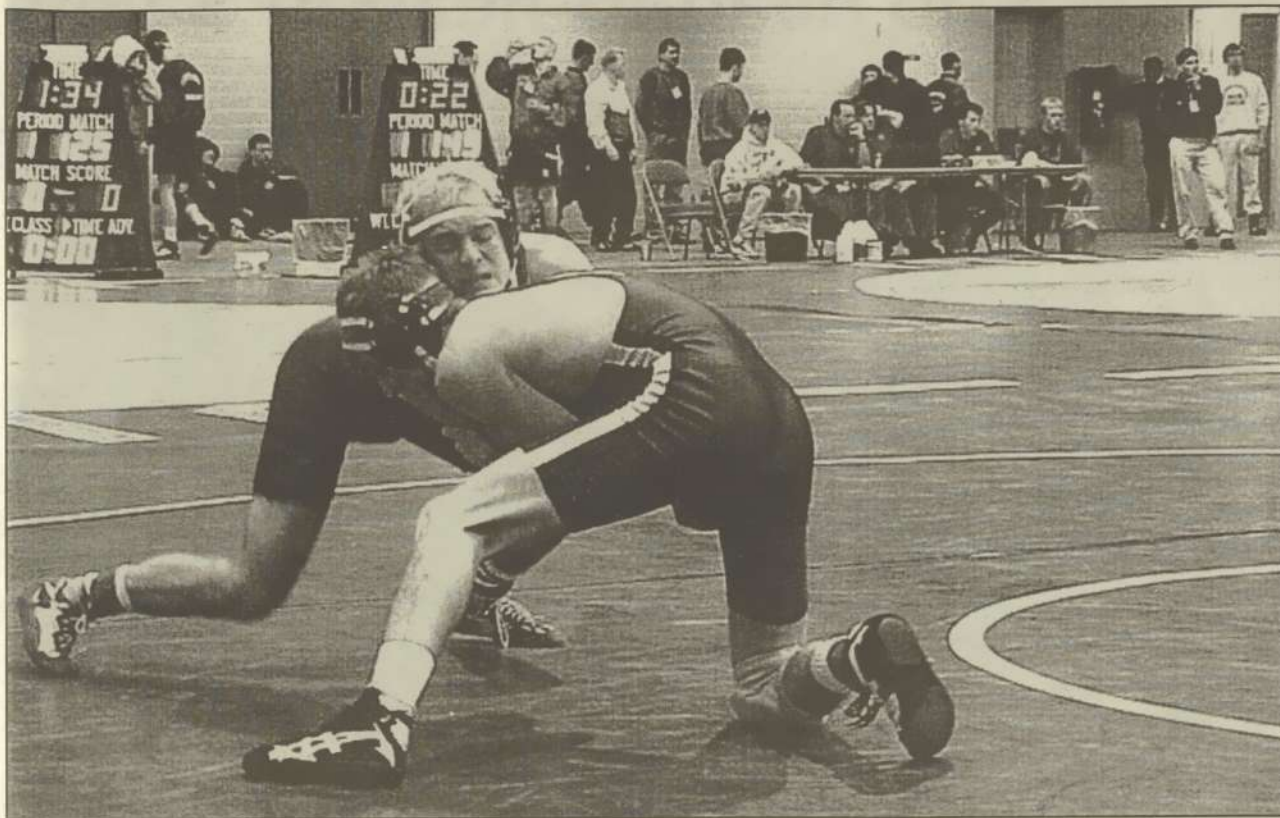


Clackamas Wrestling



Sophomore wrestler Joey Frizzel grapples with an opponent at the NJCAA championships last week in Rochester, MN.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LLOYD MARTINDALE

Cougars finish 12th in U.S.

Two All-Americans highlight NJCAA championships for talented squad

JOHN THORBURN
Sports Editor

The Clackamas wrestling squad continued its annual success at the national level this past weekend.

The Cougars, who were fifth place finishers at the Region 18 championships, took 12th place out of 45 schools in the 1999 National Junior College Athletic Association's [NJCAA] championships in Rochester, Minn.

"Overall, it was a mix of good and bad," said Clackamas Head Coach Lloyd Martindale. "We had some guys that I didn't expect too much out of that did well."

Freshman Ben Vombaur was the top finisher for Clackamas, placing third in the nation to earn All-American honors.

Vombaur [125 lb.], who nearly defeated his opponent in a match that would have sent him into the finals with a victory, was taken down with less than 30 seconds left to miss a title shot.

Abel Valdez, perhaps the Cou-

gars' top prospect for an individual championship, was wrestling for 5th and 6th place and was ahead by three points but ended up being taken down twice in the final 30 seconds to send the match into overtime. In double overtime, Valdez lost to the top-ranked wrestler in the 133 lb. weight class. Finishing 6th in the double-elimination tournament earned him All-American honors.

