

Wrestlers eyeing NCAA tourney

By Ryan Loy
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The collegiate wrestling season can be divided into three parts — the regular season, conference championships and national championships — with each building in importance.

WRESTLING

Right now, six members of the Penn State wrestling team are making the transition to the pinnacle of the season as they prepare to compete at the 2010 NCAA championships, which begin Thursday in Omaha, Neb.

The six Nittany Lion grapplers earned the opportunity to wrestle for a national title by leading the Lions to a strong performance at the Big Ten championships March 6-7.

Senior Cyler Sanderson led the way as he won the title at 157 pounds by beating high school teammate Colton Salazar of Purdue to become the Lions' 20th Big Ten champion. It was the second conference title for Sanderson, as he won the Big 12 championship as a sophomore at Iowa State.

"It felt great," Sanderson said of winning the Big Ten title. "It's great preparation for the national tournament."

Sanderson was the only Penn State grappler to compete in a championship bout after seven made it to the semifinals.

Though the Lions were in second-place after the first session of the championships,

their 1-6 record in the semifinals led to the team's fifth-place finish in the tournament. Even with the difficulties late in the tournament, the Lions improved on last season's seventh-place showing.

Senior Dave Erwin was one of the Lions to lose in the semifinals, and the 184-pounder believes he and his teammates didn't perform up to their normal standard in the late rounds. Erwin said each Lion wrestler competing at NCAAs is working to make individual adjustments.

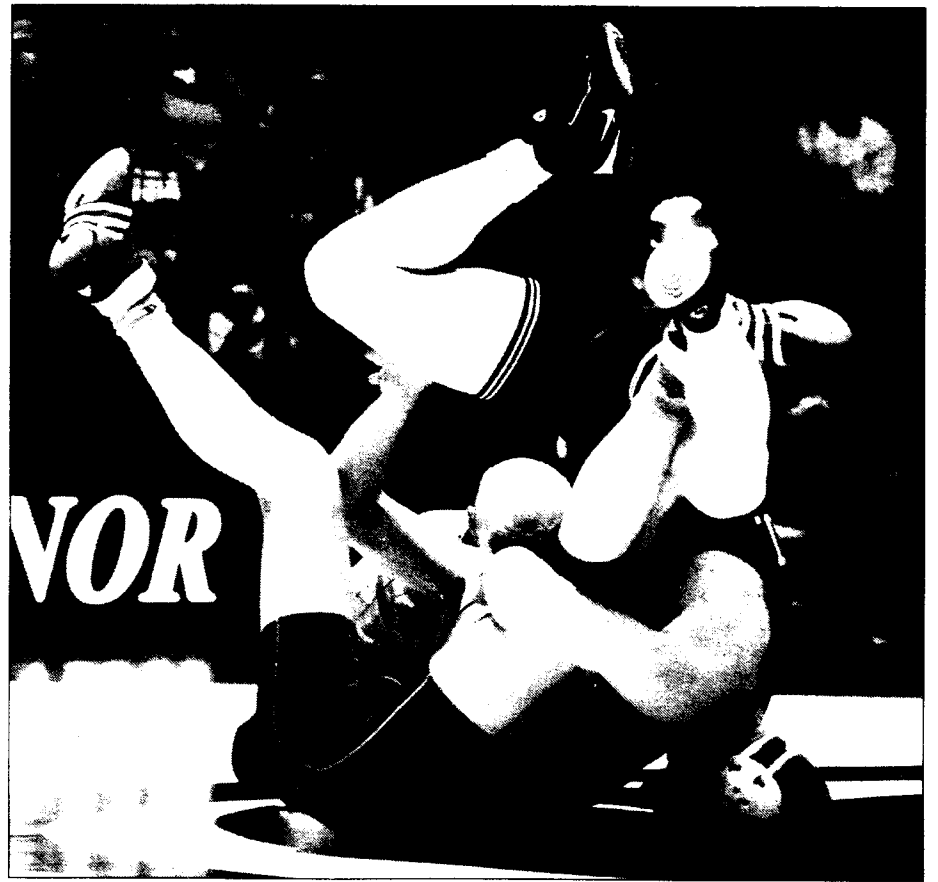
"Different guys are working on different things to improve," Erwin said. "For me, I just have to work on finishing shots and things like that."

