

New Meet Cheats Wrestlers

By Gregg Sarra
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Syracuse — For 14 years Public Schools Athletic League wrestlers dreamed of winning a state wrestling championship. They never complained about the seven-hour bus ride to the Onondaga War Memorial in Syracuse. And they never worried about the best wrestlers in the state who awaited their arrival.

"It never mattered to these kids who was out there," said Martin Jacobson, the PSAL commissioner of wrestling. "They just wanted to compete against the best possible competition. It was always a chance for them to see where they stood among the best."

Yesterday at Fowler High School the PSAL team competed in the first state federation wrestling tournament, a tournament designed to crown a true state champion with one representative each from the New York State Public High School Athletic Association, Catholic High School Athletic Association and the PSAL. The federation tournament came about after the PSAL and CHSAA were removed from the NYSPHSAA tournament, a decision handed down by the state executive committee last January, a move that neither association lobbied for nor agreed with.

"The issue here is that our kids really wanted to go to the big dance at the Onondaga [War Memorial]," Jacobson said. "They are very disappointed. This wasn't our choice."

The state federation tournament 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, reducing it to a glorified dual meet between the CHSAA and PSAL.

This wasn't the Onondaga War Memorial where the crowds reach 6,000 over the weekend for the NYSPHSAA championships, this was Fowler High School with about 100 fans.

Unatego's Nick Muzashvili, the NYSPHSAA 177-pound state champion, from Georgia of the former Soviet Union, showed up because he wanted to wrestle — anywhere, anyone. He gave the PSAL and CHSAA wrestlers a glimpse of what they missed at the NYSPHSAA tournament. Muzashvili won by technical fall twice for the federation's 177-pound crown.

"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. I'm embarrassed for the association."

According to Lindenhurst coach Joe Russo, the key issue was having to weigh in the winning wrestlers the night after the NYSPHSAA state championships.

"Kids can't maintain the weight," 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 were against it, 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."

And why not? The PSAL never has had a state champion and never finished higher than ninth in the team scoring. "All that doesn't matter," said Tottenville heavyweight Ricco Rodriguez. "There's always the chance to win when it's one on one."

But the new tournament didn't afford that opportunity. "Some upstate coach blamed us for the new format," Jacobson said. "That bothered me because we had nothing to do with it. We liked the tournament the way it was."

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

91 — AB Brody (Stuyvesant, PSAL) dec. Reuben Seguritan (Chaminade), 9-4. 98 — Joe Gabriel (St. Peter's, CHSAA) dec. David Torres (Truman), 9-1. 105 — Orie Tongle (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 Pletler (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. Marion Calderon (Kellenberg), by injury default. 145 — Tom Claro (Chaminade, CHSAA) dec. Matthew LeBovits (South Shore), 5-0. 155 — Nick Mancini (St. Anthony's, CHSAA) dec. Kerwin 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 DeSiano (St. Peter's, CHSAA) pinned Jamie Andujar (Brentwood), 19:17.

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