

Sports Week

Mounts beat Knights for first time in 16 years

Coach Lipski is optimistic about the season despite Lake-Lehman's young team

By DAVE KONOPKI
Post Editor

LEHMAN TWP. — Phil Lipski has been a head coach long enough to know how to put things in perspective.

So despite a couple of early-season losses — and the fact that Lipski has one of his youngest teams in the last 16 seasons — the Lake-Lehman coach knows it's not time to press the panic button.

"We have some very good young talent," said Lipski, whose team finished ninth in the annual Tunkhannock Kiwanis Tournament earlier this week. "We also have a couple of very good seniors. These kids are going to be good, but it's going to take some time. I think that by end of the season, we can be pretty good."

And even better if the transfer of Scott Davis is upheld.

The former Clarion-Limestone standout transferred to Lake-Lehman several weeks ago, but a hearing must be held to determine his eligibility. District 2 officials were hoping to hold the hearing during the holidays, but it was delayed because a representative from District 9 couldn't attend.

Last season, Davis placed eighth in the 135-pound division at the Class 2A state wrestling championships. The junior has a 55-14 career record.

"Scottie Davis is a quality kid," said Lipski. "He would help make us a much better team."

There is talent on the roster, even without Davis, says Lipski.

The Black Knights return five wrestlers who placed in the top six at the district championships last season. Senior Stan Brudnicki (215) returns after placing third at districts and fourth at the Northeast Regional tournament. Seniors Joe Klemunes (189) and Brandon Higgins (152) were fourth at districts a year ago, while junior Jared Kopetchne (145) and sophomore Ed Donahue (125) placed sixth and fourth, respectively. Senior Tim Ford also has a very good chance of winning a District 2 medal this season.

"We have some good seniors," said Lipski, whose team lost standouts Matt Dragon, Andy Josuweit and Jeremy Schutz to graduation. Those three had almost 400 career wins.

"Brudnicki, Higgins and Klemunes are providing our leadership. Higgins is our unsung hero. He had a shoulder injury that's prevented him from showing his stuff early, but he's really working hard."

The Black Knights have a solid group of sophomores, led by Jordan Junta.

"He's been working out with Matt Dragon during the holidays," said Lipski. "He has the potential to be a good one. He's one of the younger kids who want to carry on our tradition."

Other talented sophomores include Chris Barbacci, Nathan Walsh, Wally Simko and Chad Brudnicki. Simko weighs approximately 185 pounds, but wrestles at 275.

