

Taking Aim

IC wrestlers look for national title

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Oh, so close.

The Ithaca College wrestling team in 1987-88 could almost taste a national championship. The Bombers entered the Division III national tournament 15-0 and No. 1-ranked nationally.

During a banner season, Ithaca had twice defeated teams that had held the number one ranking. All that was left was a national title.

But it was not to be. In the season-ending national tournament in Wheaton, Ill., the Bombers finished third behind — a team they had beaten during the season in dual meets — St. Lawrence — and second-place Montclair State. It was the best finish in the school history, but the Bombers ended the season wanting more.

"We came away from the national tournament knowing we could have won it," said Bomber head coach John Murray. "But we were a very young team. You have to be good and lucky to win the national title. We hope this year we know what it takes to win it all."

It all begins for IC this weekend when the team hosts an 18-team invitational tournament Friday and Saturday at Light Gym.

Ithaca is one of the pre-season choices to win it all in 1988-89. Last season, all ten Bombers qualified for the national tournament. Nine of the ten return this year. One of those nine — Mike Cronmiller, last year's national champion at 158 pounds — will sit out the season as a red-shirt. Why red-shirt a national champ?

"When Mike transferred to Ithaca not all his credits were accepted. He still has two years of school left and only one of eligibility," Murray

IC Wrestling

1988-89 Schedule

Fri-Sat — IC Invitational
Nov. 16 — Binghamton State
Nov. 19 — Kean/Mansfield
Dec. 4-5 — at RIT Invitational
Dec. 7 — at Oswego State
Dec. 10 — at Cortland State
Dec. 13 — Wilkes College
Jan. 14 — Div. III duals
Jan. 20-21 — NYS meet
Jan. 28 — at Albany State
Feb. 3 — St. Lawrence
Feb. 4 — at Cornell
Feb. 10 — Potsdam/RIT
Feb. 11 — Buffalo State
Feb. 17-18 — Regionals
March 3-4 — Nationals

said. "We have a good shot at hosting the national tournament in 1990. It gives Mike a chance to defend his title at home."

Murray also has an ace up his sleeve at 158 pounds.

"We have a transfer from the Naval Academy, Tom Tierny, who competed at the Division I nationals. He is an excellent wrestler and should contribute."

Ithaca has only one spot not occupied by an incumbent. Last year's heavyweight, Rich Kane, graduated after becoming only the third in school history to post 100 or more victories. Transfer Randy Cotten arrives with four years of wrestling eligibility. Cotten was a standout at Fulton High School, one of the top high school programs in New York state.

"Randy will probably start slow," Murray said. "He hasn't wrestled in a while and he is coming off knee surgery. But he has a great deal of ability."

Four All-America's return to the Bomber lineup: Tim Cotter, Marty Nichols, Dan Bieller, and Mike Fu-



Journal File

ON TOP: Ithaca College's Ron Gross, pictured winning a match last year, and the other nine returners to the Bomber wrestling team hope to continue on last season's success when the new season opens this weekend.

silli. Also returning: Brad Batista, Ron Gross, Tim Habecker, and Joel Lamson — and each qualified for the nationals last year.

"We have a great deal of competition in practice," Murray said. "We have an idea what our best line-up might be, but you can't tell this early. You never know about injuries, or guys making weight. This is an evaluating time for the

coaches."

The evaluation for Murray gets into full swing this weekend at the sixth annual Ithaca Invitational. This tourney field includes St. Lawrence.

"There will be 280 wrestlers, including 18 All-Americans," said Murray. "It's nice to have a home tourney early."

Ithaca's schedule is a challenge.

In January, IC will host the Division III Challenge Duals. Seven of last year's top ten teams will come to Ithaca to compete in the meet. Murray calls it the Division III dual meet championship.

"Last year we felt we were the best dual meet team in the nation. We would like to have a competition that would prove that and this is a start."

Ithaca has also added division I power Wilkes College to the schedule.

"If we continue to improve and stay injury free," says Murray, "we have a shot to win it all. This team has the chance to be very, very good."

This year the Bombers could even be better than oh, so close to their ultimate goal.

