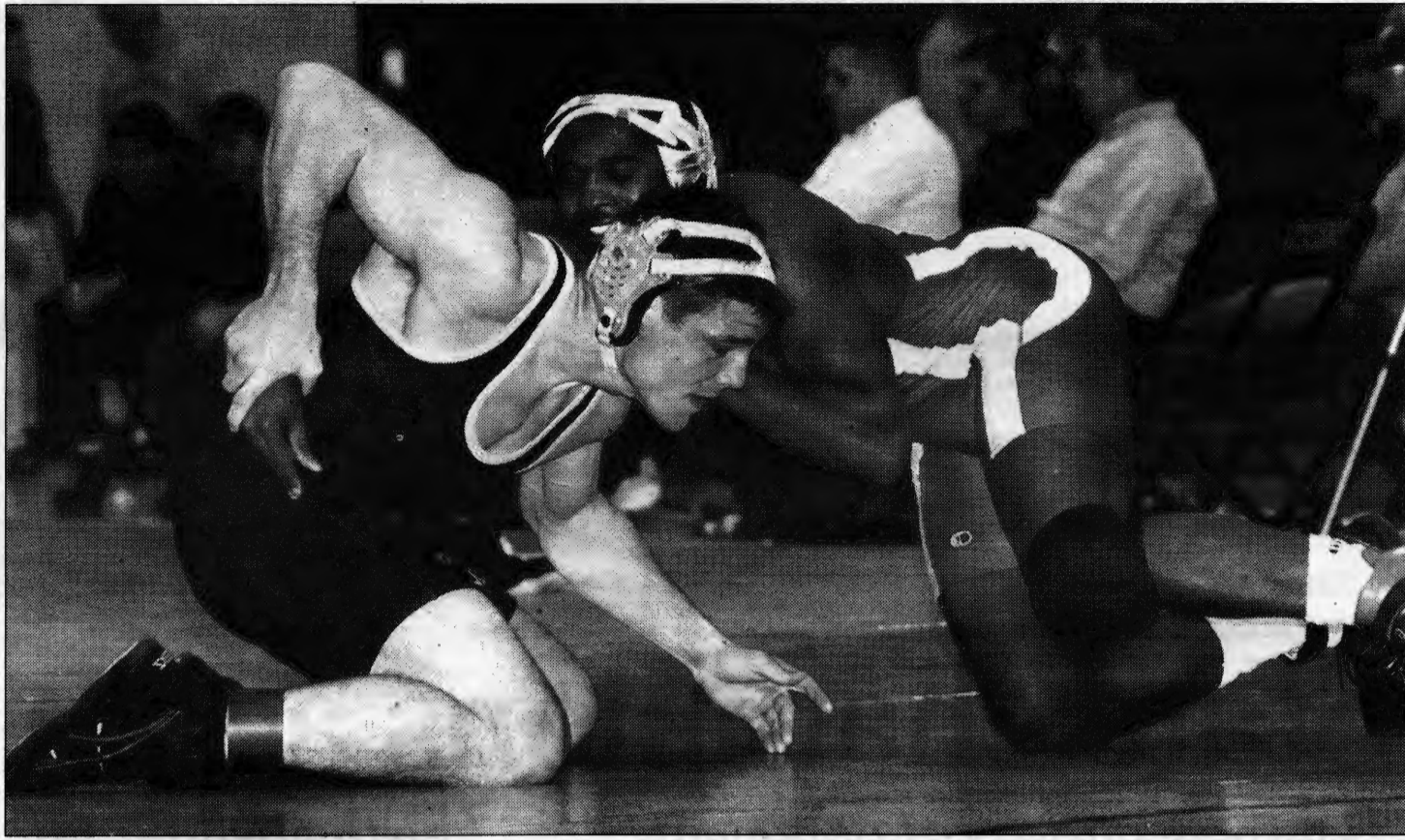


Bombers prepare for postseason

21st-ranked women's basketball team downs Elmira in final game before hosting conference tournament
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MICAH KARG/THE ITHACAN

SOPHOMORE MATTHIAS KEIB (left) battles Cortland's Stef Sair in the final match at 141 pounds. Keib won in a 10-7 decision.

Keib crowned state champ

Bombers send three to nationals, but only sophomore wins title

BY MICAH KARG
Staff Writer

What a disappointment. Of the 10 Ithaca wrestlers at the Empire Collegiate Wrestling Conference Championships, only sophomore Matthias Keib advanced to the championship match.

Several Bombers were leading in their second-round matches, but Keib was the lone member of the squad to come out victorious. He went on to win the 174-pound weight class at RIT Saturday.

Ithaca will send three wrestlers — Keib and juniors Marc Israel and K.C. Beach — to the NCAA Division III National Championships at Loras College in Iowa March 5-6.

Ithaca started the six-team tournament with wins in the 125 and 133 pound weight classes. But then the team's day took a turn for the worse. Freshman Adam Johnson

was lifted up by his opponent and dropped on his shoulder and neck. He was knocked unconscious and was wheeled out of the gym on a stretcher, on his way to Strong Memorial Hospital.

"When I saw him go down, I didn't think he got hurt," Keib said. "Then he was quivering. I saw he was knocked out, and the wheels came out. I knew it was bad."