Dennis Olsen [165 lb.], a returning All-American from last year's NJCAA championships, went 2-2 for the tournament and just missed placing.

"It was really disappointing for him not placing being a returning All-American," noted Martindale. "He had some close matches and a real tough draw on his side of the bracket. That happens, but he's right in the mix of guys who should be placing. If they had the tournament next week, he could be in the top three."

Luke Heuberger [157 lb.], another of the Cougars' bright young

prospects along with Vombaur, also missed the round for placing by one match.

"For his first time there, I think he stepped up and wrestled well," said Martindale. "I think he's disappointed with his finish and I think he's looking forward to getting back on the mat and looking to next year."

Joey Frizzel, entering the tournament on a wild-card vote from region coaches, produced the only pin for Clackamas but failed to place, winning once and losing twice.

"Joe only had one win but he got the only fall for us which was kind of exciting," noted Martindale. "He was down by four points with a minute left, then he takes the guy down twice and puts him on his back and pins him. He's a guy that's never been to a big tournament and I think the jitters got to him. He was our wild card draw, so we didn't expect a lot out of him, but he wrestled hard. He definitely gave 100 percent."

According to Coach Martindale, competition at the national championships was tougher than expected.

"The top-ranked team in the nation, which is Ricks College, only finished fifth," said Martindale. "The competition was definitely above average. It was better than anyone expected."

"A school from Colby, Kansas came into the tournament from pretty much out of nowhere and went 18-0 on the first day which is just unheard of. They were almost untouchable after that and pretty much walked away with the championship. They've got a bunch of young wrestlers, so they'll be a force to be reckoned with next year."

With the tournament featuring the best wrestlers at the junior college level, four-year university coaches and scouts lined the gym to catch a glimpse of possible recruits to nab.

"There were a lot of scouts there," said Martindale. "Our sophomores have a good shot at making it to the next level. We've had a lot of success sending guys to four-year schools because Clackamas wrestling is synonymous with hard work."

With the numbers and talent that could possibly return to next year's, Clackamas looks stronger than ever.

"Ben and Luke are thinking about moving on to wrestle at a bigger school," noted Martindale. "But if they don't, they'll anchor a really strong team."

Vombaur would return as the top-ranked wrestler in his weight class in America.



FROM
THE
BOX

Hard work, dedication, and a desire to win

After the men's basketball team's 82-68 win over Southwestern Oregon on Saturday night, it was difficult to understand what happened during the season.



JOHN THORBURN

Finishing the year with a 5-9 league record, the Cougars missed the playoffs when they were expected to produce big wins and possible title runs.

Throughout its preseason schedule, the team carried a confidence that virtually no team could match as it entered January with a 10-4 mark.

Two weeks into the Southern Region schedule, Clackamas looked red hot posting a 2-0 record.

Then, the lights went out. From that moment on, the Cougars only won two of 11 before Saturday's upset win over the high-flying Lakers.

Head Coach Cliff Wegner, in his first year at Clackamas after a one-year interim at Mt. Hood, built his squad into giant killers that took down the likes of Malaspina College, a four-year university from Canada, a Chemeketa team that was ranked in the NWAACC polls, and most recently the Lakers who are the only group of men to dent Southern Region champion Lane's 27-1 record.

Any great team, however, thrives on consistency.

Too many nights, the numbers weren't there offensively and the defense looked suspect. As the losses began to mount up against the Cougars, the confidence that it had once attained was gone, which was evident from Clackamas' lifeless performance against the Chemeketa Storm last Wednesday night.

In the past four seasons, the Cougars relied on one player to carry the load in scoring.

In 1997, it was Leif Spencer who carried the team—recording marks of 39 and 36 points in games. That season, Clackamas missed the playoffs.

In 1998, Clint Hordemann scored the bulk of the team's points. That season, the Cougars were absent come playoff time.

In 1999, Jared Price led Clackamas night after night despite tremendous help from David Cohen, Billy Bright, and Cody Eckman.

These sophomores, the only remaining link to the Royce Kiser era that won two NWAACC championships, epitomize what Clackamas basketball is all about.

Hard work, dedication, and a desire to win.

In the two years that I have had the opportunity to watch them play, they didn't win any titles; they didn't win any championships. But they provided the school with dozens of hours of quality basketball and exciting play. For that, as a student, I thank them.

Freshman Ben Vombaur stands in third place on the awards podium at last week's NJCAA national championships. The third place finish was the highest placing for Clackamas at the two-day long tournament and earned him All-American honors.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LLOYD MARTINDALE