

Ken Porter, Last Year's Biggest Surprise hopes to do it all over again

Alfred-Almond-5 senior seeks to defend his state title

Last year Alfred-Almond's (Section Five) Ken Porter surprised a lot of people in grabbing the 1990 138 pound New York State Championship. The most surprised person was actually Ken Porter. "I just kept taking things one match at a time. As I kept winning, I kept saying to myself, 'this is just like any other dual meet or any other tournament,'" said Ken. His mental preparedness kept him relaxed, poised and confident as he put together a string of ten awesome victories that carried him from relative obscurity to state champion in two short weeks.

His climb to stardom started in the Section Five Class D Championships. Feeling confident, he pinned all four opponents in capturing the 138 pound title in grand fashion. Keep in mind, though, that at this point, he was still unknown within the section. Each year, Class D brings in their group of placemen to compete with placemen from Classes A, B, and C. And after a couple of rounds, the Class D kids are already taking their showers and heading for the bleachers to watch the tournament as spectators.

The weekend after the Class D championships was the Section Five State Qualifier. The top four in each class get together to determine who goes to Syracuse. There, Porter first shut down rugged Brian Campbell of Williamson, 13-0. Then he pinned Brockport's Matt Leach in the first period. In the semifinals, he overcame a fast-improving mark Johnson of Fairport, 11-3.

The other semifinal bracket, however, contained a much more publicized match. It pitted two state-calibre wrestlers, Tom Foos of Spencerport and Frank Trigg of Eastridge. Both wrestlers had over thirty wins and the ability to place in the state tournament. Trigg, who has competed for four schools in his high school career, had defeated Foos in a close match earlier in the season. Spencerport wrestlers, though, have an uncanny knack of winning those rematches, especially when it's for all the marbles.

Such was the case in the semifinal match, as Tom Foos overcame Frank Trigg in a hugely exciting match by a 6-2 margin. Most fans felt that this match should have taken place in the finals. Porter, however, was extremely pumped up for the finals match that was to come. "I made it this far, why be satisfied for second place now? I'll just give it my best again," reasoned Ken to himself.

Both Foos and Trigg were no strangers to Porter. A couple of years ago, he had split two matches with Trigg, and last summer, he lost a 3-2 freestyle match to Foos.

In the finals, Foos scored on a takedown late in the first period and held on to the 2-0 lead. In the second period, Foos chose down, but was unable to escape the grasp of a tenacious Porter. With Porter down in the last period and still unable to get on the scoreboard after four minutes, it didn't look good. Foos rode tightly most of the period, neutralizing any Porter attempts to escape or reverse. With less than a minute remaining, Porter used a sit back to back into and finally over Foos to gain a reversal that put the match at a statemate, 2-2.

A sudden burst of energy fueled Porter as he furiously worked an arm bar. Locking up both arms, he finally turned Foos over and secured a stunning fall with only one second remaining in the match. Says Porter, "It felt awesome! I put everything I had into it, and I was really shocked."

In preparing for the state tournament, Porter maintained his mental state. "I wanted to prove myself, especially coming from a Class D school. It doesn't matter what size school someone comes from, and I wanted to show that Section Five was not sending the wrong guy to the state meet," said Ken.

At the state tournament, Ken got a lot of help from fellow Section Five wrestler, Steve Taylor. Taylor, a senior at 145 pounds, placed third last year and won the title this year. He helped Porter stay calm and zero in on just one match at a time. In round one, Porter drew the Section 9 entrant. Early in the match, both men went to upper body moves. At the 1:19 point, it was Porter who scored on a throw and held on for the fall. In the semifinals, he faced Long Beach-8's Bernard Valentin, a senior with prior state experience. A scrappy Porter came out on top of a hotly-contested match where Valentin almost won it. In the end, though, it was a late takedown that broke a 4-4 tie, giving Porter a 6-4 advantage. In the closing moments, he surrendered a stalling point, making it 6-5.

"It was scary going out there in front of such a big crowd. I again tried to zero everything else out and focus on the match, but it was hard with 7300 screaming people in the place," said Porter of his finals match. It didn't show, and he was able to maintain his intensity and dominance. His finals opponent was Suffern-1's John Spiegelman, also a junior. In period one, Porter put on an awesome display of strength as he scored early on a single leg

takedown that kept Spiegelman in the air for nearly ten seconds. A tight, yet unorthodox riding style followed with Spiegelman nearly reversing before getting turned over for a three-point near fall. After two minutes, it was 5-0 Porter.

Everything went right for Ken as he finished the match on top of a 12-5 decision. At one point, Spiegelman scored back points, but Ken managed to escape the fall. Throughout, Porter kept calm and focused, displaying an unusual amount of confidence and poise for a first-time state participant.

This year, Porter will start the year at 155 pounds, later dropping down a weight class or two. "I'm not even thinking about last year - I don't want to put a lot of pressure on myself. I want to start off at the bottom and do it all over again," says Porter. And from the looks of it, he has an even stronger chance of a state title this year, having wrestled in about 50 matches over the spring and summer.

In off-season competition, he had a lot of success. While injured, he managed a third place medal in the state freestyle championships. He also beat Frank Trigg (7-4) and Tom Foos (13-0), reinforcing that Section Five did not send the "wrong guy" to the states. He also pinned Marion-5's Todd Miller, who had given Porter his only loss last year (a 5-3 decision during a holiday tournament).

His finest showing, though, may have been in the Empire Games. There, he scored two pins before losing to a fired-up Spiegelman, 8-6. He rebounded with another pin and then a 6-4 win over rugged Kareeb Howard of Fulton-3. Howard had placed fifth in the states at the same weight class, and had already beaten Porter twice in freestyle competition. In beating Howard, Porter earned a rematch in the finals against Spiegelman, which he won, 6-2.

Howard and Spiegelman will most likely make it back to the states. Either one is talented enough to claim a state title. These two, along with the usual assortment of tough wrestlers in the states, should make it a challenge for Porter to defend his state crown. The odds right now favor Porter, and whatever happens, we're sure to see some great wrestling in March.

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