

LI SPORTS

HIGH SCHOOLS / STATE WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Poise Gives Villante a Title

Wins 215 final to push Nassau into fifth place

By Chris Antonacci

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Syracuse — It all unfolded in Gian Villante's mind like the plot of an old-fashioned movie. The MacArthur senior envisioned every movement, frame by frame, as he sat in a folding chair along the mat during the finalists' introduction.

The drama crested as the announcer listed a litany of achievements for each wrestling finalist and as the crowd reached its capacity. Yet, there sat Villante in a folding chair, wearing his backpack and prepared for the toughest match of his career.

"I don't try to get too psyched up, and I just wanted to maintain my composure," Villante said. "I pictured the match in my mind, and it went exactly the way I planned."

Villante could not have written a better script. The 215-pounder sealed his high school wrestling legacy with a state title and stayed poised throughout. Villante avenged his semifinal loss from last year as he controlled the final match for a 7-5 decision over Section V champ Mike Patterson of Wayne on Saturday at the Onondaga War Memorial.

The weight of last year's loss was lifted off Villante's shoulders after the final buzzer sounded. In celebration, Villante literally lifted almost everyone in sight off his feet.

Patterson kept the pressure on Villante for the entire six minutes of the bout. Villante lifted his opponent off the mat and dropped Patterson for a takedown to take a 7-4 lead early in the third period. Villante had broken a tie at 4 with an uncontested escape to start the period.

Villante rode out Patterson during the second period's final 13 seconds following a penalty point for tripping to tie the score. Patterson also picked up

a point after Villante grabbed his opponent's headgear to make it 2-2 midway through the first period.

"He showed incredible composure because that can really take someone out of the match," MacArthur coach Howie Greenblatt said. "The only thing he was thinking about was what he needed to do to win."

Villante will focus on improving his strength this spring before he will play football for Hofstra on a full scholarship.

Villante's workout partner, Massapequa's Mike LaBella, also won a tough bout. LaBella benefited from three penalty points in the final period

as he defeated Mike Sanacore of Corinth (II), 7-2, in the 189-pound final.

The match was marred by penalties after LaBella took a 4-2 lead on an escape with 1:07 left. LaBella registered the lone takedown 46 seconds into the second period for a 2-1 edge after a scoreless first period. "I was really mad, but I knew that I had to keep my cool," LaBella said. "My adrenaline was just running. I've been dreaming about this for a long time."

Jamie Sgaglione's memories won't be as fond. Gregor Gillespie of Webster-Schroeder (V) used three takedowns and two-near fall points to beat the Plainedge senior, 10-0, in the 119-pound final.

"I'm going to be thinking about that match for the rest of my life," Sgaglione said. "If someone would have told me at the beginning of the season that I would be second in the state, I would have definitely signed up for that. Now that I am here, it's tough to lose, but you can't sulk about it."

Villante, LaBella and Sgaglione were among 11 placewinners who paced Nassau to a fifth-place finish with 148 points. Suffolk, with one champ and five finalists, had 154 and took fourth, ending its four-year reign. Section IV won the team title with 237 points.