

New coach keeps loose

MCC wrestlers laugh and win

By **STEPHEN A. MONROE**
D&C Sportswriter

Staying loose is no problem for the Monroe Community College wrestling team. The laughter and the wisecracks begin with first-year coach Ron Kostecke and work their way down through the ranks.

But a wrestling team does not live by laughs alone, and when it is time to get down to serious business, the Tribunes have few peers. They are riding a dual meet string of 47 consecutive victories and are ranked fourth among the nation's junior college squads.

"The whole idea is supposed to be fun," said Kostecke, "I just want them to keep things in perspective and take advantage of their youth. I want wrestling to be fun for them. That's why we don't practice on Saturday, we practice on Sunday instead. I do that so on Saturday they can just have fun like everybody else."

The fun and games approach seems to agree with the Tribunes, who have continued the winning ways they showed under Mike Cronmiller. After guiding MCC to 39 straight victories the last two years, Cronmiller decided to give up coaching and concentrate on his post as head of the biology department.

It was Cronmiller who recommended Kostecke to replace him. A counselor at MCC the last six years, Kostecke is a 1965 graduate of East Rochester, where he wrestled under well-known coach Don Quinn. Kostecke came to MCC after gaining his master's degree in counseling from Albany State.

"When Cronmiller came to me and asked me to take the job, I definitely had second thoughts," said Kostecke, 29. "As my friends told me, the only way I could go was down, after the job he had done here."

"But I had suppressed my love for wrestling for so long, I decided to get back into the sport. I think it's even enhanced the job I do in counseling. I go to work in the morning at quarter to nine, finish at quarter to five and that's when practice starts. I can't think of a

more unique relationship with students."

Sophomore Ron Grubaugh, a 150-pounder with a 16-2 record this year, notices a difference in the coaching styles of Cronmiller and Kostecke.

"Kostecke lets us blow off steam," said Grubaugh, the team captain. "He lets us blow our cool, holler, scream, anything. Then he laughs at us to get things back in perspective. When I get mad or anything, he laughs at me and it helps the whole team relax."

"He doesn't sit down and lecture us, he gets on the things that we do wrong, the things that will make each of us better. His strong point is he really gives us a lot of encouragement."

Kostecke said Grubaugh, a Rush-Henrietta graduate, is "rough on takedowns. He's had as many as eight in one match."

A freshman, Harry Allerton of Newark, is MCC's "pinner" at 158 pounds.

"He's very tough," said Kostecke of Allerton, 13-2 this year. "Almost everyone he wrestles, he pins or annihilates."

East High graduate Al Barber also wrestles at 158 pounds. Madison graduate Lamont Banks, like Barber a former two-time city champion, is Kostecke's 177-pounder.

"None of us were really super in high school," said Grubaugh, whose only losses were to Jamestown's Phil Roblee, both referee's decisions in overtime. "Maybe we're all just late maturers. All of us work hard, even if we don't have the ability other kids have."

Last weekend the Tribunes traveled to Grand Rapids, Mich., for a junior college invitational that is considered the best mid-season tournament in the nation.

MCC wrestlers placed fourth among the 15 junior colleges. Grubaugh placed third at 150 pounds, and sophomore Mike Pochalski of Irondequoit was third at 190 pounds. Banks, a freshman at 177, Tim Celso, a sophomore from Newark at 118, and Jim Battaglia, a sophomore from Penfield at 134,



D&C photo by David Cook

Ron Grubaugh (right) tries to flip Harrison Allerton.

placed fourth in their classes.

Largely as a result of their showing in that tournament, the Tribunes are rated fourth in the country behind Cuyahoga West CC (Ohio), Muskegon CC (Michigan) and Grand Rapids JC (Michigan).

Locally, the Tribunes are in a slump if they aren't in first place, even though Kostecke has only two returning starters from last season. In their last dual meet they walloped Corning CC, 48-4. Against the teams Kostecke feels are the toughest on his schedule, MCC whipped Delhi, 28-12, and Alfred University, 28-9.

"I'm confident we could beat any four-year school around here, except Brockport," said Kostecke, who rates Jamestown and Morrisville as the only roadblocks to a second straight Region III title for the Tribunes.

After the regionals comes the National Junior College Athletic Association championship tourna-

ment in Worthington, Minn. But regardless of how the Tribunes fare, they'll probably be lose and laughing most of the way.

"There's no question in my mind that letting them be themselves works," said Kostecke. "So when they want to yell, stomp, laugh or whatever, I'm right there with them. If I have any philosophy of coaching, that's it."

"I was so concerned about who was going to take over the team when Cronmiller left," adds Kostecke. "I didn't want just anybody to get the job, I thought it should be somebody who cared, because these kids work so hard every day."

"Allerton and Celso are examples. Each of them run five miles a day before practice. When they come to practice, they're there to wrestle, period. That's real class as far as I'm concerned. That shows they care what happens to this program."