Johnson's injury cast a pall over the remainder of the tournament for the Bombers. They were distracted. The team continually asked coaches Marty Nichols and Ryan Ciotoli for updates on Johnson's condition.

The Bombers won out for the rest of the opening round, but the semifinals were a different story.

Freshman Kyle Kemmerer was pinned in the 125-pound weight class. At 133 pounds, junior Lance Dolson lost 13-11 to Tony D'Ambra of Brockport, who was named the meet's outstanding wrestler.

Even though wrestling is a one-on-one sport, the two straight losses created a ripple effect throughout the lineup.

"We're a momentum team," Keib said. "Once those first two went down, everyone lost focus."

Beach felt the same way.

"Once somebody loses, it gets in our head," Beach said. "Kyle's our sparkplug."

Because of Johnson's injury, Ithaca forfeited at 141. At 149, senior Greg Skiff lost to the eventual champ; at 157, top-seeded Beach lost 5-3 and at 165, top-seeded Israel lost 4-3. Both Beach and Israel finished a disappointing third, but because of their success throughout the season, each was awarded a wild-card berth to nationals.

At 174, Keib won 9-3, putting an end to the Bombers' six-match losing streak.

"He stayed focused on what he had to do," Nichols said. "He wasn't gonna have the team's previous losses change his psyche."

Unfortunately, Keib's win wasn't enough momentum for the rest of the semifinals.

Sophomore Rob Stubbs was pinned by the eventual champ at 184, freshman Nick Calandrino lost by decision at 197, and junior tri-captain Bryan Petti lost 6-4 in the heavy-

weight division to the eventual champion. With Johnson in the hospital and Keib in the finals, eight Bombers were in the consolation bracket; the highest they could place was second.

Stubbs won three straight matches to notch second place, but, despite an impressive performance, was not granted a wild card. He was the only Bomber to finish second.

"I thought he deserved to go," Nichols said. "He wrestled well, but that one match got him."

That one match was when Stubbs was pinned by Ben Locke in the semifinal round, but Beach, a tri-captain, points his finger at himself for Stubbs' end to the season.

"I put the blame of Stubbs not going on me because I was supposed to win," said Beach, who was an alternate selection last year. "I know how Rob feels. Last season I didn't go because senior Jeff [Edelstein] got the wild card."

As a team, Ithaca finished third with 62.5 points. Brockport won six weight classes and had 105.0 points, followed by Cortland (70.5), Ithaca, Oswego (57.0), Oneonta (43.5) and RIT (8.0).

Despite an overall disappointing day, Keib,

Israel and Beach will compete at nationals March 5-6. Kemmerer finished fourth at 125 and was named an alternate wild-card selection from the conference does not travel to nationals, Kemmerer will compete.



MICAH KARG/THE ITHACAN

FRESHMAN KYLE KEMMERER (top) was named an alternate wild card selection to the national meet in Iowa Mar. 5-6.

Head injury nearly ends rook's career

BY MICAH KARG
Staff Writer

In the ambulance, freshman Adam Johnson had to ask teammate Jeff Edelstein five times who he wrestled. Johnson simply had no idea.

"The last thing I really remember is warming up before the match," Johnson said Monday, back at Ithaca College.

When Johnson hit the mat at 1:03 of the first period and didn't get up, the crowd held its breath.



JOHNSON

The freshman, wrestling Jason Chase of Cortland, was lifted and put down, usually a routine move. But this time, Johnson's right shoulder blade struck the mat first, knocking him unconscious.

Trainers came to Johnson's side as the 141-pounder lay motionless on his back, his arms extended to each side. Johnson began to convulse as the paramedics arrived. He was put on a stretcher and wheeled out of Clark Gymnasium at RIT en route to Strong Memorial Hospital. Johnson's girlfriend, Monica, her mother and Edelstein, a senior not wrestling because of injury, went along with Johnson.

Throughout the afternoon, the Bombers got updates through phone calls from Edelstein about Johnson's status. They heard his wrestling career was over. They heard about cracked vertebrae. They heard it could be worse than that — he may never walk again.

In the hospital, Johnson lay in the bed hooked up to a 30-hour intravenous steroid. Initially, the doctor said he had a broken back and needed surgery. Johnson was shocked.

"I've been wrestling as long as I've been walking," Johnson said. "I just closed my eyes and prayed."

Maybe the praying worked. He was diagnosed with a third-degree concussion and two dislocated disks, which "miraculously" slipped back into place at some point during the afternoon.

After the tournament was over and the team found out who would be going to nationals, the squad boarded the bus and went straight to the hospital Saturday night. The team stayed until midnight.

The Bombers wanted to see how Johnson was doing and to cheer him up. Their camaraderie got the job done.

"Jeff comforted me all day," Johnson said. "It was really good to see the team and know that they cared."

Assistant coach Ryan Ciotoli brightened Johnson's day a little more. He got him pizza and two milkshakes, a meal Johnson had craved all day.

Johnson's singlet had to be cut off in the hospital. Knowing how much his uniform meant to him, his teammates signed their names on it and hung it above his bed before they left for Ithaca.

Johnson, now back at school, has numbness from his right knee to his hip. The doctors told him he should walk and swim for the next month, but no running or weightlifting. He'll see a neurosurgeon over spring break.

"I can't complain," Johnson said. "The doctor at the hospital said I wouldn't walk again, and I walked out of the hospital."