

2000-2001 SEASON COLUMNS by Don Shaffer

Reynolds Wrestling Preview

The beginning of a new wrestling season at Reynolds High School is always a cause for celebration. This season – for a couple of very special reasons – there may well be a little extra celebrating going on.

As a team, the Raiders will look to reach the 500-win milestone. It is something that has been done by only 25 other Pennsylvania schools, but certainly none as quickly as the Raiders who will do it about 565 matches.

Individually, senior Justin Nestor will draw his share of attention both locally and statewide as he looks to collect this third gold medal at the PIAA Class AA state championships in early March. Entering the season with a record of 112-11, Nestor will likely become Mercer County's all-time leader in wins, as well, eclipsing the current standard held by Grove City's Tom Tomeo.

Nestor, a University of Pittsburgh recruit, also has his sites set on the school record for most wins, which is currently held by three wrestlers (137) including his older brother, Jason.

If that's not enough to get excited about, then consider this: the Raiders have a potentially lethal line-up that includes a dozen returning letter winners, including four that have wrestled at the PIAA Championships, and a power trio of rising freshmen. They will be a force not only in the Mercer County Athletic Conference, but anywhere they wrestle, including the postseason tournaments.

"This is the kind of season that you really look forward to," said Reynolds Coach Brian Hills. "We've got an outstanding group of kids to work with ... a nice senior class that shows leadership. We wrestle a nice, competitive schedule to get us ready for the postseason. This team could really do well."

"This is the kind of year that's going to just fly by. It's my 15th year, but in some ways it feels like my first," Hills said.

Along with Nestor, other returning senior letter winners include Jerry Kendall, Rocky Habel, Josh Cilas, Nate Kimmy, Dylan Middleton and David May. Top returning juniors include Justin Hollobaugh, Mike Emmett, Chris White and John Svrbly while sophomore Joel Davis lettered last season as a freshman.

Kendall is a two-time state place winner at 103 pounds, finishing fifth as a sophomore and third as a junior. Junior Justin Hollobaugh, like Kendall, is a defending Northwest Regional champion. Habel, who was injured much of last season, also is a former state qualifier dating back to his freshman season. All three are expected to strive to reach 100 career wins this season.

Kendall, Cilas, Hollobaugh, Middleton, Nestor and Kimmy all won 20 or more matches last season. Kimmy, who hovered around the .500 mark much of last season, caught fire in the postseason and just missed – by one win – a trip to the state tournament.

So, as one can see, "we've got quite a bit of depth in some spots," Hills said. "In fact after our first elimination (to determine varsity starting spots) we have four lettermen on the junior varsity squad, including a Section champion."

"That's something we're going to try and do as much as we can," Hills said of eliminations. "Because we know we've got some kids who really want to be in the lineup. We're excited about giving them the opportunity to battle it out a little bit."

A trio of freshmen will look to make their mark on the team as Jake Habel (103), Travis Battles (119) and Nick Sommerfeld (189) make the move up from junior high to battle for starting spots. Battles is a former Pennsylvania Junior Wrestling All-Area (state) champ. All three could earn starting spots, though Battles will be tested by Emmett and Sommerfeld by junior Steve Weary, who is back on the team after taking a couple of seasons off.

Sophomore Mike Hills, who wrestled in eight varsity matches as a freshman, looks like he will settle into the spot at 275 pounds, despite weighing in well below the limit.

Reynolds got a bit of a boost when another talented sophomore – Owen Brickell – moved into the school district after seeing some varsity time last season at Greenville. He is expected to battle with junior Tyler Middleton for a starting spot at 135 pounds.

Other members of the team include juniors Mike Goodemote, Ryan Kimmy, Nate Lucas, Jared Reichard and Mark Svirbly, and sophomores Channing Burnett, Richard Corteau, Nick Hunt, Cory McKnight and Brent Tompkins.

The Raiders will open their dual-match schedule on Thursday, Dec. 7 by hosting Slippery Rock in a Mercer County Athletic Conference match.

Win Number 500

The Reynolds wrestling team won its 500th dual-match on Thursday, Jan. 4, 2001, and as far as the Raiders are concerned it's a number worth shouting about.

In reaching the milestone, the Raiders did it up right, setting a school record for points in scoring a 76-0 win over visiting Grove City in a Mercer County Athletic Conference match.

It was truly a special evening for the near sell-out crowd in attendance.

In honor of the occasion, the Raiders invited its former coaches to attend the match and five of the six made it including legendary Neal Lineman, fittingly considered the mastermind behind the Raiders' outstanding program.

"The greatest thing for me is that now - 20-plus years later - I still have people coming up to me and calling me 'Coach' or 'Mr. Lineman.' To me, that is the greatest feeling."

Lineman brought the house down with a rousing standing ovation when introduced to the home crowd. His career coaching record at Reynolds was 201-10.

Also in attendance were the team's first head coach Dick Sherwood, as well as Mark

Reichard, Ron Taylor and Ed McClimans. The only former coach not to attend was Doug Groover, who guided the Raiders to a perfect 15-0 season during the 1980-81 campaign.

