it back (to Jamestown). There are a lot of people who follow it every year. It will showcase a lot of fine talent."

Coach Alex Conti of Fredonia said that Fredonia State "is a great venue," but that JSBIA general manager Mike Ferguson is doing a great job.

"The best of the best will be featured in Jamestown for two straight days of competition," Ferguson said.

Randolph coach Todd Conley said the change will "be nice for traveling" for a lot of the Jamestown-area schools.

"It's a very competitive tourney," he said. "For early in the season, it is exciting."

Brad Rowe, the new head coach at Ripley, said, "It's a nice little measuring stick. Sooner or later you have to go up against the toughest competition."

According to the STWOA web site, area schools involved include Allegany-Limestone, Cattaraugus-Little Valley, Chautauqua Lake, Falconer, Fredonia, Frewsburg, Gowanda, Jamestown, Maple Grove, Olean, Panama, Pine Valley, Portville, Randolph, Ripley, Salamanca, Silver Creek and Southwestern. Among the schools from Pennsylvania will be Warren, Youngsville, Ridgway, and DuBois, as well as Grove City, Hickory, Harbor Creek, Northwestern and Sharpsville.

Other New York schools set to take part are Chenango Forks, Cheektowaga, Eden, Grand Island, Lancaster, Lockport, Medina, Niagara Wheatfield, Spencerport and Warsaw.

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