

Admits Shiebler, "They have a lot of numbers."

Still, don't confuse that with a concession speech. His best swimmers are senior Bill Iocca, juniors Sheldon

and were not at full depth, but were hoping to pull together by the end of the season."

Another team in the hunt is West Islip, fourth at Hauppauge and third in the county's a year ago. Al-

SO while Babylon, Commack and West Islip appear to be early-season favorites, it doesn't mean a Deer Park, or League II's Ward Melville, won't spoil the party.

"It's going to be interesting, believe me," Green said.

Controversy Clouds St. John's Wrestling

Only two short years ago, the St. John's wrestling program was a highly competitive one, placing third in the Catholic state championships and producing state champs in Steven Drewes, Kevin Anderson and Rob Straub. But that was then and this is now, and things have suddenly taken a turn for the worse.

Due to a severe shortage of wrestlers, St. John's has had to cancel its 1988-89 season, including all tournaments and dual meets. Although they practice daily,

with the hope of competing in "some way, shape or form," the mats have literally been pulled out from under them.

"We just didn't have the numbers," said Athletic Director Ron Alfieri. "A lot of schools have cross-over athletes, kids who play football or soccer and wrestle in the winter. We didn't get any of those kids... that's the main problem."

But the \$64,000 question is: why not? The reasons vary, depending on who you talk to. According to Alfieri, the philo-

sophy of former coach Ken Brodmerkel scared off some boys who had planned to return this winter. Alfieri said Brodmerkel was an "advocate" of a weight-loss program that would require football players to shed 25-35 pounds to compete.

"Kids were telling me they had come to him at 180 pounds and he'd say they were going to wrestle at 145," he said.

But Brodmerkel disputes Alfieri's reasoning. "There were no weight problems with kids on the team," he said. "They could go any weight they wanted."

Instead, he places the breakup on his former boss, who is also the boys basketball coach. "Basketball took priority over wrestling," said Brodmerkel, now the freshmen coach at West Islip High School. "I was very disappointed when I had to leave there, but when you have four home dual meets in three years, it's kind of crazy, don't you think?"

Brodmerkel, whose team last year started with 35 wrestlers but finished with 12, said problems arose concerning fundraising, having to practice in the cafeteria and a lack of equipment, not to mention not being able to host meets.

"It was nothing but a hassle," Brodmerkel said. "Look at the things his kids have done and what they do and then look at my team with five headgears and what we couldn't do [no summer camps and they couldn't travel to out-of-state tournaments] and it's pretty obvious."

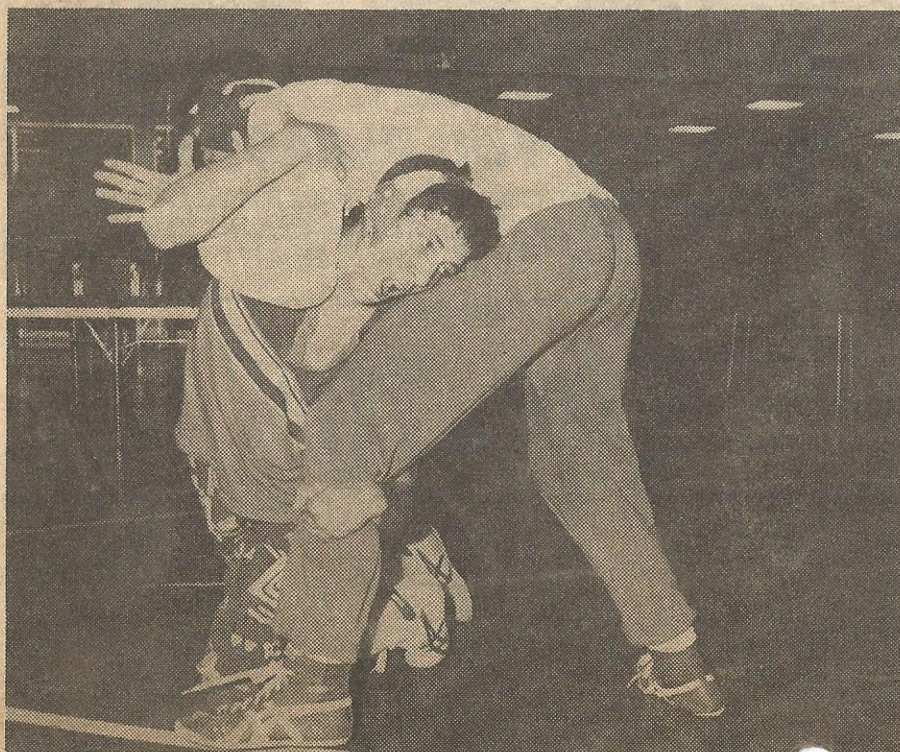
In response, Alfieri said no team is allowed to hold fundraisers, teams at other schools are restricted to lunchrooms due to space (St. John's also hosts Dowling basketball) and "we never told him he

couldn't schedule at home. It would have been tough, but we could have done it. His complaints, why he left, was his decision. His complaints don't hold any water ... You can't manufacture a wrestling room out of thin air."

So Alfieri and new coach John Messineo, who could not be reached, are left with a program that, Alfieri said, has "kind of been left in a shambles."

"It's a little frustrating [for Messineo], showing up for work and the doors are closed," he said. "He's in there every day, working with the kids, trying to build it up for next year. It's a struggle."

— J. Karp



St. John the Baptist wrestlers at a recent practice in the school cafeteria. (photo by Maureen T. McEnroe-Meier)

"FAB 15" Girls' Hoop Poll

Long Island's Top 15 Girls'
High School Basketball Teams
(through games of Dec. 27)

- 1) St. Dominic
- 2) Farmingdale
- 3) Baldwin
- 4) Smithtown East
- 5) Freeport
- 6) St. Anthony's
- 7) Hempstead
- 8) East Rockaway
- 9) Comsewogue
- 10) St. Mary's
- 11) Floral Park
- 12) Westhampton Beach
- 13) Amityville