

Agony, Ecstasy for Freeport

By Gregg Sarra

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Syracuse — This is about friendship — best friends. About two kids from Jamaica who grow up in Freeport, wrestling and playing football together. Two inseparable friends that feed off each other's emotions and learn together.

This is about one kid who is shy and introverted and his pal, who is a people person, articulate and highly emotional.

Freeport teammates Morlon Greenwood and Julian Cover ran the emotional gamut late Saturday night at the state wrestling championships in the Onondaga War Memorial in Syracuse.

They were to wrestle within minutes of each other, back-to-back, in the 177- and 215-pound weight classes to try and bring home state titles. They are workout partners in the wrestling room, football teammates and the best of friends sharing a common dream.

It started with the disappointment in Cover's sudden and shocking loss to Niskayuna's Pat Popolizio in the 177-pound final and ended in the elation of Greenwood's 4-3 victory over Union-Endicott's Isaiah Kacyvenski at 215.

And it all happened so fast.

Cover was supposed to be easy prey for Popolizio, a state runnerup at 177. Cover shrugged at the suggestion that he was in over his head with his typically confident wait-and-see attitude. Then he went out and body-locked Popolizio to his back for a 5-0 first period lead. The rarely used move was so crushing that it left Popolizio unconscious for 55 seconds. Somehow the doctors cleared him to continue.

"We were very surprised," Freeport coach Terry Haise said. "They took a chance. He was out cold."

Before Popolizio could fully regain his senses, Cover locked him up again for a 7-1 lead. Cover was dominating. He was in charge. There was no way Popolizio could recover and come back.

And then it happened.

Trailing 9-3 in the second, Popolizio tried a move seldom seen in high school competition, a freestyle move called the 'Husker'. It was so quick and so devastating that Cover found no escape and was pinned at 2:46. "He got caught with an overhead cradle while they were standing," Freeport coach Russ Cellan said. "It surprised everyone. I'm sick."

Popolizio turned certain defeat into sudden victory with one well-executed move. It earned him the tournament's most outstanding wrestler.

Cover lay on the mat briefly and got up to congratulate his opponent. Cover then walked dejectedly from the mat and fell to Haise's arms. "I was blown away in all the emotion," Haise said. "And then I had to get into Morlon's match. I had trouble clearing my head."

Greenwood, who was told by the coaches not to get involved in Cover's match and to concentrate on his, buried his head in his hands and walked to get his headgear. Tears welled in his eyes when he saw the hurt in Cover. Greenwood felt the same hurt. "I cried, man, that's my best friend," Greenwood said. "It hurt me very bad to see him lose."

Cover found comfort in his family as Greenwood wrestled Kacyvenski. Greenwood recorded a first-period takedown and just missed on several other scoring opportunities as he pushed the action through the match. Greenwood finished 33-0.

After the match, Cover (24-1) went out of his way to see Popolizio, who was strapped to a stretcher and about to be taken to Syracuse Hospital for precautionary measures. The massive body lock left Popolizio with internal bleeding in his chest. "That match will be remembered for a long time," Haise said.

Cover then re-joined Greenwood in his moment of glory. And they shared a small secret. A small talk between best friends that was no one's business. And they cried. Two class acts, one moment of glory.

"They are two exceptional young men that we're going to miss," Haise said.

Notes & Quotes: Two other Long Island wrestlers took home titles from the state wrestling championships. Wyandanch junior Thomas Marrero (250 pounds) and Mt. Sinai senior Ryan Bernholz (132).

Marrero used an overtime takedown to edge Baldwin junior Kevin Shippas, 3-1, in the 250-pound final. He became the first state titlist in Wyandanch history.

"We set a goal to win the county and we did," Wyandanch coach Ray Mills said. "Then we took baby steps, one match at a time to place in the state and we ended up with a champion. I can't explain the feeling. It'll send a message in school that hard work pays off. This is great for our program."

Bernholz became the first state champion at Mt. Sinai when he edged Waverly's Eric Kingston, 4-3, for the 132-pound title. "I'm psyched, it's an honor to be the first," Bernholz said.

South Side senior Ian Kaplan (36-1) used a third-period takedown with 28 seconds left to gain a 4-3 lead on Saranac's Pat Clancy, but gave up a reversal 14 seconds later to drop an exciting 5-4 decision in the 145-pound final. Kaplan erased a 3-0 deficit in the third period to forge the one-point lead. "It was a devastating way to lose," South Side coach Mike Davey said. "He had a great season."

Shenendehowa had a thorough scouting report on Bellport's Chris Felicetta, and Greg Parker used it to upend the previously unbeaten sophomore, 4-0, in the 91-pound final when he gained first- and third-period takedowns. "We knew [Felicetta] had a terrific cradle, and we stayed off the mat," Shenendehowa coach Stan Harper said.

Paul Paquin of Cornwall (38-0) held on against Huntington's Adrian Bonilla for a 6-4 win at 112 pounds.

Shoreham-Wading River eighth-grader Jesse Jantzen (35-1) came back through the wrestlebacks with a win over defending state champion Trent Curry of North Adirondack and a 1-0 decision over Camden's Brice Kelly for third place.

"That's two years in a row he took third," Shoreham-Wading River coach Paul Jendrewski said.

Deer Park senior Sal Cusumano (119) and Long Beach senior Akil Coad (112) also wrestled back to third place. Both wrestlers had 4-1 records.

"It says a lot about a kid who never gives up," Long Beach coach Paul Gillespie said. "You can't teach pride. They have to have it in them."