

13 Champions Boycott Event

— Newsday —

By Gregg Sarra
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Syracuse — This was to be the first state federation wrestling tournament, an event designed to crown a true state champion with one representative each from the New York State Public High School Athletic Association, the Catholic High Schools Athletic Association and the Public Schools Athletic League.

It didn't quite work out the way state officials had envisioned. Thirteen of the 14 NYSPHSAA state champions crowned Saturday night boycotted the federation tournament yesterday, reducing it to a glorified dual meet between the CHSAA and PSAL.

This wasn't the Onondaga War Memorial Auditorium where crowds reach 6,000 and the noise is deafening. This was Fowler High in Syracuse with about 100 fans.

Unatego's Nick Muzashvili, the NYSPHSAA 177-pound state champion from Unatego by way of Georgia of the former Soviet Union, showed up because he wanted to wrestle — anywhere, anyone. Muzashvili said he didn't want to get involved in the politics, because every day he comes to grips with the fact that the lives of his family are at stake in the war-torn country. Muzashvili said one family member was killed and a close family friend was critically wounded recently.

And if this tournament had a most outstanding wrestler, Muzashvili would have won hands down. He recorded two technical falls in 5:20 and 3:00 to win the state federation championship. The other 13 NYSPHSAA champs forfeited by way of a unilateral boycott in which wrestlers and their coaches protested the new tournament format — basically saying the state federation tournament wasn't necessary.

Suffolk's NYSPHSAA champions, Rason Phifer of Longwood and Angelo Zegarelli of Deer Park, were on a plane back to Long Island before the federation tournament began. They had no plans to compete.

"This is an embarrassment to the NYSPHSAA and it's disgraceful," said Sandra Scott, executive director of the NYSPHSAA. "We voted across the board to separate the individual sports and crown champions in each association first and then hold federation tournaments."

The key issue was weighing in wrestlers the night after the NYSPHSAA state championships at the Onondaga War Memorial in Syracuse.

"Kids can't maintain the weight," Lindenhurst coach Joe Russo said. "And after a grueling two-day tournament, they aren't ready to compete the next day."

The move to create a federation tournament made no one happy. CHSAA and PSAL officials also opposed the addition and hoped to return to the NYSPHSAA tournament.

"Our position on the wrestling committee was to keep things as they were," state wrestling chairman Reed Hawke said. "We voted 13-0 to keep it the same."

Opponents of the new format gained ammunition when the 138-pound class was not contested yesterday because Kellenberg's Mario Calderon failed to make weight. That upset PSAL commissioner Martin Jacobson. Calderon won the CHSAA state title Saturday afternoon, but found making the weight again too difficult.

"We brought a kid up here [Tony Park of Stuyvesant] and he didn't even wrestle and he's officially a federation champ," he said. "We went through this in good faith with the hope that we would be back in the NYSPHSAA tournament next year. This wasn't our choice."

The CHSAA held its two-day state tournament at Fowler on Friday and

Saturday. "We should have never gone through with this," Nazareth coach Bob Myers said. "There's too much wrestling in a short span of time."

Scott, who attended yesterday's event, said the situation would be addressed at an August meeting.

"I think it's disgraceful that they thought a boycott would change things," she said. "You may not like a vote but it was a democratic process and the sections made a commitment to participate. Our own people are not supporting our own position."

Scott added that the representatives from Nassau and Suffolk voted to have the federation tournaments across the board for individual sports. The only vote against the proposal last January was from Section III, the Central area that includes Syracuse.

If not for Muzashvili, the NYSPHSAA would have had no representation. Unatego coach Jeff Newman admitted the only reason Muzashvili was there was to get more matches. Muzashvili (29-1) didn't become eligible until Jan. 11.

"Nick didn't have to cut weight," Newman said. "I know a lot of the other champs would have never been able to make the weight."

Said Union-Endicott 119-pound NYSPHSAA state champ Dylan Urban, "The only reason Nick went was because he really didn't understand the situation. If he had understood, he wouldn't have been there."

STATE HIGH SCHOOL FEDERATION TOURNAMENT At Fowler H.S., Syracuse Final results

91 — A.B. Brody (Stuyvesant, PSAL) dec. Reuben Seguritan (Chaminade), 9-4. 98 — Joe Gabriel (St. Peter's, CHSAA) dec. David Torres (Truman), 9-1. 105 — Orié Tongia (Truman, PSAL) dec. Andy Azzarello (St. Peter's), 9-3. 112 — Didier Arango (Long Island City, PSAL) def. Rich DeGado (Farrell), by injury default. 119 — Lou DeLauro (St. Peter's, CHSAA) pinned Joe Curro (Tottenville), 5:17. 126 — O'Neil Sharpe (Truman, PSAL) pinned Mike Pfeifer (St. Anthony's), 1:58. 132 — Joe Dunne (St. Anthony's, CHSAA) dec. Frank Figueroa Jr. (Lehman), 12-0. 138 — Tony Park (Stuyvesant, PSAL) def. Mario Calderon (Kellenberg), by injury default. 145 — Tom Clero (Chaminade, CHSAA) dec. Matthew LaBovis (South Shore), 5-0. 155 — Nick Mancini (St. Anthony's, CHSAA) dec. Kevin DeSouza (Truman), 7-6. 167 — Brian Wszolek (Mt. St. Michael, CHSAA) dec. Martin Lewis (Truman), 3-0. 177 — Nick Muzashvili (Unatego, NYSPHSAA) def. Victor Moran (FDR), by tech. fall, 3:00. 215 — Bryan Vetell (Xavier, CHSAA) dec. Ricco Rodriguez (Tottenville), 7-6. 250 — John DeStefano (St. Peter's, CHSAA) pinned Jamie Andujar (Smith), 1:19.