

# ★ Grapplers prepare for stern test at SUNYACs

by Gary Denmark

This is where the pain begins.

The best against the best. The SUNYAC wrestling tournament will be held in Oneonta this Friday and Saturday and the Great Lakers are looking to avenge last year's second place finish.

"All we had to do was hang on," was Coach Jim Howard's comment about last year's finish in the tournament. But instead, in the second to last match, an Oswego wrestler lost. He not only lost; he lost in the last second.

It was a bitter defeat as Oswego fell and had to settle for a second place tie with Brockport.

Cortland State finished in first place. Once again, this year it looks as if this triumvirate will rule the SUNYACs.

But don't count on any letdown by an Oswego wrestler. Coach Howard gave the team a long speech, warning them that if he sees a repeat of last year's debacle, they will regret it.

Further, the Lakers seem to rise to the top with each challenge they have met this year.

In the season's opening match, Oswego defeated the defending champ Cortland by a 26-15 score. Later on in the season, they upset the previously nationally eighth ranked St. Lawrence University 25-15 at Laker Hall.

This year's team is also the most talented one that Coach Howard has seen in his 27 year tenure.

Wrestling at 118 pounds will be junior Brian Darling. Darling spent most of the season in the 126 pound weight class, except for a brief stint at 118 pounds in the state tournaments in which he placed second behind Division I star Tim Fussell of Syracuse University.

Darling compiled a 20-6 overall record (5-2 in the SUNY Conference), but he should advance to the finals of the tournament. The move by Darling to drop the weight class is a "good one nationally. He has a great chance to All-American status," according to Coach Howard. He also has a much better chance to make the Division III National Tournament as the top finisher in the conference.

In order to make the Tournament, you must win your weight class or be one of the two wildcard choices as named by the coaches.

Look for Darling to be one of these wrestlers. Wrestling at 126 for the tournament will be freshman Bob Ferrero. Ferrero spent most of his season at 118 pounds, where he compiled a 3-2 record. He lost both of his matches at 126 pounds.

Another freshman, Jeff Shade, is entering the SUNYACs on a high note after his victory over Binghamton's Brian Colao 7-3.

"Shade is making good progress. He's a tough kid," said Howard.

Despite a 3-17 record, Shade has a 3-3 conference record and he has been involved in close matches in those losses. Don't look for any first place finishes from Shade this year, but he should be challenging for the top spot in the next few years.

Junior Jim O'Neill is coming off a knee injury and a case of the flu, but will compete in the tournament at 142 pounds.

The only problem O'Neill, who is 10-4 (5-0 SUNY conference), will have to face is making the weight. O'Neill has been out of action since the Jan. 21 victory over St. Lawrence.

Sophomore Mike Wade is enjoying a fine season at 150 pounds and will be looking to avenge losses during the season at the tournament.

Wade (18-8-1, 4-1 SUNY conference) will meet challenges from Binghamton's Todd Paglia, an ex-Laker whom he lost to 3-1 at the state tournament as well as from Cortland rival Nick Zurickny.

At 158 pounds, Steve Amyot, whom Howard called "the best freshman product to come to Oswego in a long time," will take his 14-13 record (5-3 SUNY conference) to the tournament.

One thing which could backfire on Amyot, though, is his "fearless, overly aggressive" style of wrestling he takes with him each time he steps on the mat. He takes a three match winning streak with him to the tournament, however, so look for a good performance from the freshman product from Victor Central, N.Y.

167 pounder Cris Buhner (8-11-1; 5-1 SUNY conference), who carries a 3.3 GPA is a candidate for Academic All-American, giving true meaning to the phrase student athlete.

The coach is still undecided who will travel to Oneonta as the 172 pounder.

Rob Price, who is 0-3-2, will battle for the spot with junior Scott Brinley (4-2; 2-0-1 SUNY conference).

After getting off to a 1-6 record, senior 190 pounder John Conti won five of his next eight matches on his way to a 6-9-1 record (2-1-1 SUNY conference). He had some fine matches late in the season and seems to be at his peak for the SUNYACs.

Heavyweight Jon Buhner should have no problem winning the title this year. The senior All-American, who is also a two time Academic All-American, compiled a 22-1-1 record (4-0 SUNY

*continued on page 25*

# Wrestling\_\_\_\_\_

---

*continued on page 28*

---

conference), including an unblemished 17-0 record against Division III foes. His only loss came against Division I E.T. Pasteur of Army 2-1 in overtime; a match which could have gone either way.

So, it will be a battle between Brockport, Cortland and the Great Lakers for the top spot in the conference that could come down to the last match of the tournament.