



Peter Taylor Our Towns

Ethan Sinnott, left, puts hold on another wrestler during a practice session at Brighton High School

## Hearing-impaired wrestler enjoys success

By **Urla Hill**

Our Towns

BRIGHTON — Days before 10-year-old Ethan Sinnott was to begin classes at French Road Middle School in September 1984, the Brighton School District's physician barred him from participating in contact sports.

Despite Sinnott's past involvement in soccer, touch football and basketball, the physician believed it was unsafe for him to play sports because he could be injured. Sinnott is deaf.

About a month later, the decision was reversed.

Now the 16-year-old sophomore is a member of the Brighton High School varsity wrestling team. And, he said the contact sport has greatly enhanced his self-esteem.

"I wanted to be on the team to improve my self confidence. When I first came here, it was hard to find some acceptance," Sinnott said.

French Road was Sinnott's first experience at a school with hearing students and his first year there was a culture shock. He had come from a school with deaf students — School 1 in Rochester.

Sinnott said he wanted to be accepted by his peers and thought he could earn their respect by joining the wrestling team.

That year, he passed the state Selection Classification Program test. Sinnott, who wrestled at 91 pounds, was then eligible to compete for Brighton's junior varsity team.

"The first year was hard in the beginning. But when I was done, I felt like I had done something really big," said Sinnott, the Wrestling USA program's state Greco-Roman Wrestling 103½-pound champion

last year.

Sinnott, who wears a hearing aid, said he had done very well, considering it was his first wrestling experience.

"I won my share of matches with the varsity wrestlers," he said, "but at times I felt like a fish.

"There were some matches that I lost, but I paid them back the following year."

Sinnott had competed for the freshman football team last year. He dropped football in favor of cross country in the fall because the sport helped to build his stamina for wrestling.

Sinnott also has been able to transfer the discipline and confidence he's gained from wrestling to his studies. He earned a 4.0 grade point average last year and has participated in a scholarship program for the past two summers at Gallaudet College, a college for the deaf in Washington, D.C.

"The way I see it, academics comes before wrestling," said Sinnott, who hopes to compete on the U.S. Olympic team for deaf athletes. "If I were offered a Division I scholarship, then I would wrestle in college. Otherwise, I'll concentrate on academics."

Sinnott hopes to compete at the state tournament this year. But even more important to him is to be a positive role model for other deaf children.

"There may be others who have fears about coming into a mainstream environment. If I can do it, they can do it, too."

Sinnott, whose hobbies include collecting comic books and writing short stories, hopes to be a comic book writer or work in the commercial arts.

"Being a dentist or an accoun-

tant would be boring," said Sinnott, whose comic strip, *Golden Silence*, appears in the school's newspaper.

Sinnott's family moved from Boston to Rochester in 1976. In 1984 Michael and Joanne Sinnott moved their family from the city to Brighton because they found it easier to get an interpreter and special instruction for Ethan.

The Sinnotts also had learned of Mark Hoyt, a physical education teacher at French Road who also is Brighton's wrestling coach. Hoyt had played a key role in the development of a family friend, Brian Kurlander, who had a learning dis-

ability.

Sinnott, who is teaching Hoyt sign language, has enjoyed being under Hoyt's guidance.

"He treats me as an equal. I don't feel that he makes me stand out," Sinnott said.

Sinnott said Hoyt has taught him never to quit, and to be humble. Sinnott had become over-confident in a match last year, which he lost. After the match, Hoyt told him it's best to treat every opponent the same, whether his record is 10-1 or 1-10.

Hoyt also is teaching Sinnott how to drive.

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