

Zito Express Is Right on Schedule

By TOM BATZOLD

John Zito may have been a prophet when he set some lofty goals for his wrestling career two years ago.

"I was just a scared freshman but I knew what I wanted to do," says Zito, East Rochester's unbeaten junior. "I wanted to go to the states as a sophomore and I wanted to win the state championship this year."

The first half of his goal was fulfilled last March when Zito represented Section 5 in the 177-pound weight class at the state tournament in Syracuse.

The second part will be more difficult, but Zito is by no means a long shot to become ER's third state champ. He's already won this year's County Meet, a top-flight tournament in Syracuse and surprised defending state champ Mike Varmette in the 167-pound title bout at the Canandaigua tournament last weekend.

"At the weigh-in Saturday morning a couple of guys told me I'd be going up against him," Zito says. "But I was confident. I watched one of his matches and saw he had the same basic style as I use. I knew I could beat him if I wrestled smart."

Zito won 3-2 after taking Varmette down with 40 seconds left in the match. Earlier in the day, he beat a wrestler who had placed fifth in last year's state meet.

"I really wasn't surprised," ER Coach Don Quinn says. "John's capable of beating anybody; I know I'd never bet against him. All he needed was experience in the big meets and he got a taste of it at the state meet last year. If you never get there, you might be in awe of some of those guys. But John found out they all put their pants on the same way."

Although he's unbeaten this season (16-0 including tournaments), Zito isn't taking anything for granted. He knows that just to qualify again for the states, he'll have to get by an old local nemesis — Fairport's Bob Kyff.

"We're pretty even, I'd say," says Zito, who's won just one of three matches against Kyff. "All those Fairport guys come over here two or three nights a week in the summer to wrestle so we've got each other's styles down pat. That makes it tough. He knows what I have and I know what he has."

The next meeting is scheduled for Feb. 11, when ER and Fairport clash in their annual showdown for County East supremacy. Kyff has won the last two years by identical 5-4 scores,



JOHN ZITO

... ER 167-pounder

but Zito came out on top by 3-2 in overtime when the two met for the County title last month.

"A lot will be decided that night," Quinn says. "I think one of them has to go up to 177 before the state qualifier. It would be foolish for one of them not to make it to the states."

Zito, now 40-2 over the past two seasons, would rather stay at 167 pounds. "I'm more comfortable here," he explains, "because my strength gives me an advantage. I can't do the same kinds of things at 177 because those guys are usually cutting weight from 185-190 pounds."

Actually, Zito wound up at 167 this year by accident. He weighed nearly 190 pounds during the summer but came down with mono just before the football season began and he lost 15 pounds.

"I was looking forward to having a decent (football) season but it never worked out that way," says Zito, a fullback.

He's also ER's shot put and discus specialist in track. The rest of the year Zito is a mat rat.

"I don't work (at a part-time job) because I don't have the time," says Zito, the oldest of nine children. "And I really don't have to do much around the house because I've always been involved in sports."

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