

# Kumar Can't Be Deterred

## LB senior wins despite disease, moves to semis

By Chris Antonacci

STAFF WRITER

Sandeep Kumar slipped off his sweat suit, and revealed two bone-thick legs that don't appear wide enough to support his frame. Yet the 96-pound Long Beach senior intently paced — albeit a bit wobbly — around the mat with a fearless approach.

Kumar was a complex duality to the two opponents he beat in the Nassau wrestling championships yesterday at Nassau CC. His strength is evident in the ripples of muscle across his torso and arms, yet his legs seem to dangle from his body.

### NASSAU WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Kumar's right leg appears to be nothing more than skin attached to bone. His left is more secure, yet vulnerable nonetheless. Kumar has battled polio for most of his 18 years, since he was diagnosed with the disease when he was 9 months old.

Kumar maintained a defensive position in the opening moments of his quarterfinal bout against Farmingdale's Matt Fortunato. Fortunato took the opening shot, but Kumar held off his opponent, countering to take a 2-0 lead with a classic single-leg take-down 32 seconds into the bout. Kumar then worked Fortunato from a controlling position, took Fortunato to his back and made the pin with 16 seconds left in the first period.

Kumar defeated Port Washington's Paul Stalnaker, 16-1, a technical fall, in the previous round. Kumar faces East Meadow's Al Tropiano when the semifinals begin at 11 a.m. today. The finals will take place at 6 p.m.

"Strength is my first defense," Kumar said. "I can't let anyone shoot on my legs. When I step on the mat, I don't care about my disability. I just want to beat my opponent. I am strong, and I believe I can do anything."

Kumar's bravado comes three years after he cautiously accepted coach Ray Adams' challenge to join the wrestling team. Adams inspired Kumar with photographs and videos from the state and Nassau wrestling championships after the student joined his seventh-grade social studies class following a move from New Delhi, India. He wrestled without trepidation even though his first practices as a ninth-grader were undertaken with meticulousness. Kumar, who can bench press 205 pounds, wrestled without inhibitions.

"He has adapted a style that plays to his strength," Adams said.

Wrestling has brought direction, purpose and a career path to Kumar's life. He intends to enroll at Nassau CC this year, and eventually become a physical education instructor and high school wrestling coach.

"I want to go back there, and show them my moves," Kumar said. "I want to show them that if I can do it, then they can do it, too."

Kumar's two victories helped Long Beach move into second place in the team standings with 94½ points, as teammates Tom Moriarty (125), Deone Williams (130), Stephan Jones (135), Jose Rodriguez (140), Mark Kosta (145) and Tom Murphy (160) advanced to the semifinals.

MacArthur, the two-time defending Nassau champ, is in first with 138. Steve DeLorenzo (96), Matt DeLorenzo (112), T.J. Lazarus (112), Dylan Reitmayr (130), Adam Molano (152), Brent O'Donnell (171), Gian Villante (215) and Luke Ingram (275) went unscathed through the quarterfinals.

"We're relaxed because the kids all came in with the right attitude," MacArthur coach Howie Greenblatt said. "I am not jumping for joy because we have a lot of kids in the semifinals. We had some tough losses, too."

Bethpage's Ryan Higgins defeated top-seeded Carl Saviano in the 135-pound quarterfinal in one of the many upsets. Roslyn's Josh Lewis beat West Hempstead's Nick Harris to advance to the other 135 semifinal.

Syosset's Fraz Hafeez pinned second-seeded Dan Oppedisano of Garden City in 5:16 even though he was trailing 9-1 in the 189-pound bout.

Hafeez then pinned Valley Stream Central's Rich DeJesus in 4:57 in a

quarterfinal.

"I used my hips and just broke through for the pin," Hafeez said. "I have never even been ranked before, so this is pretty big. I am feeling pretty confident."

In other notable bouts: Garden City's Dan Donnelly escaped in overtime to beat Division's Luiz Fernandez, 2-1, in a 145 quarterfinal.

Garden City's Matt Ganas lost a point for stalling with 30 seconds left in the third period, and fell, 6-5, to MacArthur's Bruce Popko in a quarterfinal bout. Ingram pinned Bellmore JFK's Brent Weiss in 1:16 of a 275 quarterfinal.