

"Superman" Invades War Memorial

By Neil Kerr
Syracuse Post-Standard

To most New Yorkers in the Syracuse War Memorial this weekend, it will come as a shock if East Rochester's muscular John Zito somehow fails to capture the 167-pound Intersectional crown, because he's in a class by himself.

East Rochester coach Don Quinn agrees.

"He's a tough kid," says Quinn. "The only thing you worry about with a boy like him is some fluke accident. But he really shouldn't get beat. The closest match he's had this year was a 10-2 win. Earlier in the winter, John hadn't allowed a point, and when a couple kids finally scored on him, they received standing ovations."

One recent victim was Hilton High's tough Terry Brown, who took a 21-3 record into his showdown with Zito. But Zito, who helped East Rochester's unbeaten football team (10-0) to the state championship this past fall, won by a score of 13-1. "He countered everything I hit him with," said Brown with an awe-inspired smile. "The only way he's going to lose is if somebody catches him on an off-day."

Wrestling fans will recall that Zito last was beaten right here in the War Memorial one year ago in the state 167-pound title match by Ed Banach of Port Jervis, 10-5. "I made one mistake near the end of that match," recalls Zito. "I couldn't see the overhead scoreboard and I thought time was running out so I went for broke. He (Banach) turned it into a 5-point move. It turned out there were still 30 seconds left."

So Zito had to settle for second place, but with Banach now at the University of Iowa, it appears that no one will prevent Zito from improving upon last year's finish. "Nothing he does this year will surprise me," says Irondequoit coach Art Connorton. "I'm just surprised no one offered him that part of Superman in that new movie."

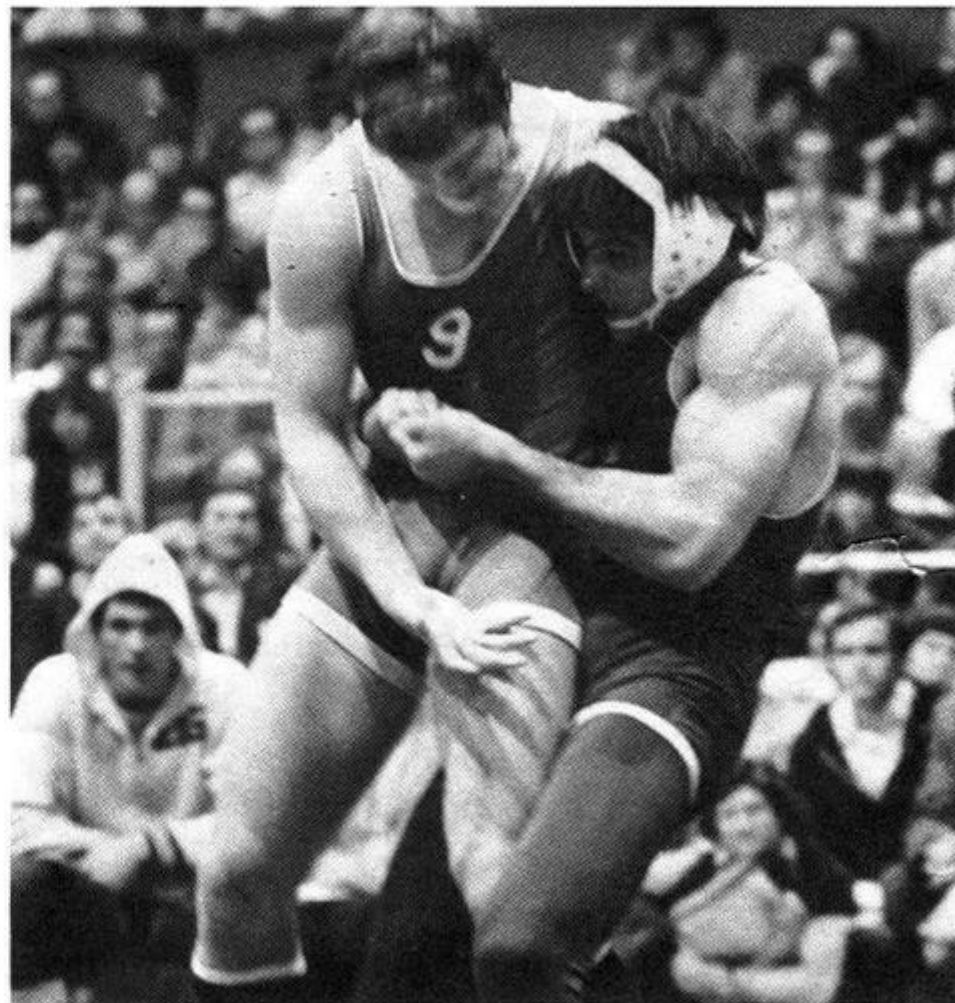
Zito last year went 33-1 and last summer won a gold medal at the Empire Games competition here in Syracuse. His record stood at 28-0 prior to last weekend's Section Five Tournament, where he was expected to add four more victories to a growing collection.

Zito also excelled at defensive end, earning First Team, All-State laurels for the Bomber football squad, also coached by Quinn. But he will concentrate on wrestling in college, probably forsaking the gridiron sport completely. "John has very high goals," said Quinn last week. "He wants to win an NCAA title and, someday, an Olympic title also. So he wants to attend a college with a strong wrestling program. All the big schools have shown an interest. College scouts have been at most of our matches this winter."

Zito has already been approached by major schools such as Wisconsin, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Arizona, Oklahoma State, Syracuse, Georgia, and Lehigh. That list figures to grow stronger after this tournament concludes.

"I want a school with a good wrestling program, but my education will come first," says Zito, a 90-student and a member of the National Honor Society. "I wouldn't mind warm weather either."

But first, "Superman" needs to conclude a scintillating scholastic career by winning a New York State Intersectional crown here Saturday night. According to everyone who has seen the East Rochester ace in action this winter, that title is inevitable.



Zito in 1978 State action.

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armdrag.com