

Pioneer's Post: Victory Is a Habit

★ By BOB DICESARE

He arrives beneath a hat that is eventually discarded, but the patience — and ultimately the victory — remain constants.

As always, his students are well-schooled in the fundamentals and the theory that dedication has no substitutes.

At a time when his peers are continually striving for new techniques and advantages, Pioneer wrestling Coach Dick Post is sticking to his guns — the same ones that fired 13 consecutive Erie County Interscholastic Conference divisional championships and propelled the Panthers to an 8-0 start.

"He's sort of a Tom Landry type," Orchard Park Coach Gene Tundo explained. "He doesn't yell or scream. He just remains calm all the time.

"He has his own way of doing things. Most teams change over the years, looking for new techniques. Not them. They stick to the basics and they master them."

Basics, which for years have been drilled into the heads of willing junior high students with varsity desires.

Ron Dabolt, 18-0 through seven matches and four tournaments, is the epitome of the Dick Post system. He began wrestling in the seventh grade — at the urging of a cousin — and worked his way to the top.

As an eighth grader, wrestling in the 98-pound class, Dabolt compiled a 20-5 varsity record. While moving up the weight ladder to his current 155-pound status, he has won 112 of his last 129 matches.

"I think I have a good chance of going to the states if I work hard every day," Dabolt said — meaning if he continues his gruelling, regimented schedule that has produced 12 pins thus far this season.

Dabolt finished fifth in the state at 145 pounds last year, after winning the Section VI crown.

Following the team's 90-minute workouts, he returns home and hits the weights for another 30-60 minutes. Because of cartilage problems in his knees, he favors swimming over running to build endurance. And as another match approaches, he accelerates his routine

to shed three or four excess pounds.

Dabolt is not the average Pioneer wrestler, but the most formidable and dedicated on a Panther squad, which Tundo calls their best in seven years.

"He's put more time in it than anybody," Post said of Dabolt. "Last summer he went to Iowa, at his own expense, and wrestled 11 matches in two days in the U.S. Federation Championships. He finished sixth out of 59 in his division.

DICK POST is not a miracle worker, and he has not established a wrestling factory at Pioneer. He offers a give-and-take proposition to each of his students. From then on the choice is their's.

"He's one of a kind ... a great person to work with," Dabolt said. "He knows what he's talking about and all he asks is that you do your best.

"He'll make a commitment to you, but he also wants one in return. Oh, he'll get on your case if he has to, but in a quiet way. It's up to you from there."

Thus far this season, Post hasn't had a need to offer many reminders.

The Panthers found themselves in a deep hole early in the season when their low-weight wrestlers, comprised mostly of freshman and sophomores, were outscored, 22-6. But Post's more experienced grapplers responded by winning the next seven matches for a 36-22 victory.

In the prestigious Spencerport Tournament, Dabolt won his 155-pound class while John Hoffman, the only other Panther to reach the finals, dropped a 9-2 decision at 167.

Pioneer's chances of winning the tournament for a third time, a feat accomplished by only two others, looked bleak.

"I never even knew we were in it until I came back from dinner for the finals," Post said. "We only had two guys in the finals while Spencerport and Huntington had six each. But the way the point system worked, a boy who won all his matches after losing in the first round earned as many points as the boy who finished second. We had 10 of 13 wrestlers win three matches



—News Staff Photographer Bill Wippert

Coach Dick Post chats with Ron Dabolt.

and we won the thing."

HIS LACKADAISICAL approach to tournaments might startle his peers, but Post believes the emphasis in such endeavors should be placed upon individual accomplishment.

"When we have a duel meet, the team aspect comes more into play," Post explained. "In tournaments, we just try to place as many wrestlers as we can in the top six. The team scoring is secondary."

Throughout his 19 years as a wrestling coach at Pioneer (the first six as an assistant), Post has looked to his modified program as a building ground for the team's future.

Most of his wrestlers have passed through it, including the likes of Dabolt, freshman P.J. Romessor and sophomores Eric Romessor and Troy Almeter. Without it, the latter three and others in their classes would be hard pressed to be competitive on the varsity. And that's what has Post worried.

"I only have 24 kids in the program, not even enough for two full teams," he said. "The modified pro-

gram has been in and out and right now its been dropped because of finances.

"The problem is if we don't have a modified program, we don't get a jump on the others because we can't teach the kids the basics through junior high. It's like starting from scratch."

Post says it's an advantage neither the team nor the individuals can afford to lose.

"Right now, in order to be competitive on a statewide basis, wrestlers have to compete year round. There are tournaments throughout the spring and summer which they can enter on their own, and because of the emphasis on the sport in other parts of the state, it's almost mandatory for boys in this area to do so.

"But without the modified program as a training ground, they are at a disadvantage from the start."

It's certain Post will push to have the program reinstated because all might be lost without it. But meanwhile, he'll continue to preach fundamentals and dedication.