



Rosso Steps Up

NCCC Sophomore Takes Region III Title

By Michael Tellier

ALFRED—Niagara County Community College made their way to Alfred State College for the annual Region III wrestling tournament on February 14th. Battling for his 15th Region title, Head Coach Eric Knuutila's Trailblazers came away with 85 points, securing themselves as Region III champions for the second consecutive year.

The Trailblazers posted three champions including Rocco Rosso at 125 pounds, Shay Shive at 149 pounds, and Troy Ireland at 157 pounds. "I said going into this tournament that the 125 pound weight class was key for us; it was nice to see Rosso step up," said Knuutila. Coming in to the tournament Rosso was named the third seed and had already been defeated by Alfred State's Cody Dill and Mercyhurst North East wrestler John Pas. "I knew coming into this tournament that I would have to approach these matches differently than I had in the past. I was much more aggressive and physical this time around, and I feel like it made a huge difference in these two matches" said Rosso. The NCCC sophomore controlled his way through the 125 pound division, defeating number two seed Cody Dill in the semis, 9-3, and number one seed John Pas with a convincing 6-2 decision in the finals. "I knew all along that on any given day I could beat both of these guys. I was just fortunate enough to come away with two huge wins and capture a Region III title," said Rosso.

Even though the Trailblazers came away with the title, Coach Knuutila was still somewhat disappointed with some of the results "I'm glad that we won, but I am very disappointed about the 133 pound weight class and the 285 pound weight class. Our guys have been beating those guys all year long and this came as a huge shock to me," said Knuutila. Dan Audy faced off against Jason Alexander (MCNE) in the finals at 133 pounds. Audy secured two takedowns in the first period, and it appeared as though the match was in his hands. However, as the second period began, Audy and Alexander began to scramble, and Audy would eventually be put into a cradle and later pinned at 4:43 of the second period. "It was a very silent ride home on the bus for us," said Knuutila. "Winning only three weight classes is not up to our standards. I guess the one positive that we can take away from this is that nine out of ten of our guys will be going to Nationals."

Sophomore Shay Shive captured his second Region three title defeating Juan Flores (STCC) by technical fall, 17-2. With the win, Shive became Knuutila's 100th Regional champion. Minutes later, Troy Ireland also captured a tournament title with a 6-4 decision over Max Murray (JCC).

Now the Trailblazers will prepare for the National tournament in Des Moines, Iowa on February 25th-27th. "As always we will go over in practice what we did right and, more importantly, what we did wrong," said Knuutila. "I really hope we can improve and come home from Iowa with good news." □

