

Reed Hoffmann Staff photographer

Whether he's practicing against teammate Mike Romeo or wrestling in competition, Sirrell Gissendanner throws his weight around.

'I feel like I'm going to win'

Spencerport's Gissendanner aims for state championship

By John Smallwood

Staff writer

Two years ago, Sirrell Gissendanner's desire to play high school football began to turn into a rage.

He knew he had strength, speed and balance — all the attributes needed to become a big-time football player.

The thing he didn't have was a team because Spencerport High didn't play football.

He was going to transfer to Gates-Chili, but by faced the possibility of being forced to sit out an entire season of the other sport he loved — wrestling.

It was a risk he wasn't prepared to take.

Now a 17-year-old senior, Gissendanner still hasn't played organized football since the seventh grade.

He still has the desire, but he never let the frustration of being denied get him down. Instead he put all his energy into developing his potential as a wrestler.

"I think I could have done very well at football," Gissendanner said. "But my parents said to me, 'Since you can't do football right now, just be the best at what you could do.'"

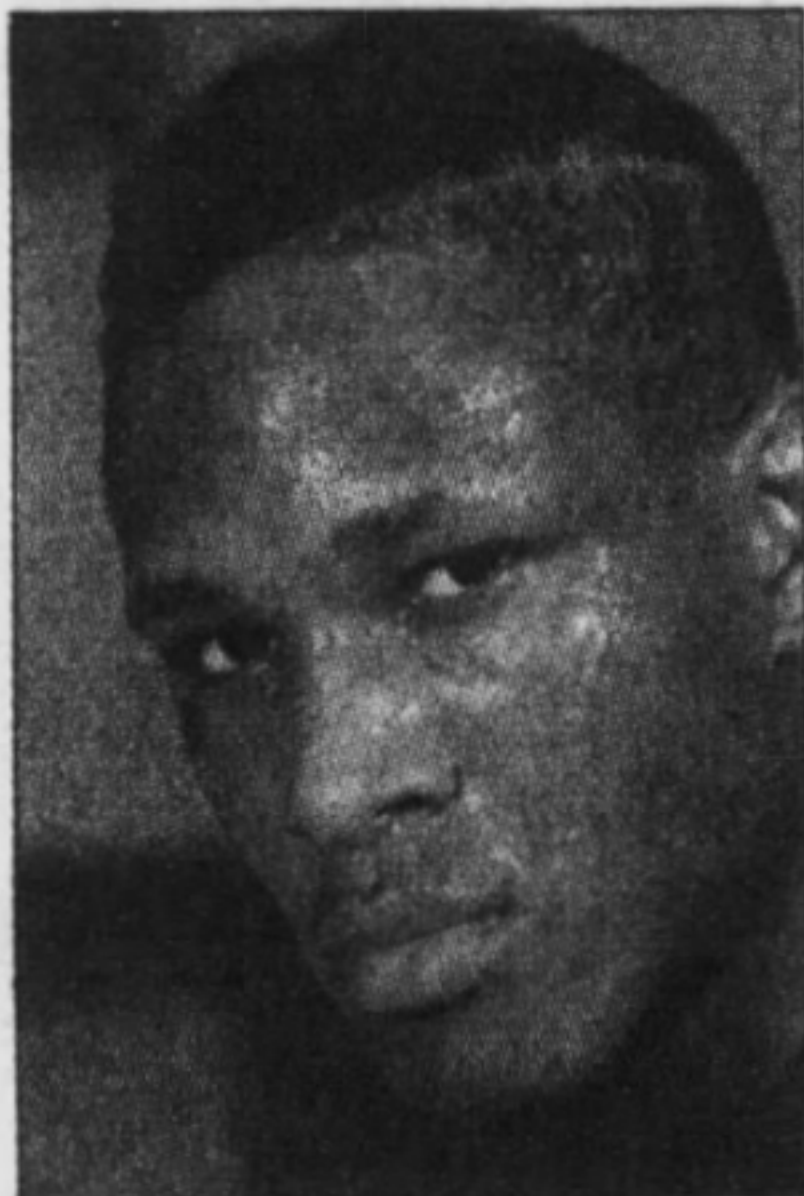
This season, Gissendanner will seek his third consecutive Section 5 Class A and Super Sectional championships. Last season, he placed third at 167 pounds at the New York State Public High School Athletic Association tournament.

