

SPORTS II

Democrat and Chronicle

BIG BUCKS

Feeding deer may sound like fun, but it's expensive and not recommended for this area of state. Story on **14E**.

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Despite disability, he's dynamite

Wrestler excels with one leg

By **Walt Slater**

Democrat and Chronicle

When the SuperSectional wrestling championships begin Friday night at Rush-Henrietta High School, one 132-pounder will give opponents a very different look.

Marcus Whitman senior Blane Smith's left leg was amputated above the knee four years ago after he caught his shoelace in a manure spreader at his grandfather's farm near Plattsburgh.

"Making SuperSectionals and winning 25 matches have been long-term goals," said Smith, the No. 4 seed in yesterday's Section 5 Class C tournament at Geneseo High School.

After pinning Warsaw's Mike Luvender on Friday night, he won close decisions (2-0 and 7-5) in yesterday's quarterfinals and semifinals to earn a spot in last night's championship bout opposite No. 2 seed Wade Marriott of Kendall.

Smith lost to Marriott, leaving his record at 25-6 (59-20 varsity career), but



Reed Hoffmann Democrat and Chronicle

Blane Smith, before pinning Warsaw's Mike Luvender early in match Friday.

the top four finishers at each weight from each of Section 5's four wrestling classes advance to the SuperSectionals.

Four years ago, Blane Smith wasn't interested in wrestling. Jump shots, touchdowns and the high jump were his athletic passions. But his Christmas

Eve, 1985, accident changed all of that.

Doctors in Plattsburgh and Burlington, Vt., spent one week trying to save the limb, then amputated the lower half of his leg. Smith spent two more months in rehabilitation in Burlington before he returned to his Rushville home.

One month later, he decided to attempt high jumping again while wearing a prosthesis.

"I just knew I had to start doing something," he said. "I saw a movie about a high jumper who had one leg and made it to the Olympics, and that gave me some inspiration."

The next winter, Smith took up wrestling after former Marcus Whitman Coach Frank Lamanna urged him to come out for the team.

"I had never thought about wrestling until he spoke with me about it," Smith admitted.

He finished with a 5-4 junior varsity record at 112 pounds.

"That first season was very difficult for him," Smith's mother, Joanne, said. "He had to work on things that his coaches really didn't know anything about."

Smith moved up to the Marcus Whitman varsity at 119 as a sophomore (14-7) and wrestled at 126 as a junior (20-7).

This year he placed second at 132 in the Finger Lakes West league championships, losing to Sodus' Dave Laird, 3-0, in last week's final. Marriott knocked Laird into the Class C consolation



Smith, who normally wears a prosthesis, says 'nobody feels sorry for me. Some guys used to be that way but that doesn't happen anymore.'

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Wrestler excels despite one leg

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bracket yesterday.

"I had set winning the league championship as a goal," he said. "Not winning it was disappointing, but I got something better."

The Finger Lakes West coaches named him the league's outstanding wrestler.

"Obviously, he relies on his upper body," Marcus Whitman Coach Lonnie Gunsalus said. "I'm aware that he has one leg, but . . . it isn't something that's always on your mind. At this point, he's my big gun."

"He's pretty strong in the upper body," Warsaw's Luvender acknowledged. "He's stronger than most guys. You can feel it."

Smith says he doesn't spend a lot of time in the weight room, but he has improved his arm and

shoulder strength in another manner.

"When everybody else does their running, I lie on a board and pull myself around with my arms," he said.

Smith a "B" student, hopes to be admitted to Cortland State and says he may try to wrestle for the Red Dragons.

"If I get in, I'll talk to the coach and see what he says," Smith said. "I know It'll be a lot tougher to wrestle in college but I'd like to give it a try."

He plans to study physical education and eventually teach and coach. If Cortland doesn't accept him, Smith said he'll probably attend Community College of the Finger Lakes and try to transfer to Cortland as a junior.

"He's starting to see that he might be able to be successful at a higher level than this," Gunsalus said. "He's starting to wrestle with more confidence."

Week-long wrestling camps at Clarion (Pa.) University the past three summers have been a big help, Smith said.

He admits that he tries to get through the first period without giving tough opponents any points, then prefers to start from the down position when the match moves to the mat.

"I try to switch on them," he said. "Getting one (a reversal) is always my best chance."

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