

# Sports

## 'Roots' of Medina's wrestling success

### Sibling rivalry aids win efforts

By JOHN HAKES  
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Having strong Roots is a virtue in life. Medina wrestling Coach Mike Crandall certainly acknowledges that.

With the Root brothers — senior Dan, sophomore Kevin and eighth-grader Matt, the Mustangs have its first grappling triumvirate since Higgins siblings Dennis, Darryl and David wrestled for the Mustangs in the late 1960s. Crandall grappled on the same team as the Higgins brothers.

Dan Root, 17, has had nothing short of a great year. He has compiled a 25-6 record and won tourney titles in the 152-pound class at Byron-Bergen, Lockport and last Saturday at the Ken-Ton Tournament.

Dan Root, who received Western New York honorable mention status this year, still is not satisfied.

"I just want to go to states. That's my goal," he said without hesitation on the subject of the New York State Wrestling Championships the first weekend in March at Syracuse.

"He'll do anything it takes to win," said assistant coach Craig Gross. "He understands what it takes to win and he's willing to pay the price. He's stubborn. That helps in wrestling."

The first step towards the states occurs here on Saturday as Medina High School serves as the site of this year's Niagara-Orleans League meet. Weigh-ins begin at 7:30 a.m. with the grappling action to begin at 10. The finals are expected to begin between 5 and 6 p.m.

Medina does have some unfinished business to attend to on Saturday. The Mustangs try to wrestle the league title away from defending champion Newfane. Both teams are 6-0-1 in the league. The team that places the highest could win the N-O title, though Albion still has an outside shot at winning the championship.



The success of Root brothers, Kevin, Matt and Dan, has put the Medina wrestling team in position to win the Niagara-Orleans League championship this weekend. The brothers have combined for 52 wins this winter and four wrestling titles. (J-R Photo by Dennis Stierer).

If the 5-2 Purple Eagles win tomorrow and neither the Mustangs nor the Panthers finish higher than third, Albion wins the N-O title.

Gross uses Dan Root's undying work ethic as an example to younger wrestlers in the program.

"He's by far the hardest worker in the practice room," Gross said.

Added Crandall: "If I could instill the attitude and work ethic of the Roots (into everyone), I'd be one of the most successful wrestling coaches in history."

The eldest Root said he wants to do all he can while he's still wrestling because his

brothers are out to show him up.

"That's what I think drives us," Dan Root said. "When I started I wanted to do better than what my dad did."

The trio's father, Rick Root, wrestled for Medina at 119 pounds (Matt's weight class) from 1965-69.

"He wants to do better than what I do," said Dan Root, pointing to Kevin. "Everyone wants to out-do the other one. It just motivates us."

Kevin Root, who recently turned 16, has compiled an 18-9 record this year while capturing first-place at 140-pounds in the Byron-Bergen Tournament. He also came

in third in the Sweet Home Tournament and fourth at Lockport.

"He's already turning into a great leader," Gross said of Kevin Root. "He gets real fired up, but in his mind he's focused. You can see how badly he wants to win — he'll give you his all from whistle to whistle."

Kevin Root, like Dan, said he just wants to go as far as possible in the upcoming postseason tournaments.

"I want to get to the state qualifier," he said. "Once you get there, anything can happen."

Matt Root is one of three eighth-graders

on the roster.

"I just want to do as good as I can in sectionals and hopefully get to the state qualifier," said the soft-spoken 13-year-old, who has compiled a 9-9 record against older competition.

Matt Root said he got into wrestling through his brothers and got to know his coaches well during a stint as the football team's water boy.

All three play football, with Dan and Kevin playing lacrosse in the spring. Matt plays baseball as a middle infielder.

"He has the same attitude (as his brother): never say die, never quit," Gross said of the youngest Root. "He has a long way to go, but he has the same work ethic and he'll do well down the road."

Gross said Matt Root has soldiered on through the season with a shoulder injury, refusing time off. Matt Root had a brief stint as a basketballer, but said he prefers wrestling.

Dan Root attributes much of his success and growth as a wrestler to Crandall and Gross.

"(Gross) tries to be as good as he can, works hard and helps whenever he can. Mike Crandall (does), too," Dan Root said. "They both help you a lot and encourage you to stay on the straight and narrow path."

The three boys have been life-long Medina residents. Like many brothers, the Roots admitted they "fought a lot" and broke a few household appliances.

Yet several skirmishes later — Dan, Kevin and Matt found themselves working together for a common goal: to constantly improve as wrestlers.

"We wrestle in the summer and lift weights," said Dan Root of the trio's off-season training routine. "I started lifting weights and they just followed the example, I guess."

All three have attended wrestling camps at colleges like Edinboro University (Pennsylvania) and the University at Buffalo to condition and work on technique and style.