

# BOMBERS CLAIM 1989 NCAA WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIP

by David Herz, Pete Moore

Five All-America wrestlers helped carry Ithaca College to the 1989 NCAA Division III Wrestling Championship at John Carroll University. The championship capped off a remarkable eight-month stretch for Ithaca's athletic program that included Division III crowns in baseball and football. The Bomber grapplers, who out-tallied second place Delaware Valley, 72.5-64.5, managed to take the title without the benefit of an individual champion.

"We won it with our balance," said Ithaca mentor **John Murray**, voted NCAA Division III Wrestling Coach of the Year by his peers. "We wrestled well throughout the tournament and gained some valuable points with pins and superior decisions along the way.

"We knew we needed a team effort," **Murray** said. "Since we didn't have one or two dominant wrestlers, I told the team it was very important that we advance three wrestlers into the finals." His charges heeded the advice, as five wrestlers advanced to the All-America round and three earned spots in championship bouts.

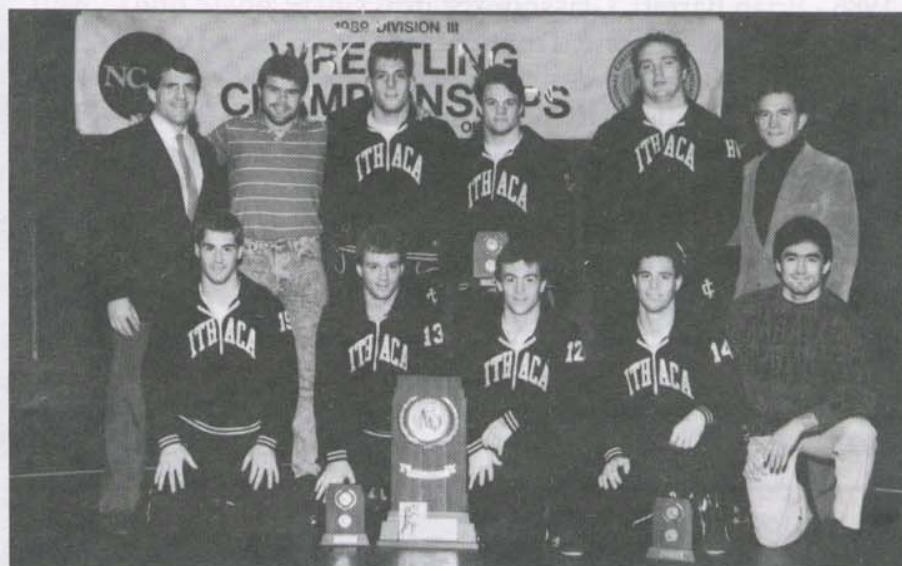
Ithaca had knocked on the national championship door in the 1988 NCAA tournament at Wheaton College. After earning the top ranking during the regular season, Ithaca qualified 10 wrestlers for the nationals. Although the squad performed admirably, especially individual national titlist **Mike Cronmiller**, their effort fell short and the Bombers placed third.

The experience gained, however, would prove quite valuable 12 months later, as six of the seven Ithaca wrestlers who had qualified for the 1989 tournament appeared in the event the previous year.

"I think our experience helped a lot," said Ithaca 190-pounder **Mike Fusilli**. "Knowing what the environment would be like and how the crowd would be was a big factor."

"We weren't in awe when we got there," added Bomber captain **Joel Lamson**. "We knew what level of competition we would be facing."

**Ron Gross** capped off a fantastic tournament with a second-place finish at 142 pounds. **Gross** pinned his first two opponents, won superior decisions in the quarterfinals and semifinals, and only lost in the championship bout to three-time national titlist **Shaun Smith** of Delaware Valley. **Dan Bieller** claimed four matches by decision at 177 before losing in the finals,



1989 National Champion Ithaca College

4-3, to **Kevin Higgins** of Baldwin-Wallace. **Fusilli** completed Ithaca's trio of second-placers with four triumphs by decision — including two in overtime — before dropping the 190-pound final by a 3-2 count to **Dean Gavin** of Wartburg.

**Lamson** placed fifth at 126 pounds. Knocked out of the championship bracket by eventual runner-up **Pete Hayek** of John Carroll by a 3-2 decision, **Lamson** then edged Oneonta State's **Dave Regina**, 1-0, in overtime, to earn fifth. **Marty Nichols** was beaten in the 150-pound semifinals by eventual champ **Karl Monaco** of Montclair State but rebounded by pinning **Travis Young** of Simpson in the fifth-place matchup. Although they didn't earn All-America recognition, 134-pounder **Tim Cotter** and heavyweight **Randy Cotton** contributed to Ithaca's success.

Once again, the Division III Wrestling Championships offered a number of exciting highlights in addition to the team title.

Delaware Valley may have fallen short in the crown chase but the Aggies produced three individual champs. **Shaun Smith** won a third title at 142 pounds with his 15-4 decision over Ithaca's **Gross**. **Smith** had captured first place in 1985 and 1986, as well. **Mark Ambrose**, the runnerup in 1988, claimed the 158-pound class by edging **Eric Stewart** of Central, 6-2. At 167 pounds, **Randy Worrell** downed **Joe Schmidt** from the host school, 6-3.

The tournament wouldn't have been complete without Montclair State being a factor, and the Indians were, placing sixth. **Pete Gonzalez** won his second crown at 126 pounds and was named the championship's outstanding wrestler after recording three pins, including one in the finals against **Pete Hayek** of John Carroll. Teammate **Karl Monaco** won his third individual title, adding the 150-pound award to a trophy collection that includes two 142-pound firsts. He decisioned Cortland's **Dave Zariczny**, 9-2, in the final's bout.

Buena Vista's **Dave Jordan** improved on his sixth-place finish in 1988 by taking the 118-pound crown. He narrowly defeated **Joe Dasti** of Kean, 2-1. In the 134-pound class, **Bob Berceau** of Wisconsin-Stevens Point knocked out defending champion **John Beatty** of Augsburg, 6-2, in the semifinals, and in the finals downed **Chris Cuffari** of Trenton State, 2-0, in overtime.

**Kevin Higgins** of Baldwin-Wallace made his 100th career victory count as it earned him a national title at 177. **Higgins** was triumphant in another thrilling final, edging Ithaca's **Bieller**, 4-3. Ohio Northern's **Vince Cameron** captured the heavyweight crown with a 5-2 overtime win in a matchup with Central's **Scott Dierks**.

Among the other top team finishers, Augsburg wrestled its way to third place with 61.5 points. Host John Carroll delighted the partisan crowd by earning fourth, just 13.5 points behind title-winning Ithaca.