

★Potsdam Wrestling Season Comes to an End

Mike Heburn

Contributing Racquette Writer

Two and six! When it was all over they were two and six, three and twenty-one if you are counting the last three years. Terrible stats! Irrefutably bad; downright rotten, right? Well, to the misinformed, yes, these facts representing the Potsdam Men's Wrestling team seem undeniably horrendous.

Finding print space for a team who only wins two matches in one season is a difficult task. But the time has come to shed some light on a team that has been locked in the dark closet of ignorance for far too long.

So let's start at the beginning. Three years ago Dr. Neil Johnson stepped down from the head coach position of the Men's Wrestling team, opening the door for new coach Mike St. Amour, a graduate of St. Lawrence University, and former wrestler, captain, and assistant coach of the Saints wrestling program.

Taking over the wrestling team was no simple task for the young St. Amour. Recruiting had been non-existent for several years and as a result most of what St. Amour had to work with were walk-on wrestlers with limited wrestling experience and talent.

Knowing that the key to any successful program is the ability to acquire top-notch recruits, St. Amour went to work spending countless days on the road searching for young talent that could represent the kind of wrestling power he was looking to establish at Potsdam in the years to come.

And find talent he did! The 1989-1990 Bears Wrestling squad, primarily composed of freshmen, may be one of the most talented young Division III teams in the nation. So why did they finish with

such a poor record? A look at the Bear's schedule provides the evidence.

The 1989-1990 wrestling season consisted of 5 tournaments and 8 dual meets, six of which were against members of Division III's elite top twenty list: #1 Ithaca, #4 Cortland State, #8 S.L.U., #9 Brockport State, #16 Oneonta State, and #17 Oswego State. Added to the fierce competition of these dual meets were 5 extremely competitive tournaments boasting some of the best wrestlers in Division I, II, and III. When was the last time the Bears Basketball team faced a Division I team?

At the Springfield Invitational (Division II) Tournament in early November, many onlookers took note as Potsdam rattled many opponents for unprecedented victories in several weight classes. High place finishes were recorded by Sophomore Matt Brown, 1st at 118 lbs., (no longer with the team), Sophomore co-captain Mike Heburn, 3rd at 134 lbs., freshman Don Duell (2nd at New York State Championships in 1989), 3rd at 150 lbs., and freshman Matt Dupoint, 3rd at 190 lbs.

Later, in December, success continued for the Bears as Duell, Heburn, and John Bena (N.Y. State Champion 1989) finished in the top five of their respective weight classes in the highly acclaimed R.I.T. Invitational consisting of Division I through Division III schools.

Furthermore, if Potsdam's tournament achievements were not enough evidence of Potsdam's talent then their dual-meet kick-off December 9th was. Opposing #16 in the nation, Oneonta State, the young team battled to a 20-19 loss, leaving the very cocky Red Dragons very quiet and stunned.

Later in the season, the Bears faced #8 in the nation, St. Lawrence University, the 1987 NCAA Division III Champions, in front of a very boisterous SLU crowd. The experienced Saints team, boasting 2 All-Americans, were looking to squash the youthful Bears, but instead were nearly run out of their own gymnasium. After Ken Powell (4 time Ohio State place winner), 126 lbs., pinned senior Bob Zoeke of SLU, the crowd was quieted.

Victories from Duell, crushing 2 time All-American Brian Read, freshman Brett Danis (1989 All New England Champion), who pounded out a first period pin, and senior Steve Miles, in the heavy-weight class, led to a very close meet and by the end the score favored SLU by only a mere 5 points, 23-18; needless to say the Saints were not marching out.

The following night, things got no easier for the win hungry Bears as they squared up against #4 in the nation, Cortland State. The team picked up where they left off the night before, but with added confidence and desire. Back to back pins by Powell at 126 lbs. and Heburn at 134 lbs., followed by victories from Bena at 142 lbs., Duell at 150 lbs., and Danis at 167 lbs. opened up a giant 24-9 late-match lead. But experience proved to be the deciding factor as Cortland edged back in the last three matches and stole the meet 25-24, leaving the Bears once again with a close loss on the road.

Coming home turned out to be the best possible thing for the Bears as they finished the regular season with two impressive back to back wins beating R.I.T. 31-17 and Binghamton State 25-17, setting the stage for the S.U.N.Y.A.C. Championships, the qualifying

tournament for the NCAA Championships to be held March 2 and 3.

The 6 team tourney consisting of 4 nationally ranked teams (The SUNYAC is still considered one of the toughest Division III conferences in the nation), is the epoch of 6 months of endless practice sessions, countless pounds of weight loss, and a vicious amount of competitive battle. The top finishers and nine wild cards proceed to the national championships held in Ithaca this year.

Several of the Bears wrestlers showed personal bests as they completed the two day event and finished up a promising season. Freshman Andrew Canning (1989 Section Champion) slated a fourth place finish in a weight class dominated by upper classmen. Freshman Matt Dupoint, returning late in the season from a bad knee injury, also recorded a fourth place finish at 190 lbs. Freshman and possible future All-American Don Duell took third place honors at 150 lbs., putting the final touches on a season that included 4 tournament place finishes and a 6-2 dual-meet record. Senior co-captain, wrestler and assistant coach Steve Miles took a second consecutive third place finish and brought an end to a successful college wrestling career. Finally, sophomore co-captain Mike Heburn took runner-up honors at 134 lbs., grabbing 4 wins and suffering only 1 loss, but being passed up for a wild care bid for the national tournament. On the broad scope it was Potsdam's best season-ending performance in ten years, proven by Coach Mike St. Amour being voted into a tie for the SUNYAC Coach of the Year award presented at the conclusion of the tournament.