

Carter couldn't see his standing ovation

Blind wrestler wins Class C sectional title

By TOM FITZGERALD
D&C Sportswriter

Gerry Carter is a Section 5 wrestling champion who never has seen a single opponent.

By his own estimation, he wrestled "a pretty good match" to win the Class C sectional championship Saturday night in Arkport. The crowd was more impressed than he was with his performance. It gave him a standing ovation.

Carter is the area's only champion who goes to school at the New York State School for the Blind.

The 18-year-old Carter, blind since birth, has been attending the Batavia school since he was six.

Don Gugel, the school's wrestling coach, talked him into coming out for the team four years ago. Carter took a quick liking to the sport.

"I used to love beating up on people," he said with a laugh. "I kept telling Mr. Gugel I'd come out every year, but I didn't get serious about it until ninth grade."

The coach's problem this year was finding competition for the 6-foot-1, 247-pounder from Buffalo. There were only eight boys on the team, so the school had to wrestle at the junior varsity level in the Genesee-Orleans League.

Few of the schools had wrestlers in Carter's weight class, unlimited. So Carter has had only six official matches this year. He's won them all, including a 13-1 victory over Arkport's Al Carson in Saturday's championship bout.

Carter and coach Gugel say being blind is not much of a handicap.

"We use a touch start with the hands," said Gugel. "People who think he's at a disadvantage should see him for themselves. Wrestling is knowing your moves. I don't think sight has that much involvement."

Knowing where the out-of-bounds line is could be a problem, Gugel said, "but I don't teach kids to go out-of-bounds anyway. If he's getting close to the circle, I'll tell him to pull towards himself. And I might yell out how much time is left or what the score is."

Carter said if it wasn't for Gugel and other instructors at the school, "I might be sitting in the dorm getting fat."

Blindness is "not really a problem. I shoot quite a bit, as often as I can. Hopefully, I could coach a team of my own someday."

Before he went to the unlimited weight class this year, Carter was 38-6 his first three years. Opponents were

more plentiful when he didn't weigh as much.

He's had no problem finding players for pick-up basketball games at the school. "We've been playing in that gym so long, we can almost sense where the basket is," he said.

When Carter competes in the first round of state qualifying at Fairport High Friday, he'll have plenty of incentive.

"This is my last year of wrestling at the school," he said. "I plan to give it my all. I'd like to give the school something to remember me by."

Two torrid races enter the final week of the hockey season. Bishop Kearney (10-2-2) and Irondequoit (10-3-2) are tied with 22 points each in the North Division. Pittsford Mendon (12-2-1) and Pittsford Sutherland (12-2-1) are tied with 25 points in the Southern Division.

Irondequoit and Kearney face off Tuesday at Lakeshore Rinks at 7:15 p.m. If Irondequoit wins, Kearney would have to beat Brighton the next night to tie for the championship. Mendon meets McQuaid Wednesday and Sutherland meets Webster Thursday in their final games.



D&C photo by Talis Bergmanis

Bishop Kearney's Rory Legacy had Trev Graham in a predicament in 94-pound class Saturday.

Another heated race is for the third and fourth place in the Southern Division. Brighton, McQuaid and Penfield could end in a three-way tie for third place. If they do, a coin flip will determine the third place team, and the other two teams will play off Friday at Lakeshore. If two of the three teams tie for fourth place, the

two will play off Friday to determine the final berth in the post-season tournament, which begins Saturday.

NOTEBOOK: The City-Catholic League had only two sectional wrestling champions this year. Rory Legacy of Bishop Kearney won the Class AAA 94-pound title, and Darrell Leslie of Madison won the Class AA

119-pound title. Spencerport's Shane Graham was released from Strong Memorial Hospital after suffering a concussion in the AAA semifinals. Hilton's 62-49 loss to Edison Tech in the basketball sectionals ended the playing career of one of the area's outstanding shooters, Matt DiBiase.