

Hall turns wild card into NCAA title

BY ABIGAIL FUNK
Staff Writer

Senior tri-captain Tommy Hall has finally fulfilled his dream of becoming a national champion. Hall took the crown in the 133-pound bracket at the NCAA Division III national tournament Saturday at First-Union Arena at Wilkes-Barre University (Pa.).

Hall was one of five Bombers attending the tournament. The only Bomber who didn't win a conference title Feb. 16, he was a wild card entry Saturday. He did not receive a seeding for pre-tournament brackets, but went right to the top, defeating the No. 3 and 7 seeds along the way.

Wrestling

"You can't really look at seeds when you go into a tournament like nationals because everyone has the ability to win," Hall explained. "It's really who shows up and who wants it to happen."

Hall traveled to the national tournament his sophomore year and entered as the No. 1 seed, only to finish in fourth place.

"Upsets happen every year," Hall said. "You just have to wrestle your best, and the person that does wins."

Hall received a bye in the first round and went on to a technical win, 20-3, over Kevin DeJulius of Washington and Jefferson (Pa.) in the second.

In the quarterfinal match, Hall wrestled No. 3-seed Mike Waldron of Lycoming (Pa.). Hall had lost to Waldron at the Ithaca Invitational back in November when he tore cartilage in his rib area, which ended up being a season-long injury. Fans said it was one of the most intense matches of the tournament. With only four seconds to go in the bout, Hall was down 6-2. He was then able to flip Waldron on his back and pin him for the win.

Semifinal action for Hall included the No. 7 seed in the 133-pound bracket, Ralph Acosta of Upper Iowa. Hall defeated him by a major decision, 12-4, to proceed to the championship match. He had no trouble with a 10-6 decision over non-seeded Steve Martin of Loras University (Iowa). With a fair number of Ithaca wrestlers and students, the Bomber section on the bleachers went crazy.

"It was great to get everybody back at the right time," Coach Marty Nichols said after an injury-ridden season for the Bombers. "The guys went out there and performed and did a great job."



FILE PHOTO/THE ITHACAN

SENIOR TRI-CAPTAIN Tommy Hall made the national tournament as a wild card entry and then won the 133-pound bracket.

Hall redshirted last season in order to wrestle with his classmates this year but had a rocky season, beginning with his rib injury in the first tournament of the season. He missed most of the season's matches, wrestling in only four tournaments and one dual meet before nationals.

"It was hard to work out and keep my weight down because I was injured," Hall said. "But it helped me mentally, kept me fresh."

Hall was determined to wrestle for a conference title and ended up taking second place at the conference tournament, along with a wild-card entry to nationals. Hall said his rib injury is a painful, nagging one and persists in the wake of the championships.

"My ribs were bothering me a little bit

in certain situations," he explained. "But that was the last tournament I was ever going to wrestle in, so I just tried to suck it up and go all out."

Hall now has all the time in the world to recuperate, as he and his fellow captains and seniors are all graduating in May. Hall and fellow tri-captains Ryan Ciotoli and Carlos Restrepo stayed a fifth year at Ithaca to try for that national title this season.

"A couple of the other guys came back another year. We planned on winning it," Hall said. "We didn't do that, but it's hard to compete with teams that bring their whole team."

When Hall was asked if he and his fellow captains were pleased with their decision to stay the extra year, he replied happily.

"Absolutely," Hall exclaimed. "We went all out. We left everything on the mat, and we did the best we could, and it was definitely worth it coming back with those guys. I'd do it again in a second."

Nostalgic feelings surrounding graduation haven't set in for Hall yet, but he knows he will miss Ithaca and the Bomber wrestling team soon.

"A bunch of us are going to be staying around the area, so we'll be around," he said. "Right now I'm kind of happy the whole thing's done, but I'm sure I'll miss it."

See Page 23 for the results from the other four Bombers at the Division III wrestling tournament.

Three others All-American

Sixth out of 58 teams at NCAAs says something about the Ithaca wrestling team. The five Bombers — half the size of champion Augsburg College's (Minn.) team

Wrestling

— gave Coach Marty Nichols his best finish yet at the national championship.

"It's great," Nichols said. "We had a little trouble early on in the season and the middle of the season with some injuries ... but it was fun."

Restrepo received a sixth-place seeding and promptly upset the No. 3 seed, Vinny Pedalino of Western Maryland, 7-4, in his quarterfinal match. Restrepo met the No. 5 seed, Jamie Taxted of Buena Vista (Iowa) in the championship, falling 7-3.

Ciotoli made his fourth trip to nationals, finishing in sixth place after missing half of the season with an anterior

or cruciate ligament tear. In his semifinal bout, Ciotoli lost by just one point, given to the College of New Jersey's Matt Moscatello for riding time. Ciotoli is Ithaca's ninth three-time All-American.

Hall, Restrepo and Israel join Ciotoli in earning All-America honors. Israel became only the second Ithaca freshman All-American.

Steele lost his first bout of the tournament to the top seeded heavyweight, Jason Ott of Wisconsin-LaCrosse, then suffered a concussion in his next, forcing Steele to forfeit the rest of the tournament.

The Bombers lose five seniors this season: Ciotoli, Hall, Restrepo, Conor Heun and Dan Montana — quite a blow to the roster.

"Those guys have kind of held our program together for five years," Nichols said. "We're definitely going to miss those guys. They're hard to replace."