

OSWEGONIAN SPORTS

Oswego State wrestlers prepare for Nationals

By Pat Martin

Sports Writer

The lower level of Laker Hall, directly below Max Zeil Gymnasium is where Oswego State's wrestlers practice.

The team season is over, but the entire squad was still in the room laden with hunter green and gold, sweat dripping off their faces.

On the far wall are the names of the 39 All-Americans the wrestling program has produced.

In two weeks, they have a chance to add three more to the wall of names. Everyone is still around giving support for those Lakers who are still alive.

Seniors Noah Seitel and Tom Mulchy, along with sophomore Frank Petrucci, earned bids to the national tournament at last weekend's Empire Conference Tournament in Oneonta. The tournament will be held in Scranton-Wilkes Barre March 1 and 2.

The Empire Conference Tournament was bittersweet for many of the Laker grapplers. Oswego State found itself in the middle of the pack, taking third

place as a team.

Head coach Mike Howard was impressed with his team's determination, however.

"The effort was there, we knew that it was going to be tight," said Howard. "Some guys just had off days, but they battled and competed hard, that's all you can ask for as a coach."

The weekend was full of feel-good stories and heartache at the individual level as well. Jeff Holmes had all the makings for a storybook ending to a magnificent career at Oswego State.

Holmes went into the tournament seeded second, and was hoping to return to the national tournament for the second consecutive year.

His championship semifinal match was with Brockport's Don Favro, who he had beaten in their last meeting, 3-2. The extremely closely contested match ended 2-1 in favor of Favro.

Holmes showed tremendous heart to win his next two matches and took third at the 174-lb. weight class.

He finished the season with 30 wins, including two in a row to cap off an amazing career.

Holmes' season is not over yet, however. Ever the team player, he continues to wrestle with his practice mate and friend Noah Seitel to get him ready for nationals.

Petrucci's road to his second trip to Nationals in as many years was not as flashy as the previous year.

In 2001, he earned Most Outstanding Wrestler honors at the Empire Conference tourney, along with his automatic berth to Nationals.

This year, he was seeded second and lost to the top seed Kris Harrington, 4-2, and went on to take second.

His bid to Nationals came from one of the five wild card bids given to the SUNY Athletic Conference. Petrucci hopes to improve on his less-than-exceptional performance in last year's national tournament.

"Last year, I was content just to be there," said Petrucci. "I was distracted as a freshman being MOW (Most Outstanding Wrestler) in conferences, and I lost focus."

