

# Former Floyd Star on Outside Looking In

By Gregg Sarra

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Syracuse — This was not where Ryan Maurer was supposed to be at this time of the year.

He sat in Section I, Row A, Seat 3 at the Onondaga County War Memorial. He should have been on the mat competing for his third state championship, a feat accomplished by only 11 wrestlers in the state before him. But Maurer dropped out of school in the fall, and he was merely a spectator yesterday.

The ticket cost him eight dollars. He was there to support his best friend, Mike Williams of Hicksville. The same Williams whom he had wrestled in the Floyd School District since the seventh grade. The same guy with whom he shared the dream of winning a state championship.

Maurer already had lived the dream, winning two state titles as a sophomore and a junior. Williams was here as a member of the Comets wrestling team after he transferred out of Floyd in search of a new direction in his life. He was impressive in three straight wins as he bulled his way into the 140-pound championship bout last night against Uthman Jackson of Amityville.

Perhaps he got some helpful tips from Maurer, who pinned Jackson in last year's Suffolk 140-pound final on his way to a second state title. Certainly he hoped to feel the same exhilaration that Maurer had felt.

What he couldn't feel and might not understand is the pain his best friend felt when the current competitors marched in the parade of champions Friday afternoon before the start of the tournament. Maurer said he never thought it would bother him to return here and not compete, then admitted it did.

"It really hit me when the parade of wrestlers came in and I wasn't with them," Maurer said. "This was supposed to be the topper — the proudest moment of my career."

Instead, Maurer, who turned 19 in December, makes a living pounding nails and framing houses out on the East End as an apprentice for a carpenter. He has been on his own trying to make ends meet since he was 16. He works full-time and wants to get his GED. He will take the test in April and attend Nassau CC in the fall. He recently moved in with an aunt in Mastic and shows signs of moving in the right direction.

"I made a mistake and now I'm missing out," Maurer said. "I hurt coach [Terry] Phelan, and I loved that guy. My attendance in school was poor and I had some family problems. The guidance counselor said I wouldn't graduate on time, so I quit."

Now Maurer kicks back in his seat and exhales.

"You know, there's no looking back, only ahead," he said. "Mike's going to win his title and I'm . . . going back to school."