Now he wants to be a champion. "I feel like I'm going to win the state championship this year because of my attitude," said Gissendanner, who is an Urban League Black Scholar. "I know I have to train hard and work at it everyday. We've had a lot of state champions at Spencerport, but nobody's been an undefeated state champion. That's what I want to do."

Gissendanner is the highest state finisher returning at 167 pounds.

"Physically, he's one of the most gifted athletes in Section 5," said veteran Spencerport coach Bill Jacoutot. "We think he has the potential to be a state champion, but potential doesn't mean anything if you don't go out and realize it every day."

"We remind Sirrell, and all of our wrestlers, how much every day



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means to their development."

Jacoutot, in his 12th season, first recognized Gissendanner's potential when he was a seventh-grader.

"I could see he had the strength, speed and physical attributes," Jacoutot said. "I felt if we could develop a style to fit him, he could become a great wrestler."

Jacoutot, however, didn't exactly sweep Gissendanner off his feet.

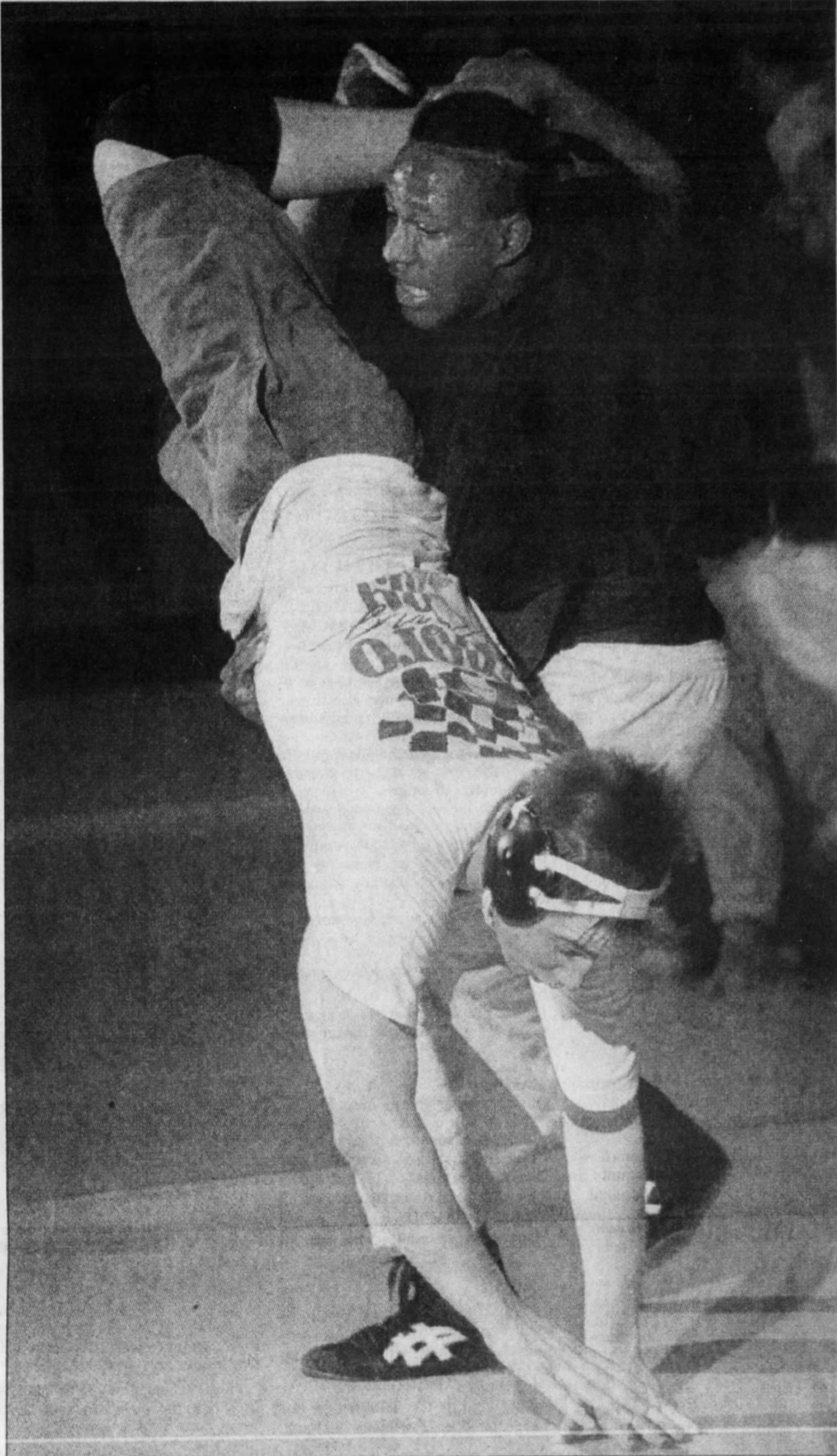
"I worked on him for months," the coach said. "One day I made him put on a varsity letter jacket, and said, 'Sirrell, you don't know how good you look in that.' I had to brainwash him to get him to come out."