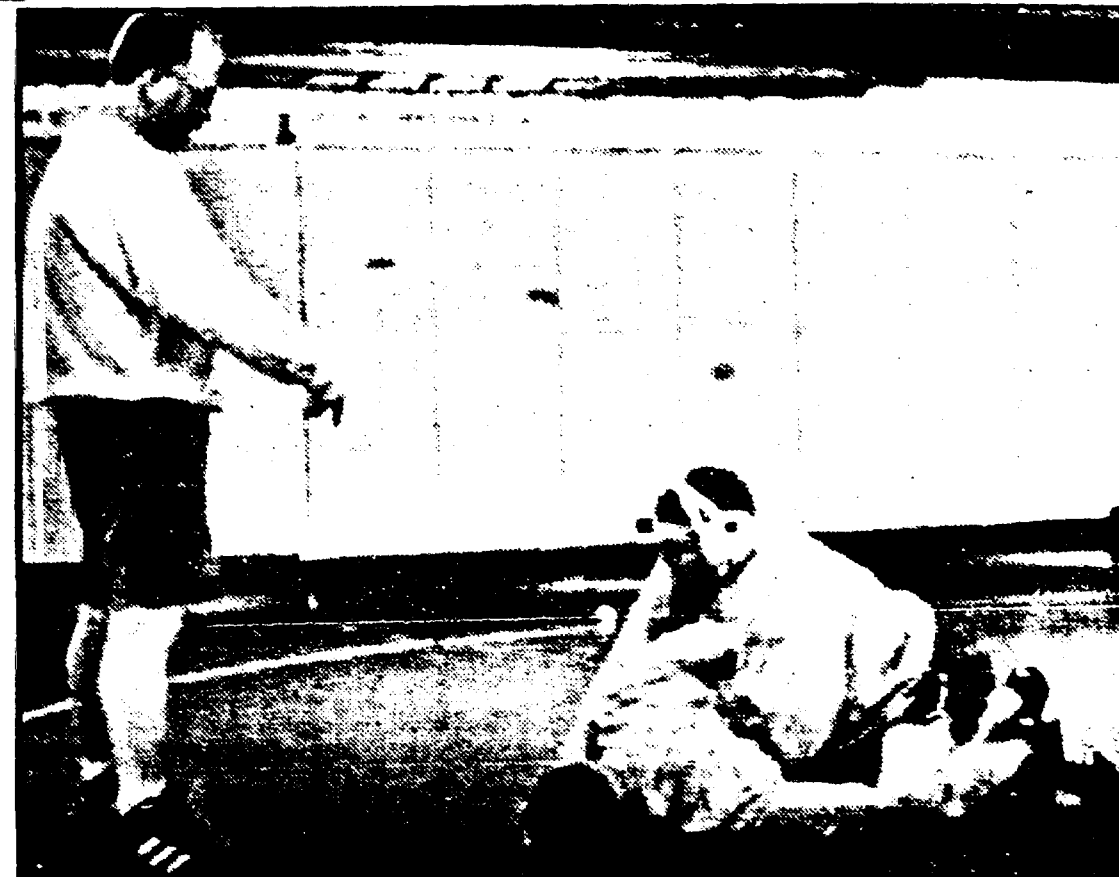


Photo by Pat Martin

Lakers wrestling coach Mike Howard instructs Noah Seitel during practice. Seitel, along with Frank Petrucci and Tom Mulchy, will be attending Nationals March 1-2 in Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

Now, Petrucci feels as though he is in the best shape of his life.

"Without making any predictions, I know we (along with Mulchy and Seitel) are in great shape. If we wrestle like we can, we'll do just fine," Petrucci said.

Mulchy's season had been a bat-

tle. Out for most of the season after an operation on his spleen, Mulchy felt he came back before he was ready.

"I got off to a slow start, I just didn't feel right," Mulchy said.

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Seitel, Mulchy, Petrucci ready for NCAAs

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He must have felt fine in Oneonta, because he ripped through the field at 197 pounds. He won his quarterfinal match by a major decision, 20-8.

He then turned his three seed into a championship as he dethroned the two seed and pinned top seed Anthony Viola in 5:23.

Mulchy is focused on turning his Empire win into an All-American title.

"I am definitely focusing on making it to the All-American round," said Mulchy. "I felt I should've been there last year, and now is my chance."

Headed to the national tournament for the third time in his 100+-win career, Seitel is described as "extremely hungry" by Howard.

"Noah has the talent and he has been there," said Howard. "He knows what it takes and he is going to have to really work for it."

Seitel is hungry for the elusive All-American honor. He has been just short of the All-American Round twice before and he seems determined to make it this time.

"I am more focused this time out," said Seitel. "My experience will take care of the jitters and I can just wrestle."

When asked what it would mean to have his name on the wall in Laker among those other 39 Laker All-Americans, Seitel paused and looked at the wall.

"It would be the culmination of my whole wrestling career," said Seitel. "I can't even explain how it would feel, it is the ultimate goal."

Howard said that he won't be changing anything in practice to get the three ready, except rotating other wrestlers in to make shorter, more intense practices for those continuing on.

Petrucci, Mulchy and Seitel take the mat against the rest of the country in two weeks in Wilkes-Barre.



Photo by Pat Martin

Pictured from left to right are Frank Petrucci, Noah Seitel, and Tom Mulchy of the Oswego State wrestling team. These three will represent the Lakers at the national tournament in Scranton/Wilkes-Barre, Pa. in March.