

Senior eager for nationals

By Ryan Loy
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Dave Erwin almost missed out on competing in the biggest event in his sport.

The senior 184-pounder was a highly touted recruit out of Urbana, Ohio, but injuries and struggles in conference tournaments kept him out of the NCAA championships.

WRESTLING

Now, in his final season as a Nittany Lion, Erwin has overcome those obstacles that slowed him in the past and is preparing to compete in his first NAAs, which begin Thursday.

"Dave had a solid, injury-free year and kind of got the monkey off his back," said Aaron Anspach, a club coach for the Lions who had problems similar to Erwin's in his Penn State career. "It was super important for him to have some really good wins against some tough guys."

Anspach was the national runner-up at heavyweight as a senior after injuries limited his earlier seasons, so he can relate to

"I've come a long way, but I've still got a ways to go. My goal wasn't just to qualify for nationals, so I have this weekend to go out and try to reach my goals."

Dave Erwin
Senior - 184-pounder

Erwin's excitement for the national tournament. Especially after Erwin's season didn't start off smoothly.

The senior lost to Justin Ortega at 174-pounds in the team's intrasquad dual.

That was followed by a major decision loss in the Nov. 13 season opener against Lehigh's Robert Hamlin.

With his future and place on the team in doubt, Erwin turned his season around after moving up to 184. Erwin doesn't know if cutting weight hampered him at 174, but he knew he wasn't wrestling to his potential early in the season.

Despite Erwin's struggles, the coaches didn't give up on him, which was a key to his turnaround.

"The coaches knew what I was capable of," Erwin said. "It was

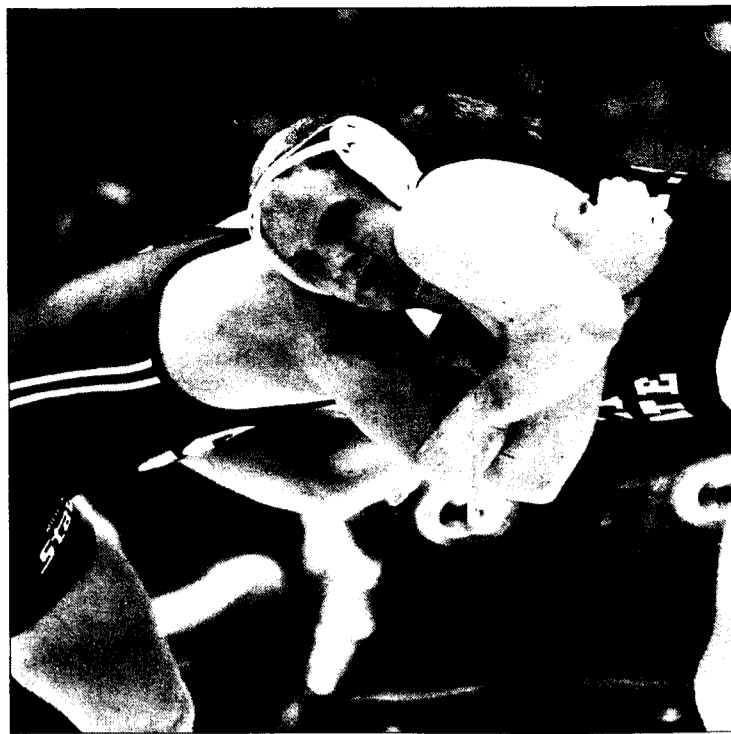
there, but I just wasn't coming out with it. [Their support] helped a lot."

Junior Brad Pataky said the 184-pounder has a laid-back personality. While Pataky said Erwin doesn't get caught up on success or failure, he believes the senior is happier and enjoying wrestling more now that he's winning.

After going 29-7 at 184-pounds — including a 3-2 record and fourth-place finish at the Big Ten championships — Erwin is ready to test his abilities at the national tournament.

Anspach said Erwin needs to focus on one match at a time and look to continuously score points. He believes Erwin is hard to beat when he controls the tempo and looks to score often.

As his final collegiate tourna-



Penn State 184-pounder Dave Erwin (right) wrestles against Michigan State's Nick Palmieri. Erwin is preparing for his first NAAs.

ment nears. Erwin knows he has work left to do.

