

By: Michael Tellier

It has been a rebuilding process for the past couple of years for the Niagara Wheatfield wrestling program.

After finishing in fourth place in the Niagara Frontier League last season behind Niagara Falls, Lewiston-Porter and Lockport, head coach Rick Sweney is ready to take his team a few steps forward, and contend for a league title.

"We had an extremely tough league last year," Sweney said. "All three teams that finished ahead of us were very solid, but we only had 24 guys on the team last season which is really low for us."

This season there is currently 45 kids on the team, including 106 lbs. Vince Falvo and sophomore 120 lbs. Shane Helbig. Helbig is a returning sectional champion from last season.

"We have a lot of younger guys on the team, but that isn't holding us back," Sweney said. "Helbig is only a sophomore, but I still consider him to be one of our leaders."

With over 20 sophomores and six seventh graders who made it to the junior varsity/varsity lineup this year, Niagara Wheatfield will need all of their leaders to step up and be mentors.

"We understand that this is a process and that it's going to take some time before we reach the level that I really want this team competing at," Sweney said. "But I do really enjoy this group of guys, and I think that by the time some of these kids reach their sophomore, junior and senior year they are really going to start producing. We have a lot of talent on this team; we just need a little bit of time to progress."

So far this season the Falcons have had only had one league match against Kenmore East, where they defeated the Bulldogs 70-0. Niagara Wheatfield's next match will also be a league match at Niagara Falls on Wednesday, December 11.

"This is a big one for us," Sweney said. "They finished ahead of us last season and we would love to go steal a win from them in their own gym."