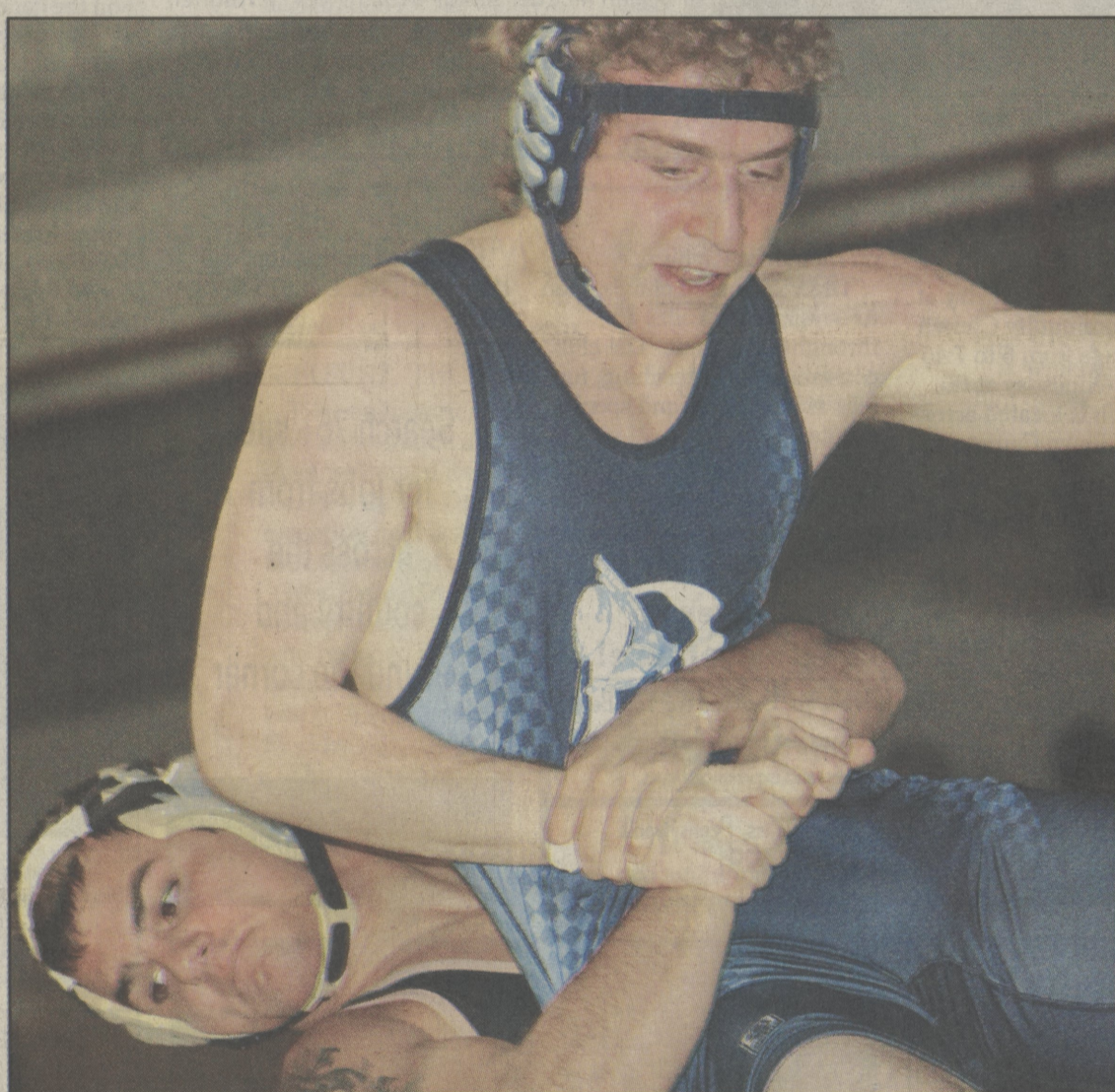
The Lake-Lehman wrestling program honored members from its 1981 state championship team before a recent meet against rival Dallas. The team was coached by the late Shorty Hitchcock. Former standouts Ricky Bonomo, Rocky Bonomo and Mike Leskowsky were among the team members to attend the ceremony. A reception was held after the meet.

"It was a nice thing to do," said Lipski. "One of our assistant coaches, Alex Wilson, came up with idea in October. It was nice to have some of the guys come back. There was certainly a lot of talent on that team."



Mitch Artsma, Dallas, tangles with Tim Ford in the 125 lb. category.

FOR THE POST/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK



Lake-Lehman's Brandon Higgins pulls down Dallas's Josh Anderson in the 160 lb. bracket.

Returning starters and full roster give coach, Dan Natitus hope for a division championship season

By DAVE KONOPKI
Post Editor

DALLAS TWP. — When Dan Natitus took over the reins of the Dallas wrestling program last year, he said one of his goals was to build the Mountaineers into a serious contender for the Wyoming Valley Conference Division II championships.

He's well on his way.

The Mountaineers are off to a solid start this season, including a recent win against Back Mountain rival Lake-Lehman for the first time in 16 years. Dallas returns 12 starters from last year's 8-15 team, which was competitive in the division.

"I expected some big things from this group coming into this season but I think that, overall as a program, we're ahead of schedule," said the second-year coach. "We've made huge strides from last year. Everyone on our team is wrestling well."

