

★ Levine's No. 1 Goal— Beat Don St. James

By TOM BATZOLD

Maybe he's old-fashioned but Steve Levine can't stand the thought of being No. 2.

It wasn't any consolation to the Brighton junior when he was mobbed by friends and well-wishers after the finals of the Monroe County tournament last month. He was a one-point loser to two-time sectional champ Don St. James of Rush-Henrietta Sperry.

"Everyone told me how good I did," Levine says. "I guess I was supposed to be happy but I wasn't. I was pretty upset that night when I got home. There's just no way I can feel good about a loss."

Not even if the loss was to St. James, whom some people were ready to concede another sectional title.

"That's the problem some wrestlers have against him (St. James)," Levine says. "They get psyched out because they know he's been to the states twice. Then they don't have a chance."

St. James, however, isn't invincible. Levine beat him by a point in an AAU tournament in Spencerport last spring.

"That was the first time Steve actually knew what he was capable of doing," Brighton Coach Mark Hoyt says. "That really gave him the incentive to get going."

A busy summer followed. Levine wrestled in nearly a dozen amateur tournaments across the state and in Pennsylvania and developed into a more polished wrestler.

"That was like another dual meet season for him," Hoyt says. "In a typical high school season you might get 32 matches, tops, all season. Steve had all of that and more over the summer. You can see he's more experienced now."

Levine also dropped down to 119 pounds, his natural weight, this season.

"I was wrestling guys like (Fairport's Ken) Jamison and (Spencerport's Ray) Vincelli at 126 last year," he says. "I didn't always win but I think I learned a lot against guys who were a little bigger. This is my natural weight. I don't have to rely on pizza and milkshakes to make weight anymore."

Instead, his secret is the Tootsie Roll. "I eat 'em all the time," he explains. "I can't eat something like a hot dog before a match because it won't sit well. But I can eat all the



STEVE LEVINE

Brighton 119-pounder

Tootsie Rolls I want and it won't bother me."

Levine was 24-4 and placed third in the sectionals as a sophomore. So far this season he's 12-2, losing a dual match when he was weakened by the flu.

The 119-pound final at the county tournaments was a classic, "the best in two or three years," according to Hoyt. St. James won 9-8 and Levine limped off the mat with an injured ankle and a bloody nose.

"I think Steve would have won if he didn't have that bloody nose," Hoyt says. "We had to stop the match five times because of it. Every time he got cooking, we had to stop."

"But he'll have another chance. We have Sperry in our last match and everything Steve's doing now is to get ready for Donny. If anything, the county tournament had to help Steve's confidence. He knows that when both of them are in shape, he can beat Donny. And Donny knows it, too."

Actually, it's possible for the two to meet three more times — in the dual meet, in the sectionals and in the state qualifier.

"He should be aware of me by now," Levine says. "The thing I have to do is approach it like he's just another wrestler. I've got to wrestle some guy with two arms and two legs and not the name."

"I remember how bad I felt after losing the last time. I hate it. That should be enough incentive. I think I'm afraid to lose again."