

# Suffolk Wrestlers

## Dominate

### Huntington trio helps win 4th state title in row

By Gregg Sarra

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Syracuse — Thirteen seconds remained and Stephon Sair made the final move of his fabulous Huntington wrestling career. He gathered the legs of a scrambling Chris Horning of Baldwinsville (Section III) and overpowered him to the mat for a takedown, pulling out a wild 9-7 victory and winning the state 145-pound title late Saturday night before 7,073 fans at the Onondaga County War Memorial.

It was Sair's fourth victory in the state tournament and completed a 34-0 season. Sair's win gave Suffolk the highest team score in state history and the three highest scores of all time. Suffolk's

final total reached 256 points when Jose Viera of Central Islip pinned Dwayne Hash-Barberis of Scotia (II) in 3:42. It was Viera's third straight pin after a 4-3 win in his first-round bout.

"I was nervous in my first match and then I turned it up a few notches," said Viera, who became the first wrestler in Central Islip history to win a state crown. "This is a very special feeling."

Suffolk won the team title for an unprecedented fourth straight year. It crowned five of six finalists, including all three representatives from Huntington, as Pat Flynn and Steve Palacios joined Sair as state champions. The Blue Devils became the fourth school in the 40 years of the tournament to crown three champions in one year. Mepham (1964), Brentwood (1971) and Longwood (1992) were the other schools to accomplish the feat.

The Blue Devils scored 74 points to win the individual team title. MacArthur finished second with 65.5 points as five of its six qualifiers placed in the tournament to help the Nassau sectional team finish second.

It was an outstanding performance

by both Long Island teams. Suffolk became the first section in state history to place all 15 qualifiers. Nassau had 12 place-winners, including three champions in MacArthur's James Strouse (140), Calhoun's Greg Lawrence (171) and Baldwin's Chris Weidman (189).

"We knew we had a strong team during the practices to get ready for the tournament," said Nassau coach Howie Greenblatt of MacArthur. "This was a major improvement over last year." Nassau finished ninth in 2001.

Five Nassau wrestlers reached the finals. Carlos Patrick of Freeport was beaten 8-2 in the 160-pound final by Matt Herrington of LaSalle (II). Herrington earned the most outstanding award after setting the national mark for wins in a high school career with 243. Glen Cove's Charles McCullough lost in the final seconds of a brawl with Anthony Chamorro of Sidney (IV), 3-1, in an exciting 275-pound final.

Nassau held a 3-2 edge over Suffolk in head-to-head bouts. But that's about the only statistic Suffolk didn't own.

There were so many components that made up this special group of Suffolk wrestlers. There was Dan Song of Hauppauge, Dan Miracola of Shoreham-Wading River and Tom Sforza of Lindenhurst, each of whom showed so much resolve in the wrestlebacks to key the record-breaking performance. All three finished with 4-1 records and third-place finishes. Smithtown's Sean Coffin took third with a 3-1 mark.

Huntington's Flynn fulfilled a promise he made a year ago by avenging last year's loss in the state final. He upended Gregor Gillespie of Webster (V) for the 112-pound title. Palacios filled the other spot in the Blue Devils trifecta when he defeated Jason Chase of Rush Henrietta (V), 7-5, in overtime of the 125-pound final. Palacios nailed a textbook single leg takedown at 32 seconds of the overtime for the win.

"I didn't feel well during the match," Palacios said. "I was nauseous from eating too much." He felt better after the victory.

As did Brentwood's Tom Finnerty, who needed a reversal with 33 seconds left to edge Scott Prutzman of Valley Central (IX), 8-7, for the 96-pound title. Finnerty became the first Brentwood state champ since Joe Plante in 1984.

"We were awesome," Suffolk coach Terry Phelan of Floyd said. "It's that simple."

**Brother Act.** St. Anthony's Magnani brothers, Tom (103) and Lucas (119), reached the finals but were beaten in their respective classes. In a rematch of last year's final, Lucas led defending state champion J.R. Roberts of Medina (VI) 4-3 before Roberts hit a four-point move in the third period and went on to an 11-6 victory . . . St. Anthony's had three wrestlers reach the semifinals and finished third in the individual team scoring . . . Huntington coach Lou Gianini now has a record 22 state champions in 32 years.

#### STATE WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIPS