

Familiar schools strong again; 11 individual champs return

By Gregg Sarra

STAFF WRITER

Longwood, Sachem and Long Beach are loaded. Again.

So what else is new?

Well, 11 county champions return to defend their titles on Long Island — six in Suffolk and five in Nassau.

Dion Visconti has finally graduated from Chaminade with a record four Catholic state titles under his belt. But Kellenberg appears to be the best in the Catholic League.



Mike Picozzi

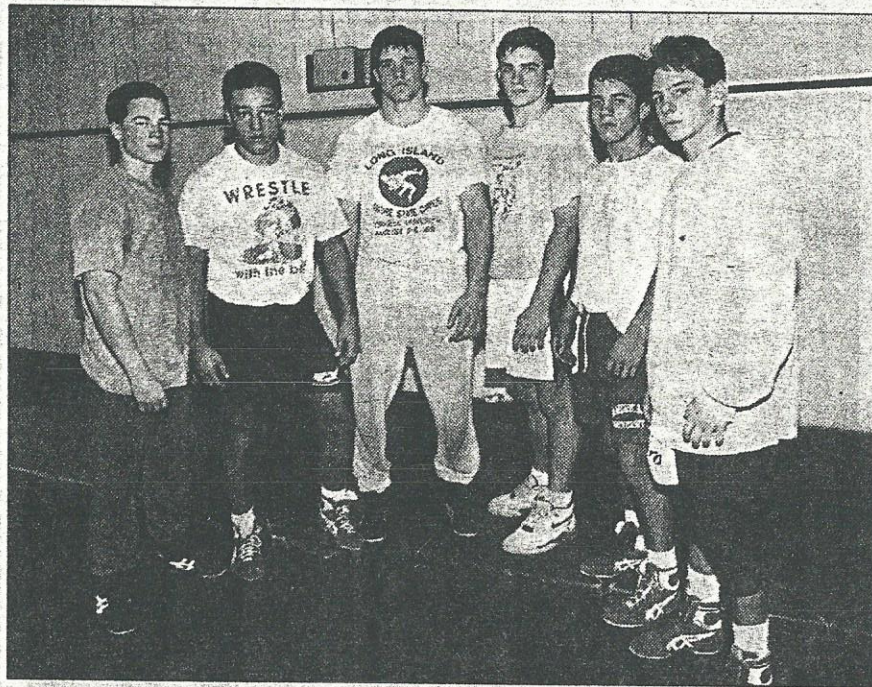
Rocky Point crowned its first county champion in junior Chad Henkin in February and the League IV champion Eagles (14-0) took fourth in the county tournament. And when austerity threatened the program for this season, coach Rob-

bin Winkel and the Rocky Point Wrestling Club put together an Election Day golf outing at Swan Lake and attracted 140 participants to raise enough money to support the entire program.

Huntington is the only team in the state to return two state place-winners — Brian Fischenich (third) and Elias Perez (sixth). With six league place-winners back, Lou Giani's squad will vie for its ninth successive league title and the county crown — something the Blue Devils haven't captured since 1985.

Giani has guided the team to 19 league titles in the past 20 years and a 118-3 league record, including an active 55-match win streak. Commack North beat the Blue Devils, 28-25, in 1982. That was Huntington's last league loss.

"He's brilliant," said Section XI chairman Paul Brodmerkel. "I wish he



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Sachem, which again should vie for the county title, will feature, from left: Robert Harris, Jason Kraft, John Aebly, John Micena, Sean O'Hara and John Carvalheira.

would let people into his practice room and see how he structures practices. But that's where his secrets lie — behind those doors. And he'll never let anyone in there."

Former Blue Devil county champion Mike Picozzi has taken his knowledge from *that* room and instilled it at Longwood, coaching the program into one of the state's finest.

"Longwood and Sachem are absolute-ly the best," said Long Beach coach Paul Gillespie, who scheduled both in tournaments. "It's good to meet teams of that caliber."

Long Beach tries for a sixth consecutive county team title. However, the top-seeded Marines' quarterfinal loss in the

dual-meet championships against eighth-seeded East Meadow left them short of copping both team titles.

"We got outfoxed in the dual-meet tournament," said Gillespie. "East Meadow surprised us."

Massapequa took the dual meet title, and although the Chiefs graduated all but one wrestler from the starting lineup, 70 athletes are out and coach Gary Mims will have them ready to defend the title. East Meadow, Mepham and Bethpage join Long Beach as the teams to watch in Nassau.

"The depth at those schools will separate them from the rest," said Freeport coach Terry Haise. "They have quality kids spread throughout the lineup."

Bethpage has two-time county champion James Douglas and county titlist Ron Cercy to lead the way. Mepham has six county place-winners over the past two years returning and East Meadow lost only one starter to graduation. Long Beach brings seven county place-winners back.

"We should be right in the thick of it," said Mepham coach John Walter. "It depends on how the other kids fill in. I'll know after the first two tournaments where we stand."

In the Catholic League, the coaches agree that Kellenberg is the team to beat under second-year coach Brian Hughes.

"Brian has really turned that program around," said St. Anthony's coach Kevin Smith, whose team edged Kellenberg for the dual meet title with a 31-30 win last year. "They have a quality lineup all the way through. We needed three pins in the last three matches to beat them last year and we got it."

Too bad for the Friars — all three winners from that dual meet have graduated and Kellenberg returns all three of its wrestlers with that pivotal match fresh in their minds.

Oh yes, and then there are Longwood and Sachem.

Longwood, the two-time defending county champion, has won three of the last four dual meets between the two but has never captured the League I tournament, as Sachem has earned that distinction nine years in a row.

County champ Jason Kraft (155), Sean O'Hara and Jim Carvalheira will help Sachem attempt to unseat Longwood as county champs. The Lions will counter with county titlist Kerry McCoy (177) and freshman Rason Phifer.

"It'll be real close again," said Sachem coach Jack Mahoney. "I'm just glad they don't have Nick Hall at heavyweight anymore."

It's no wonder. Hall won the decisive match three times against Sachem.