"I've come a long way, but I've still got a ways to go," Erwin said. "My goal wasn't just to qualify for

nationals, so I have this weekend to go out and try to reach my goals."

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There's no better time of the year for sports fans

By Stephen Hennessey

At this point, you've been inundated with March Madness analysis.

ESPN aired a dance party featuring a disc jockey Monday night. If you're not a fan of college basketball, it's tough to escape the Madness.

But, this is the best time of the sports year. There's nothing like the first four days of the NCAA tournament. I've broken down NCAA tournament brackets since I was 4 years old.

Yeah, I was that kid.

This column's purpose is to give some advice to those who don't watch college basketball every single day.

Fill out your bracket with the

help of a kid who does.

I grew up idolizing the Kentucky Wildcats in first grade, when they cut down the nets in 1996. My two uncles graduated from Lexington. I'm still going to rip on them because I think Kentucky has issues to be addressed.

Kentucky is the most talented team but also the most inconsistent. If you've watched John Wall and his fellow freshmen play the last couple games, you've seen some freshmen mistakes.

The Wildcats will run into trouble when they are defended well by a team that can match their athleticism. DeMarcus Cousins is a menace in the post, and Texas is not disciplined enough on defense to stop the Wildcat backcourt.

Still, the Wildcat underclassmen have turned ball over under pressure. They were 0.1 seconds away from losing to Mississippi State in the SEC title game.

John Calipari must stop his players from committing those

costly mistakes. I picked them to lose to West Virginia in the Elite Eight. Sorry, Uncle Mike.

Kansas is the consensus favorite to win it all. The Jayhawks have an experienced point guard in Sherron Collins and an experienced center in Cole Aldrich. They've got the talent in freshman Xavier Henry and sophomores Marcus and Markieff Morris.

A mixture of talent and experience is the recipe for a championship team. Last season, North Carolina was anchored by upperclassmen with NBA talent — Tyler Hansborough, Ty Lawson, Wayne Ellington and Marcus Ginyard. It was clear the Tar Heels were the best team.

That's why you can't discount Syracuse, Duke or West Virginia. Each team has players who can handle the pressure. Say what you want about Jon Scheyer, but he doesn't choke. He, Da'Sean Butler and Andy Rautins all perform when the lights are on.

The potential loss of Syracuse's

senior center Arinze Onuaku would cripple the Orange. Wesley Johnson is a great player, but I'm not convinced he can carry the offensive and defensive load in the post. The 'Cuse are lucky they have the easiest path to the Final Four. Vanderbilt and Kansas State will present challenges, but Syracuse looks like a safe bet to advance to Indianapolis.

My sleeper pick is Texas A&M. The Aggies are dangerous. Every game Texas A&M lost was to an NCAA tournament team. In the last two months, the Aggies have lost to Kansas and Baylor. The Aggies have tough games in the first two rounds, but don't be surprised if they beat Duke and make the Elite Eight.

When the first game tips at 12:20 p.m. Thursday, if you're as enthusiastic as I am, you'll follow the action religiously. In high school, I would sneak out of class to check the scores on Thursday and Friday. I'm sure a lot of you did the same.

I won't endorse cutting class.




John Calipari's Kentucky team is talented but inconsistent.

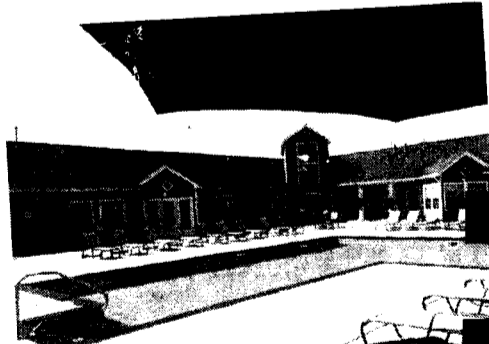
but enjoy the next couple days. It's the greatest time of the year to be a sports fan.

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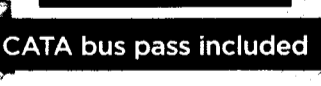
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