

Wrestling: Room at the Top

By Gregg Sarra

STAFF WRITER

The marquee names all are gone. Names that were synonymous with winning, such as Adam Mariano (Comsewogue), Ted Stachtariar, (Plainview), Jamie St. John (Port Jefferson), Scotty Graham (Long Beach) and Bay Shore's Porcelli brothers, Mike and Alex, are memories. And this year there is no returning wrestler with that type of reputation.

Only Plainedge's Craig Vitagliano can etch his name with the rest, if he is able to repeat as a state champion. But he'll have to shrug off a nightmarish Empire State Games performance in August and regain the respect he earned when he decided East Rochester's Roy Frey, 10-5, for the state title.

"Now Craig knows what it's like to be on top and have everyone coming after you," Plainedge coach Steve Licht said. "He had a tremendous high up at the states and he never gave himself time to rest when it was over. He went into the freestyle season and made mistakes." Vitagliano did not reach the finals at the event.

Licht said that Vitagliano took the fall off, stayed in shape and came into the first day of practice with a refreshed outlook. "He's focused on the scholastic season," Licht said. "The pressure is back everyone else to beat Craig."

Others who know what it's like to be on top are defending county champions James Douglas of Bethpage and Aaron Brown of Farmingdale. All three should help Nassau improve on last year's sixth-place finish at the state tournament.

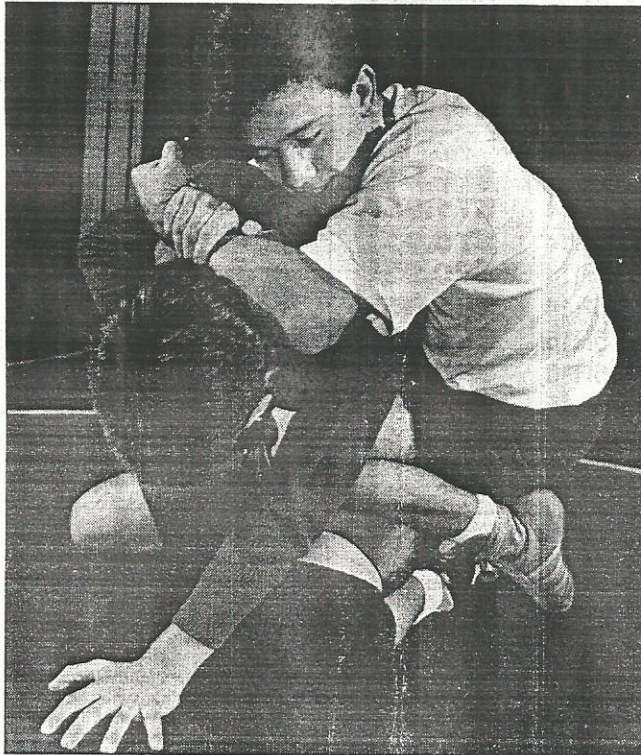
"New reputations will have to be made," West Islip coach Tony Mellino said. "It's a whole new era. There are no shoo-ins. You can't whip off the names of top-notch wrestlers like in the past. You have to stop and think. It's not like there are five defending state champions coming back — it's wide open."

What the 1990-91 season does promise, however, is an opportunity for the unheralded wrestlers to make their mark. Someone like a Kerry McCoy of Longwood, who took second in the Junior World Tournament in Yugoslavia in July, or Sachem's John Aebly, who beat defending state champion Paul Lyman (Watertown, Section III) at the Empire State Games.

Or, maybe East Meadow's Dan Majcher will win the county title that has eluded him the past two years. Or maybe Dion Visconti will become the Catholic League's first four-time state titlist and go on to win a public state title. Only one Catholic wrestler has won a public title — Chaminade's Kevin Murphy at heavyweight in 1987.

"This will be a very interesting season," said Nassau wrestling chairman Cliff Forziat, who also aches the Herricks team. "We'll see how good the younger talent is and how well the Long Island sections bounce back in the states."

For the first time in six years, a Long Island sectional team will not travel to the state championships as the defending champion. Rochester (Section V) took care of that when it crowned three champions



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Plainedge's Craig Vitagliano is the lone returning state champion

in March. And for the first time in 27 years, Suffolk failed to crown a state champion.

"Looking back, it was a disappointment that we had four finalists and all of them lost," Suffolk wrestling chairman Paul Brodmerkel said. "But in no way would I say Suffolk has lost a step — we finished third."

Although Suffolk's finish was acceptable, it wasn't typical of a section that won five state titles in the 1980s. With only four returning county champions, the future remains unclear. Longwood brings back three of the four with Chris Conway, Jason Burke and Nick Hall to lead an experienced team that hopes to defend the county title it won by three points over Schem.

"Both schools bring back a load of talent," Longwood coach Mike Picozzi said. "I would say that our two teams have risen above the rest right now."

Austerity has had an impact on the Longwood program, where Picozzi said the varsity hasn't lost strength but the junior high programs have been affected. "And that will cost us down the road," he said. "It's important to have a strong feeder system."

At Schem, coach Jack Mahoney should put together one of his finest lineups to battle Longwood for the League I and county team title. "It'll be another dogfight that comes down to heavyweight," Mahoney said. The teams are scheduled to meet at Schem on Jan. 18 at 7:30 p.m. Last year, Longwood pulled out a 25-23 win, despite watching two of its defending county champions lose.

