

Sports Week

Pinning down a CHAMPIONSHIP



TIMES LEADER STAFF PHOTO/S. JOHN WILKIN

Dallas wrestlers cheer a teammate during Wednesday's match at Hanover Area. The Mountaineers won the WVC Division II championship with a win against the Hawkeyes.

Dallas wrestlers capture first championship in more than 30 years

By DAVE KONOPKI
Post Editor

DALLAS TWP. — Dan Natitus wasn't thinking championships when he took over the reins of the Dallas wrestling program last year. Heck, he was just worried about having enough bodies to fill all of the weight classes.

How things have changed.

The Mountaineers captured the Wyoming Valley Conference Division II championship with a 54-21 win against Hanover Area earlier this week, the first championship for the Dallas wrestling program since the 1973-74 season.

"Winning a championship didn't cross my mind," said the second-year coach. "I worried about getting more kids out for the team and being competitive in all of our matches. Winning a championship would have been extra. But I wasn't even thinking about it."

Things began to change near the end of last season, when the Mountaineers hung near the top of the WVC Division II standings. With 12 starters returning from that team, expectations began to grow. And so did the confidence of the wrestlers.

"Last year we were in the running," said Natitus. "This year, everyone felt we had a good chance of winning. We never really needed to talk about it. All of the kids expected it."

Natitus had his hands full when he was named the head coach. In addition to low numbers, the former Dallas football and wrestling standout was the program's fourth head coach in five years.

"It's been a challenge," he said. "We're trying to build a tradition here."

He certainly knows all about tradition. Natitus was an offensive

lineman and later an assistant coach for head coach Ted Jackson's football program. The Mountaineers have consistently been one of the best teams in the WVC during Jackson's 20 years. In fact, Dallas hasn't suffered a losing season since Jackson took over the program in 1985.

Natitus would like to have the same kind of long-term success with the wrestling program.

"That's what (former assistant coach) Gerry Ogurkis and I had in mind when we started coach-

ing at the (Dallas) junior high. "We want to get back to the time when Dallas was competitive with every team in the valley."

At press time, the Mountaineers were focusing on winning another championship as the prepared to face Scranton Prep in the District 2 Team Duals Tournament. Natitus hopes a strong showing in that tournament, as well as solid individual performances at the upcoming District 2 championships, will help pave the way for his next goal:

To become one of the premier teams in the conference, regardless of classification.

"If things keep going the way they've been going in our junior high and elementary programs, I can foresee that in the future," he said. "Right now, teams like Pittston, Crestwood and Hazleton are very strong. We want to be right there with them."

In the meantime, Natitus, assistant coach Bob Jesse and the Mountaineers will enjoy a little of their well-deserved fame.

"At the beginning of the season, not many teachers (at Dallas) knew who I was," he said. "Now, I'm being congratulated all of the time. It's really nice, but it's all on the kids' shoulders. They're the ones who have been doing all the hard work

Dallas wrestle Kyle Hazleton battles Hanover Area's Steve Williamson during their 152-pound match.

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Dailey, Poepperling, Rutalis lead hoop teams to wins

Chris Dailey scored 36 points as Digital Print Services defeated Bishop Photo, 57-55, to pull into a three-way tie for first place in Dallas Youth Basketball's seventh and eighth grade boys division. Jordan Stephens added nine points and Tyler Patton chipped in eight. Gary Verazin and Hunter Englehart combined for 48 points to lead Bishop Photo. Tim Reinert added a basket.

Chris Ellis made four crucial free-throws in the last minute of the game as Dr. Jack Ellis edged Offset Paperback, 57-55, to pull into a tie for first place. Ellis led his team with 15 points, followed by Ryan McAndrew with 14 points and Kevin Muldoon with 11. Drew Schaub chipped in six points. Offset was led by Joey Murray's 19 points. Erik Cannon and Michael Diaco added 16 and eight points, respectively.

Marc Noyalis scored 32 points and Tyler Shutlock added 17 as D.J. Charlie Hayes topped McCarthy Tire, 58-42. Jacob Simon added four points for the winners. Austin Carr led McCarthy Tire with 19

points, followed by Kevin Gilbert with six points and Chris Clemson with four.

Griffin Adams scored a game-high 19 points and Michael Diaco added 12 as Offset Paperback ran past Karchner Refrigeration Service, 58-33. Andrew Ondish added seven points and D.J. Berley chipped in four for Offset. Karchner, which remained tied for first place despite the loss, was led by Tony Bevevino's nine points. Hayden Jenkins added eight, while Eric Baines and Scot Riccetti finished with five and four points, respectively.

Gary Verazin scored 23 points and Spencer Youngman chipped in seven to lead Bishop Photo to a 56-41 win against Quad Three Group. Brian Wise chipped in six points and Tim Reinert added two. Jimmy Brown led Quad with 18 points, followed by Dustin Siperko with 10 points and Jon Lando with eight.

Standings: Digital Print Services, 12-5; Dr. Jack Ellis, 12-5; Karchner Refrigeration, 11-5; Offset Paperback, 10-6; and Bishop Photo: 11-7.

7TH/8TH GRADE GIRLS

Jennifer Rutalis scored 11 points and Rachel Buckman added eight as Darling Graphic Designs posted a 35-30 in overtime win against Bishop Photo. Mikaela Pricher added seven points, while Taylor Millington and Katie Darling chipped in five and four points, respectively.

Bishop Photo battled back from a 14-point deficit in the fourth quarter and Sarah Konopki nailed a shot at the buzzer to send the game into overtime. Dana Krawetz led Bishop with 13 points, while Mary Kate Osick and Konopki added seven and six points, respectively.

Dana Krawetz scored 11 points and Mary Kate Osick added nine as Bishop Photo posted a 28-22 win against the Dallas Lions. Sarah Konopki and Neveen Siam added four points each. Taylor Dougherty led the Lions with nine points. Crystal



Jared Novitski scores for Ross Elementary during action in the Lake-Lehman PTO/PTA youth basketball league.

FOR THE POST/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

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