While 500 wins are certainly a number to crow about, the Raiders can be doubly proud because of the time it took to reach the level. Reynolds, with an overall record of 500-63-2 took just 565 matches and 40 years to get there.

The Raiders almost assuredly are the fastest Pennsylvania team to reach the 500-win level. But more than just the fanfare it was this year's wrestling team that made the event even more memorable. The Raiders recorded 11 falls, a major decision and a forfeit to total 76 points.

"We didn't set out to get the record but Jake Habel (103) and Jerry Kendall (112) got the ball rolling with first-period falls and from there is just kind of took off," said head coach Brian Hills. "Everybody wanted to do their part to keep it going. We just kind of steam rolled. It was pretty exciting though I really didn't expect it."

Along with Habel and Kendall, the Raiders also got pins from Travis Battles (119), Josh Cilas (125), Justin Hollobaugh (130), Owen Brickell (135), Rocky Habel (140), David May (152), Nate Kimmy (171), Nick Sommerfeld (189) and Mike Hills (275). Two-time state champion Justin Nestor (160) stayed unbeaten by accepting a win by forfeit.

The only Raider not to score a fall was senior Dylan Middleton (145), who just missed a technical fall with a 15-1 major decision.

The old record had been set in 1997-98 with a 74-0 win over Titusville.

Following the match the Reynolds Wrestling Boosters Club hosted a reception in the school cafeteria complete with a large cake to celebrate the event. T-shirts commemorating the event were sold.

The next milestone the Raiders can look forward to will be Coach Hills' 200th win. With 188 to date, Hills could reach the mark this season should the Raiders win the state dual-match championships.

In a season already filled with many accomplishments that would truly be the icing on the cake. Of course, so would Nestor's third state title and PIAA Class AA Championship, and a ...

Wrap-up Column

It would be hard to talk about the 2000-01 Reynolds Wrestling season without first talking of three-time state champion Justin Nestor.

Nestor will be remembered as one of the greatest wrestlers ever produced by Reynolds High School, and rightly so.

But more than the accomplishments of just one individual, this was a season that was full of milestones with enough honors and championships to make every member of the team feel like a winner.

Some of the highlights of the recently concluded season include:

a.. The school's 500th dual match victory in a record setting 76-0 victory over Grove City. a.. The school's 29th Mercer County Athletic Conference title.

a.. The school's first-ever District 10 Duals title. a.. The school's 31st Section Tournament title. a.. The school's 10th District 10 title.

a.. A runner-up finish at the PIAA Class AA Tournament, with two-state champions and a fourth-place finisher.

a.. Team championships at the Mountaineer, Lewistown and Tool City tournaments and a third-place showing at Manheim.

Even for an outstanding program such as Reynolds, that is quite a season. What Nestor accomplished as an individual just adds to the luster of the season.

Closing an outstanding career with his third state championship, Nestor finished the season at 41-0 and 153-11 for his career. Both are school records and the career win total is a Mercer County record as well. He becomes just the fourth wrestler from Mercer County to win three state titles, and the second from Reynolds, joining assistant coach Casey Taylor.

Nestor was not the only Raider state champion as senior Jerry Kendall (103) also closed out his career at the top of the podium at Hersheypark Arena. Kendall finished the season with a 39-2 record and was 115-17 in a three-year career.

In addition, junior Justin Hollobaugh finished fourth in the state at 119 pounds as the Raiders finished second in the team standings to conclude a most-memorable campaign.

The highlight of the dual-match season was clearly the school's 500th all-time win, which came in early January via a 76-0 whitewash of Grove City.

Reynolds finished 13-2 in dual matches with both of its losses coming to Wilson, Pennsylvania's No. 1 Class AA school.

Reynolds lost to Wilson on criteria (21-21) at the Brookville Ultimate Duals, before falling to them a second time in the first round of the PIAA Dual-Match Championships at Hershey.

The Raiders earned the right to wrestle in Hershey by winning the District 10 Duals, defeating nemesis Fort LeBoeuf, which had defeated the Raiders in each of the past two seasons.

The Raiders took part in four in-season tournaments winning three of them. The one they did not win - Manheim - may have been their best performance of all, placing third in a tournament that is among the most-rugged in the nation.

Nestor and Kendall headlined an outstanding senior class that will also see the loss of such standouts as Rocky Habel (90-28), Nate Kimmy (50-34), Josh Cilas (59-24), David May (48-40) and Dylan Middleton (31-28).

Combined, this class posted more than 500 individual wins. All is not lost, however, as Hollobaugh is set to lead a group of returning wrestlers for next season.

Juniors Tyler Middleton, John Svirbly and Steve Weary, sophomores Owen Brickell, Mike Hills and Joel Davis and freshmen Jake Habel, Travis Battles and Nick Sommerfeld all posted outstanding seasons.

In addition, juniors Mike Emmett and Chris White lettered as sophomores and will be back to bolster the 2001-02 Raiders.

Looking even further ahead, Reynolds lead all area schools by qualifying 13 of its wrestlers for the Pennsylvania Junior Wrestling state tournament, with nine of those placing in the top eight.