

Manarte, Palacios Face A 125-Pound Showdown

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STAFF WRITER

Sachem's John Manarte and Huntington's Steve Palacios have so much in common. They both won a Suffolk title as juniors. Both placed in the state tournament last year. And both are enjoying another outstanding season.

Now, one will continue to enjoy the 2001-02 season and the other will not.

Manarte and Palacios find themselves in opposite brackets of the same weight class in the Dr. Robert Fallot Suffolk County Wrestling Championship at Stony Brook University. Palacios, the second seed, looking up at top-seeded Manarte, readying for the showdown that this collision course has them on. It is a match that promises to heighten the excitement that comes with the final round.

What they won't have in common is a trip to the state championships in Syracuse next weekend. The loser of the 125-pound final will stay home and the winner will earn his way back upstate.

"It was tough for both coaches to put them in the same weight class," Eastport coach Bob McIntyre said. "But if

it's the right weight and most comfortable weight for both wrestlers, what can they do? Sometimes these things happen. I'm looking forward to watching a great final."

The common practice is for coaches to separate returning county champions to avoid such conflict before the state tournament. Not this time. The loss of Manarte or Palacios invariably hurts the Suffolk sectional team in its quest for a third straight title. Palacios wrestled at 125 in the state tournament last year and finished sixth and Manarte placed third. Manarte grew during the summer and was forced to move up into the same weight class as Palacios this year.

All five of Suffolk's defending champions moved into the finals.

Tom Finnerty of Brentwood added a decision to his two first-period falls at 96 pounds, Huntington's Pat Flynn had a first-period pin, a superior decision and a major win at 112 pounds, and East Islip's Rob Vaccaro has two technical falls and a pin at 119 pounds. Vaccaro, a two-time state champion, has not been tested.

The semifinal round offered five bouts that went into overtime.

Another seven were decided in the final seven seconds of regulation.

When it was over, Brentwood grabbed the team lead as all four of

the Indians' semifinalists advanced. The most intriguing Brentwood situation comes in the 96-pound final, in which Finnerty, the defending champion, will meet teammate Ken Torres for the title.

"At least we know someone from Brentwood is going to win," said Brentwood coach Bob Panariello, who was thrilled by his team's performance. "They're all champs as far as we're concerned."

Notes & Quotes: So just how good was League I wrestling this year? Well, consider this: There are seven League I schools represented in the finals, a total of 14 competitors, almost half of the final field . . . Alton Lucas of West Babylon is the only freshman in the finals. He earned a spot with a 9-4 victory over Russ Sykes of Sachem at 140 pounds . . . Shoreham-Wading River's Dan Miracola captured a county championship three years ago as a freshman. After two years of disappointment, Miracola is back in the final round. He advanced to the 140-pound final against Lucas . . . There are 21 schools represented in the championship round. Brentwood has four finalists and Longwood, Huntington and Floyd have three each . . . Eastport posted its first county placewinner when heavyweight Joe Congero finished fourth at 215 pounds.

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