

HIGH SCHOOLS



Annette Lein Staff photographer

Irondequoit's Arkee Allen overcame a rocky start during his freshman season to become one of the finest wrestlers in Section V.

Grappling with success

Persistence pays off for wrestler from Irondequoit

By **Urla Hill**

Staff writer

Wrestling looked to be a perfect sport — on paper — for Irondequoit freshman Arkee Allen.

"I was in the gym during open house and a gym teacher gave me a handout," said Allen, who now is a senior. "It looked like a sport I could do."

And besides that, "I thought I should do something to meet new people because I was new at school."

Anyone the 5-foot-2, 98-pound wrestler befriended that year spent much of the season handing him hankies.

"I was crying after every match," said Allen, who was 13-16 during the regular season. "I lost more than I won."

"I remember seniors saying, 'Don't worry Arkee, you'll be good some day. We'll come back when you're a senior.'"

But when coach Art Connorton asked him if he wanted to step down to the junior varsity for the next season, "That jump-started me," Allen said.

"That made me better right away. I thought, 'I've been on the varsity this long, I might as well do something with it.'"

That and the fact that most of his teammates had moved on to the post season.

"It was sectional time and I didn't want to be the only guy who didn't want to go. If you didn't qualify for Super Sectionals you still had to come to practice."

After being pinned by Greece's Dan Nier at the Section V Class A meet, Allen took a shot at Super Sectionals the next weekend.

He took on Webster's Jeff Linder — the Monroe County All-League choice at 98 pounds that season — for third place and won.

"After every period I was praying and jumping up and down," said Allen, who wound up finishing with a 20-19 record. "I'd score two points



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Arkee Allen gets on top and gains control of teammate Mike Moulton during a recent practice at Irondequoit High School.

and jump up and down."

Nothing like a third place finish to build one's confidence.

"When I looked at the next season's schedule, I was like, 'OK, I'll be 20-0 by then, 21-0 after that,'" Allen said. "By the time I finished the schedule, I was 30-0."

That season Allen broke the record for single-season takedowns (115) and most takedowns in dual matches (55) and posted a 33-6 record.

But he still wasn't satisfied because he finished third in the section again, this time at 112 pounds.

"I lost a match I should have won," he said. "I was beating (Candaigua's Todd Allen) 4-0 and tried a move that had worked before, but he caught me on my back for five points and won."

"I wasn't happy because I finished the same as the last year, but was a better wrestler."

Last season Allen had no doubt he would conquer all on his way to the state meet.

But his season ended prematurely, or so he thought.

In the Monroe County League tournament, his right hand got pinned under his opponent on a takedown and he suffered a broken middle finger.

"I thought it was only jammed," said Allen, who has a career record of 109-28. "I couldn't feel it because I was taking pain medication for a shoulder injury. The meet was on a Saturday and I went to the doctor on Tuesday."

"When he told me I'd miss the rest of the season, I couldn't believe it."

But something told Allen he would be back.

"I don't know," he said. "I knew I was going to be back, but then I didn't know. I just kept calling and pressuring the doctor so I would get to come back."

He did. And just in time for Super Sectionals — the state qualifier — in which he was allowed to participate because of his outstanding record.

Since he hadn't done anything but ride a bike for a month, his return to the mat was difficult to prepare for mentally, he said.

"I was nervous, really nervous," he said. "I came back during Super Sectionals. I was thinking, 'You're back into it during the best tournament in Section V.'"

Against all odds he qualified for the state tournament. "I was really happy about that."

But finishing seventh was a ma-

Takedown king

■ **Who:** Arkee Allen of Irondequoit

■ **Class:** Senior

■ **Age:** 17 **Ht.:** 5-6 **Wt.:** 131

■ **Sport:** Wrestling

■ **Academic honors:** Maintains a 90 average and is a member of the National Honor Society

■ **Athletic honors:** 1993-94 Monroe County League champion at 126 pounds; named the outstanding wrestler of the county meet; 1992-93 team MVP; Super Sectional winner at 126 last season; seventh in the state at 126 last season; owns the school single-season takedown record (115) and the dual meet takedown record (55), which he set as a sophomore; three-time All-County and All-Section V wrestler and a two-time All-League selection.

■ **Recruiting news:** Is being recruited by 12 schools including Cornell, Syracuse, Edinboro and Lock Haven, but Columbia is his favorite.

■ **Hobbies:** Making up math problems and tutoring others in math

■ **Favorite book:** *Native Son*

■ **Favorite food:** Stuffing

■ **Favorite musical artist:** Ice T

■ **Favorite movie:** *Boyz n The Hood*

■ **Favorite saying:** "Thank you Jesus."

jor disappointment.

"I lost again," he said. "I remember people saying I did a good job to make it that far and that I shouldn't be disappointed. I joked about it to make myself feel better."

The joking has stopped.

This season Allen is 27-0 and was crowned the county champ. In addition, he was named the outstanding wrestler of the meet.

"Last year I was trying to master everything to get the feel," he said. "This year I got the feel. I don't even have to think on the mats."

Now there isn't any doubt in Connorton's mind that Allen will be able to finish on top just as former state champions Kurt Black (1971), Rory Whipple ('72) and Tony Co-troneo ('81). □