"Sachem and Longwood are on the top echelon," Mellino said. "But watch out for a young and talented Lindenhurst team."

In Nassau, Long Beach is set to defend the county team title it has held for the past four years. With 45 athletes signed up and six returning county placemen, coach Paul Gillespie is optimistic.

"We'll keep the consistency," he said. "We've got enough depth and some key kids back. But Mepham, East Meadow and Bethpage will be right there."

Long Beach will return Alberto Garcia, Billy Whittaker and John-Paul Posada in an effort to regain the county dual meet title it lost to East Meadow, 24-23. East Meadow will defend with Majcher, Marc Bloom and Tom McLoughlin.

Perhaps the strongest Nassau contingent will wrestle in the four-team Nassau-Suffolk Catholic League. Chaminade's Rob Donnino, Ken Gein and Visconti are Catholic state champions and all are back. And the Flyers return a league finalist in every weight class.

"Chaminade is definitely the team to beat," St. Anthony's coach Kevin Smith said. "They are powerful enough to beat anyone in Nassau, public or private."

"We have our best lineup ever," Chaminade coach George Dlugolonski said. "We have six league champs back, depth and experience." The key league dual meet will pit St. Anthony's at Chaminade Jan. 30 at 4:30 p.m.

LONG ISLAND WRESTLERS TO WATCH

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|------------------------------------|
| 91 | Dan Beckerman (Sachem) | 138 | *Jason Burke (Longwood) |
| | Marc Bloom (East Meadow) | | Phil Coriglio (Bethpage) |
| | Brian Fischenich (Huntington) | | Lakei Evans (Long Beach) |
| | Kon Gein (Chaminade) | | Nat Fickenworth (Westhampton) |
| | Ed Sainmervil (Hempstead) | | Craig Furrer (Centerreach) |
| | Brian Smyth (Mepham) | | Tim Godoy (Sachem) |
| 98 | Tom Chapman (Riverhead) | 145 | *Robert Chester (Amityville) |
| | *James Douglas (Bethpage) | | Gerry Donohue (Chaminade) |
| | Len Fries (Lindenhurst) | | Steve Kraft (Bay Shore) |
| | Alberto Garcia (Long Beach) | | Brett Lassar (Connetquot) |
| | Andrew Simone (Mepham) | | Ryan McGovern (Bayport) |
| | Peter Smith (St. Anthony's) | | John Phillips (Sachem) |
| 105 | Jose Cavero (Kings Park) | 155 | Robert Farina (Hills East) |
| | Brian Gibel (Oceanside) | | John Kamallic (Bethpage) |
| | John Giordano (Sachem) | | Sean McLoughlin (Floyd) |
| | Elias Perez (Huntington) | | *Melvin Lindsey-Lewis (Long Beach) |
| | **Craig Vitagliano (Plainedge) | | Dan Majcher (East Meadow) |
| | David Yoo (Syosset) | 167 | John Caspers (Mepham) |
| 112 | Brian Betancourt (Smithtown East) | | Jason Dove (Hauppauge) |
| | Rahsaan Johnson (Huntington) | | Jason Kraft (Sachem) |
| | Brett Gould (Calhoun) | | Kerry McCoy (Longwood) |
| | Ralph Menechino (Sachem) | | Max Razzini (Massapequa) |
| | Craig Schilfstein (Baldwin) | | Dion Visconti (Chaminade) |
| | Denis Tarpey (Massapequa) | 177 | John Aebly (Sachem) |
| 119 | *Chris Conway (Longwood) | | Chris Aliani (Lindenhurst) |
| | Louis DiMaria (Herricks) | | Craig Amarando (Connetquot) |
| | Robert Donnino (Chaminade) | | Joe Barbieri (North Shore) |
| | John Jaeger (Sachem) | | Mike Stewart (Farmingdale) |
| | Brian McGinnis (Westhampton) | | Jerry Vitello (Babylon) |
| | Tom McLoughlin (East Meadow) | | Joe Bongiorno (MacArthur) |
| 126 | Chris DiPerri (Mepham) | | *Aaron Brown (Farmingdale) |
| | Gerald Odom (Whitman) | | *Nick Hall (Longwood) |
| | John-Paul Posada (Long Beach) | Hvy | Gasper LaRosa (St. Anthony's) |
| | Joe Renny (Herricks) | | Mike Reese (Herricks) |
| | Tori Smith (Garden City) | | Bill Zach (Kings Park) |
| | Joe Welz (Hauppauge) | 250 | Ron Cerci (Bethpage) |
| 132 | Dan Coiro (Mineola) | | Jason Cohen (West Islip) |
| | Curt Kielbasa (Centerreach) | | Jarrod Levy (Oceanside) |
| | Ray Lizzol (Longwood) | | James Martin (Westbury) |
| | Brian Napolitano (Massapequa) | | Billy Whittaker (Long Beach) |
| | John Phillips (Sachem) | | |
| | Chris Tucci (St. Anthony's) | | |

The weight of the individuals listed above may vary. This is not a ranking. Each wrestler listed has been touted by the coaches as a candidate to place highly in the county tournament.

* — Returning county champion. ** — Returning state champion.