

# Ithaca trio in Syracuse in search of state titles

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ITHACA — "Ithaca High is going to come home with three state titles."

So says IHS wrestling coach and perennial optimist Joel Lamson, who will chaperone juniors Brandon Lehman, David Leonardo and Joel Walsh to today's opening rounds of the New York State Public High School Athletic Association Tournament at Syracuse's Onondaga War Memorial.

While Leonardo and Walsh

## NYS WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

will be making their first trips to the NYSPHSAA Tournament, it has become routine for Lehman, a state champion at 105 pounds in 1996 and the 112-pound state runner up last winter. Lehman's 5-4 loss to Jody Avery of Section III's Morrisville-Eaton was the only flaw in an otherwise perfect season. That has weighed heavily on the mind.



Lehman



Leonardo



Walsh

"I think that's played into it quite a bit for him," Lamson said of Lehman's quest for a second state title. "He wants to win that state title. It drives him nuts to see

'former state champion.' He wants to be the state champion again."

"It's been a learning experience because I think I pushed myself a little too hard last year, like all year," Lehman said. "This year, I've just went along and pushed when it started to get important. Where I'm at now, I can't wait to go and wrestle."

According to Lamson, Lehman — undefeated at 37-0 — should easily accomplish this winter's goal.

"I told Brandon that if he goes out and wrestles the best he possibly can, the match won't last six minutes with anybody in the state," Lamson said. "He's at a different level than any other wrestler. He's a college wrestler, wrestling at the high-school level."

Lehman confidently, not arrogantly, agrees with his coach's

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## Wrestling

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evaluation despite picking up a cold earlier this week that could affect his abilities.

"I'm kind of sick right at the moment," Lehman said. "But if I get over this cold and wrestle to my ability ... I don't think I can be (challenged)."

Lehman earned the 125-pound championships at the Watkins Invitational and the STAC Championships, gaining outstanding wrestler honors at Watkins, before dropping a weight class for the 119-pound Section IV Class A and state qualifier titles. Lehman, who faces 25-4 John Paul

Igoe of Chaminade in today's opening round, pinned all four of his opponents at the state qualifiers.

While Lehman probably has a personalized dressing room reserved at the Onondaga War Memorial, Walsh and Leonardo still have to earn their stardom.

Lamson found a similarity between the wrestling styles of Walsh and Lehman as both strategies revolve around aggressive scoring.

"They go out and try to create opportunities," Lamson said. "They take their shots when they're there."

Walsh has taken more than just

shots in the postseason, winning three individual titles — the STAC, Section IV Class A and state qualifier crowns — at 96 pounds. Walsh and first-round opponent Jason Parker of Woodland will match their 29-2 records today. Walsh's two losses of the season came while wrestling two weight classes up — 112 pounds — during dual meets.

Walsh and Lehman easily maintained their top seeds for the state qualifiers, but Leonardo had to earn not only a state berth, but also respect.

Leonardo completed an unbeaten dual-meet season and won the 130-

pound STAC Championship before being upset in the 125-pound Class A final, losing a one-point decision. The Class A loss led to a No. 5 seeding for the state qualifiers, and Leonardo carved up the competition by beating three wrestlers seeded higher than himself en route to the 125-pound title and outstanding wrestler accolades.

"He can stop people, he has that ability to do that," Lamson said. "He'll win the closer matches."

Leonardo (31-6) will be compensated for his low seeding in the state qualifiers with a first-round bye in today's NYSPHSAA Tournament. He faces the winner of Happaugue's Mike Mussina (36-1) and Truman's Leon Henry.

Wrestling continues all day Saturday, and the consolation finals are expected to begin around 6 p.m. with the championship finals to follow.

## Witchger

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at Branches Restaurant, held in conjunction with the girls' midget sectional hockey tournament this weekend at The Rink in Lansing

sends out a survey every other year," she said, noting that one of the questions on the survey asks boys and girls what sport they'd like to play if it were offered in the school. Generally, little

"I knew what the law was," she said, "and I knew that when administrators would say things like it couldn't be done because they didn't have enough money or interest. I say 'Yes, there's