

State Champs Boycott Federation

■ Thirteen wrestlers go home rather than participate in Sunday's meet at Fowler.

By NEIL KERR
The Post-Standard

With the tournament boycotted by all except a wrestler from the former Soviet Union, the State Federation Wrestling Tournament at Fowler on Sunday proved to be little more than a dual meet.

The Federation event was to match the champions from Saturday night's state public school (NYSPHSAA) tournament in the Onondaga County War Memorial, the Catholic High School Athletic Association (CHSAA) and the New York City Public School Athletic League (PSAL).

It didn't happen.

As anticipated, all but one of the 14 public school (NYSPHSAA) champions crowned at the War Memorial on Saturday night returned home following their late-night title bouts.

Only one — 177-pound Nick Muzashvili from the former Soviet Union and Unatego High School — opted to stay in Syracuse for the tournament.

Muzashvili, who defected to this country last year from the civil war-plagued Russian state of Georgia, toyed with the competition at the Federation meet, earning two quick technical falls.

Muzashvili, who is being recruited by Syracuse University, Edinbo-

ro, and Clemson Universities, hard-ly worked up a sweat.

As Unatego coach Jeff Newman explained, "Nick just wants to wrestle — he doesn't care who or where it is. He's only been wrestling since Jan. 11, which was the day he first became eligible. Plus, he has no problem making weight — he's a natural 177-pounder."

Disgusted with the idea of having to weigh in again and compete Sunday, the other 13 public school champions boycotted the tourney. Before leaving the War Memorial on Saturday, 119-pound champion Dylan Urban of Union-Endicott said, "I definitely don't want to wrestle tomorrow. The only reason Nick (Muzashvili) is competing is because he doesn't understand the situation."

Among the 100 spectators at Fowler was a visibly upset Sandra Scott, executive director of the NYSPHSAA. "This (Federation meet) is what our people in the public schools voted for, and then they boycott the event," said Scott. "I'm very embarrassed for the (NYSPHSAA) association."

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"I really wanted to win the states this year," said Zegarelli, who placed third last season. "I put in the effort and worked very hard for this."

Zegarelli was a clinician throughout the tournament, scoring 16, 23 and 16 points before the final. He finished with 23 takedowns in four bouts.

"He went out and earned it," Deer Park coach Ed Luksik said. "He never stopped working, and he deserved to be a state champ."

Phifer Ascends Pinnacle

By Gregg Sarra

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Syracuse — When the program for the state wrestling tournament is published next season, a Longwood athlete will grace the Champion of Champions page for the third time in five years. Rason Phifer, already a state champion, has taken his place with three-time state champ John Lange and Nick Hall among the truly elite.

Phifer won his second consecutive 112-pound state title with an 8-3 victory over James Materese of Union-Endicott on Saturday night at the Onondaga War Memorial in Syracuse. Moreover, he was chosen Champion of Champions by virtue of his three pins in 7:05 total minutes and a dominating decision in the final. His achievement makes Longwood the only school in the 33 years of the state wrestling tournament to have three wrestlers earn the award.

"He's worked very hard to be in this position," Longwood coach Ethan Prifte said. "And he deserves it all."

Phifer wrestled with the power and fury that has been the benchmark of one of the most successful careers on Long Island. Phifer (136-6) completely overmatched all of his four opponents. He recorded pins in 2:45, 1:56 and 2:22. In the final, Materese looked timid and in awe of Phifer.

"Each time I grabbed him, he was shaking out there," Phifer said. "He just didn't want to get pinned. I just wanted to win."

Phifer didn't think the voting committee made up of media representa-

tives and coaches would give him the prestigious outstanding wrestler award. He was shocked by the announcement.

"Sometimes when things don't go your way, you expect the worst," said sectional teammate Matt Hickey, who lost by decision in the 199-pound final. "I worked out with Rason all week. He's earned everything, and I'm happy for him."

Deer Park senior Angelo Zegarelli captured the 105-pound title when he beat Charlie Voorhees of Warsaw, 8-7. Zegarelli became the first Deer Park state champ since 1985 when Ray Downey won the most outstanding wrestler award for taking the 126-pound class.