The convincing argument came when Jacoutot sent Rick Suhr, Spencerport's 1986 state champ at 155 pounds, to talk to Gissendanner.

The two hit it off immediately.

"You take interest in any kid who's talented," said Suhr, who's become Gissendanner's personal trainer. "But we had a real connection. It's more than coach and pupil. We've become best friends."

In 1991, Gissendanner won a National High School Power Lifting championship by lifting a combined total of 1,450 pounds — 550 pound



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This season, Sirrell Gissendanner will seek his third consecutive Section 5 Class A and Super Sectional championships. Last season, he placed third at 167 pounds at the NYSPPHSAA wrestling tournament.

squat, 600 dead lift and 300 bench. His power and quickness are his most dominate attributes as a wrestler.

"With his strength, we decided to make a takedown and escape man out of him," Jacoutot said.

In addition to Gissendanner, Kevin Bouvy (126 pounds) and twins Jason (112) and Joe (119) Barbera have solid shots at bringing Spencerport its first state championship since Joe LoPresti in 1989.

"It's been too long," said Jacoutot. "Each year, no matter who's on the roster, people expect us to do well. What's helped us is the older wrestlers always take the younger ones and show them what kind of effort it takes to be successful."

Jacoutot took Gissendanner

along to Syracuse to see LoPresti win his title.

"We thought Sirrell was a prodigy," said Jacoutot. "We took him along so he could live it and see what it was like to be at the state tournament. He got there himself as a sophomore."

Last year, Gissendanner's state title dream ended with a second-round loss to Rob Wylie of Rocky Point.

But Gissendanner quickly dismissed his disappointment.

He wrestled back through four matches and then beat Wylie in overtime, 3-1, to take third place.

"It was one of my hardest tasks ever," said Gissendanner. "But you never quit because of a loss. It's something coach Jacoutot has al-

ways stressed to us. As a team, we're the best at getting up for the next match."

Gissendanner is already being recruited by colleges like Army, Navy, North Carolina, Penn State, Pitt, and Syracuse.

"I want to be an NCAA champion," he said, "and I think I will one day. To accomplish anything, you've got to have a solid base. My family and coach Jacoutot have given me that."

Jacoutot, an All-American wrestler at Middlesex Junior College and the University of Buffalo, said Gissendanner "has all the attributes of a Division I prospect. If he gets in the right program and keeps the desire, he may become a NCAA champion." □