

Big Reversal For Program At Riverhead

By Gregg Sarra

STAFF WRITER

Team scoring is of little or no consequence to individuals shooting for a county title. But the team scoring total does hold significance when you look within the development of wrestling programs throughout Suffolk County.

One team that's shown marked improvement and sticks out in the standings is Riverhead. The Blue Waves crowned six champions and captured the League III tournament to qualify 16 wrestlers into the Dr. Robert Fallot Suffolk County Wrestling Championship at Stony Brook University over the weekend.

Three of Riverhead's finest reached yesterday's semifinal round as the Blue Waves held a small first-place edge. That lead disappeared as Brentwood moved four wrestlers into last night's finals and Riverhead slipped to fifth with 73 points. But it was a vast improvement for the Blue Waves, who hadn't led in team scoring since 1963.

"To be ahead after the first day is an accomplishment for our program," Riverhead coach Rocky Davey said. "It says something about our depth and how far we've come. But we're still young and we're not totally there yet."

But they're well on their way. Riverhead didn't place anyone in the tournament a year ago. This time around, the Blue Waves will have at least five county place-winners.

"Last year, we won the league tournament and came to the county tournament and got hammered," Davey said. "That was very disappointing. But this time, we were ready and wrestled well."

Davey knows what it takes to build a program from the foundation up. He did so at Shoreham-Wading River from 1983-89, winning a county championship in 1988 and crowning eight individual champions. He took over at Riverhead six years ago when he accepted a physical education teaching job in the high school.

"It takes time to build a program," Davey said. "We have 90 kids in the program now. And we're young on the varsity, with mostly sophomores. I knew what to expect when I came here."

Sophomores Aaron Tyte (103 pounds, 28-4 record), Chris Raynor (112, 29-2) and Chris Darrow (119, 28-4) lead the younger group of Blue Waves, and seniors Ricky Stevenson (152, 26-5) and Greg Goodale (171, 29-3) set the winning example.

"We're at a level with a lot of real good wrestlers," Davey said. "Now we want to go to the next level and make some noise in the county tournament and eventually crown a champion."

DR. ROBERT FALLOT