Another reason for the early success is having a full roster. Last season, Dallas went into most of its meets knowing it would have to forfeit at least two matches. With the opposing team receiving six points for each forfeit, the Mountaineers began most of their matches in a deep hole.

"It's very important to have all of the weight classes filled," Natitus said. "You don't want to go into a meet down 12-0 or 18-0, especially against teams like Lake-Lehman and Coughlin. Having a full lineup makes things a lot easier."

It also helps to have talent and Dallas possesses several wrestlers who could have success during the regular season and on the district and regional levels.

Senior Brian Goeringer (171 pounds) was third at the District 2 championships last season. Sophomore Joe Hayes (130) also finished third and senior John McCue (215) took fifth place. Sophomore heavyweight Craig Nilsson has looked promising early this season and seniors Sean McMahon (140) and Josh Anderson (160) — who join Goeringer and McCue as team captains — bring leadership and experience.

"We have three goals this season — beat Lake-Lehman, win our division and take as many kids to (the northeast) regionals as we can," Natitus said. "We took three kids to regionals last year and we're hoping to have at least six this season."

The Mountaineers already accomplished their first goal with the win against Lake-Lehman. The Dallas coach hopes the win against the tradition-rich Black Knights will boost his team's confidence.

"That was the biggest win for our program in a long time," said the former Dallas wrestler. "When (assistant coach) Bobby Jesse and I wrestled, we never beat Lehman. It was a great win for us. Lehman has been a great program for a long time. It was a good test to see where we stand."

With the full roster and almost 30 wrestlers on the junior high level, Natitus says things are looking up for his program.

"Things are definitely moving in right direction," he said. "It should be a very fun season."

Brittany Prater in swing with newly formed college golf program at CUP

By DAVE KONOPKI
Post Editor

DALLAS TWP. — Brittany Prater has certainly come a long way since she first swung a golf club less than four years ago.

"My dad took me to a driving range and I couldn't hit it the ball at all," said the Dallas High School senior. "I was really upset."

Those days are over. The 17-year-old recently became the first Pennsylvania resident to sign a letter of intent to play golf at California University of Pennsylvania. The newly-formed program started play in 2005 and Prater was one of its first recruits.

"I want to major in sports management and it's hard to find a college with a golf team and that major," said the son of John and Sue Prater, who will play for head coach Merrilyn Gibbs at CUP. "I'm going to get the chance to play golf in college. I'm really excited."

Not bad for someone who shot

a 136 during a pre-district meet as a freshman.

"Oh, I was bad," said Prater with a laugh. "But I loved it. I had played every sport possible, except golf. So for my 14th birthday I wanted a set of golf clubs. I wasn't very good at first. But I was hooked."

Prater started to get better after taking lessons from local golf professional, Tim Foran.

"I didn't take the sport too seriously at first, but he got me focused," she said. "During the summer before my junior year, he completely changed my swing. He promised me that if I worked hard, I'd be pretty good by the end of my senior year."

Foran was right.

In October, Prater finished third at the District 2 Golf Tournament at the Scranton Municipal Golf Course. She made school history by becoming the first female golfer at Dallas to win a district medal and qualify for the state championships.

"It was a great experience," said

Prater of the event at Heritage Hills Golf Resort. "The night before (the state tournament) I went out for dinner (with Gibbs). We talked about the mental aspect of golf and keeping a positive attitude. I was impressed with her."

Prater was also impressed with the CUP facilities when she visited the campus in the fall. The school is located approximately 30 minutes from Pittsburgh.

"The school recently built an indoor facility and it's awesome," she said. "They have a simulator, a practice green and bunch of nets. I can't wait to start playing there."

The honor student is also looking forward to playing on an all-female team. At Dallas, Prater was the only girl golfer and played on the boys team.

"I didn't mind playing with the guys," she said. "It definitely improved my game and I got so much better playing with them. But it's going to be cool to be part of girls team. This is all so exciting. A couple of years ago, I didn't think it was possible."



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