Senior 165-pounder Dan Vallimont echoed Erwin, saying he's looking to improve on finishing his shots quicker, among other little things.

The Penn State grapplers don't want to make too many changes to their game. Prior to the conference championships, coach Cael Sanderson said wrestlers often try to make too many adjustments in the postseason, rather than wrestling to their own style.

Three of the Lions know they have what it takes to get past the first round, as Vallimont, Erwin and Brady Pataky each defeated their first opponent in a regular season bout.

Regardless of what happened in the past — be it the regular season or conference championships — each wrestler starts over



Steph Witt/Collegian

Penn State's Cyler Sanderson (top) will compete for the NCAA title at 157 pounds. Five other Nittany Lions will try to win titles in their respective weight classes at the NCAA championships, which start Thursday in Omaha, Neb.

and has the opportunity to make a name for himself at nationals.

In his final season, that's what Erwin is looking to do.

"I'm looking to go out there to Omaha and show the country what I've been work-

ing on all year and the last few years," Erwin said. "It's always fun to go out and wrestle in front of a big crowd. There's nothing else like it."

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PSU ends road trip with close loss to Texas State

By Stephen Hennessey
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Steven Hill knew his teammates had a rally in them.

The Penn State baseball team had lost its last four games by a total of 44 runs, but Hill exited Sunday's game with his team trailing by only two runs.

BASEBALL

The Nittany Lions tied the game in the eighth inning, but Texas State won, 5-4, on a sacrifice fly in the ninth inning off junior pitcher Jesse Alfreño.

"We haven't been in many ball games. The last couple of them, we tipped our cap early and bowed out," Hill said.

"We were in it for all nine

innings today. I would take the loss as a positive just because we got a lot of confidence in our abilities as a team."

Sunday's loss was the Lions' seventh straight, capping a road trip in which they went 2-7 overall.

The Lions (4-8) were swept in their games against Texas A&M, Texas State and Lamar and defeated Dallas Baptist and McNeese State.

Freshman outfielder Steve Snyder tied the game for the Lions on an infield single in the eighth inning Sunday, scoring sophomore Sean Deegan.

Texas State's Shaun Garcia hit a fly ball to center field in the last inning, which gave Texas State its

third-straight victory over the Lions.

"That's one thing over the week — that we didn't get the feeling that any of our guys quit by any means," pitching coach Jason Bell said.

"Everyone still battled and competed. The results weren't there, but the effort was."

Hill gave up two runs in six innings pitched Sunday, putting his season ERA at 2.47.

The freshman said he threw

strikes early in the count, which allowed him to get in control of the lineup.

Aside from Sunday's game, the pitching staff submitted lackluster performances in its last five games. The Lions dropped two games apiece to Texas A&M, 17-3 and 7-0, and Texas State, 15-6 and 20-6.

Bell said the biggest disappointment was the amount of walks given up by his staff.

In Friday's 20-6 defeat, the staff surrendered 15 walks to Texas State.

"We have to stay aggressive and continue to attack the strike zone," Bell said. "Make the other team put the ball in play and let our defense make plays."

Snyder and junior Heath

Johnson both had two hits for the Lions on Sunday. Johnson said he focused on swinging down because he had been getting underneath the ball prior to Sunday.

Despite another disappointing loss, Johnson said it's "go-time" for the Lions right now. He said the team needs to get right back to work Monday.

Hill hopes Sunday's effort will help the Lions to get off their losing slide.

"This team has a lot of fight in it," Hill said.

"We're not going to get down. If we're losing by three or two, it doesn't matter. We're still trying hard to come back."

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Hill

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