

They Call Him 'Superman' on the Mat

The Only Thing ER's John Zito Can't Do Is Fly

By TOM BATZOLD

The scene is still implanted clearly in John Zito's mind.

He was wrestling Long Island's Ed Banach in the 167-pound finals in the state tournament last March and the crowd at the Syracuse War Memorial was screaming loudly. In the final period, Banach was clinging to a 5-4 lead.

"I made one mistake near the end of the match," Zito recalls. "I couldn't see the overhead scoreboard and I thought time was running out so I went for broke. He (Banach) turned it into a 5-pointer. It turned out there were still 30 seconds left."

Zito wound up losing 10-5 — his only loss of the season — and had to settle for second place. Now, with Banach off with the big boys at the University of Iowa, everybody expects Zito to become the state champion this season.

"Nothing he does this year will surprise me," says Irondequoit coach Art Connorton. "I'm just surprised no one offered him the part of Superman in that new movie."

Zito, a 5-10 senior with a rock-like body, is that good. As a junior, he won his first 33 matches, including the county and sectional titles, and then he tuned up for the current season by winning a gold medal at the Empire State Games and placing sixth in the Junior National AAU meet last summer.

"I'm improved," Zito said before yesterday's practice. "I went to a tournament practically every weekend last summer and I didn't see anyone in my weight class who worked as hard as I did."

He warmed up this fall by playing fullback and defensive end on ER's football team, top-ranked in the state, and although he was one of the area's top players, he couldn't wait for the season to end.

"We had a great season but there was too much pressure on the team," he says. "As the season went on, it wasn't enough to just win. We had to win big. I just wanted to get it over with as soon as possible. Now I'm into my sport."

Zito's style on the mat is non-stop aggression. "I'm an offensive wrestler," he says. "I'm going to go out this season and try to get a pin every match. I don't know if it's possible but we'll see what happens."

Zito sets his goals high but he doesn't brag. He knows he's good

and simply lets his performance speak for itself.

"The one thing I know I don't have to worry about with John is him getting a big head," ER coach Don Quinn says.

ER opened its season with a 65-2 rout of Pittsford Sutherland last weekend but Zito won by forfeit and decided to jog back to East Rochester just to get a workout. He also runs two miles before school every morning and usually winds up running another three or four miles after practice every night.

"That's the kind of kid he is," Quinn says. "He's hard-working but he's also got the physical tools and the brains to go with it. That's not a bad threesome to have going for you."

Ultimately, that combination should mean a full college scholarship. Zito has already been approached by collegiate powers such as Arizona, Oklahoma State, Syracuse, Georgia and North Carolina and the list will grow longer by March.

"I want a school with a good wrestling program but my education will come first," says Zito, a 90-student and a member of the National Honor Society. "I wouldn't mind warm weather, either."

Or the state title.



Times-Union photo — Bob Gapsky

Zito says he is improved over last year when he won 33 matches before losing in state finals.

Wrestlers To Watch

98 Pounds — Larry Kane, Penfield, junior; Doug Court, Churchville-Chili, sophomore; Mike Brien, East Rochester, senior.

105 Pounds — Tony Cotroneo, Irondequoit, sophomore; Steve Burton, Hilton, junior; Jeff Bumbarger, Churchville-Chili, sophomore; Silas Ussery, Madison, senior; Bill Howard, R-H Sperry, sophomore.

112 Pounds — Rob Starkweather, McQuaid, senior; Tim Lehmann, Irondequoit, sophomore; Trevor Graham, Spencerport, sophomore; Tony Fidele, Athena, senior.

119 Pounds — Rory Legacy, Spencerport, senior; Steve Levine, Brighton, senior; Chris Kellman, Hilton, senior; Romeo Battazzi, East Rochester, senior; Chris Nakis, R-H Sperry, senior; Bob Aroa, Fairport, junior; Andy Springer, McQuaid, junior; Danny Pleniaszek, Athena, junior.

126 Pounds — Carl Tandoi, Spencerport, senior; Neil Thomas, Churchville-Chili, senior; John Scott, McQuaid, senior; Jimmy Russo, Athena, senior; Ralph Matsko, Brockport, senior.

132 Pounds — Gary Curwin, Brighton, senior; Al Rossner, Hilton, senior; Mark Knopp, Schroeder, senior.

138 Pounds — Mike LaRocca, Gates-Chili, senior; Scott Gilman,

Fairport, senior; Dave Schneider, Irondequoit, senior; Joe Morone, Edison, senior; Jim Gaden, Hilton, senior; John Irvine, Brockport, senior.

145 Pounds — Tony Bruno, Brockport, senior; George Eblacker, Hilton, senior; Tom Lehmann, Irondequoit, senior; Scott Trainor, Churchville-Chili, junior; Bob McMullen, Spencerport, senior.

155 Pounds — Paul Salamone, Irondequoit, senior; Dennis Essom, East Rochester, senior; Chuck Pignato, Schroeder, senior; Lem Rogers, McQuaid, senior.

167 Pounds — John Zito, East Rochester, senior; Mike Paternoster, Athena, senior; Jon Campo, Irondequoit, senior; Don Faller, Olympia, senior.

177 Pounds — Phil Lanzatella, McQuaid, senior; Mark Everts, Brighton, senior; John Mahar, East, senior; Joe Prestigiacomo, Athena, senior.

Heavyweight — Doug Wheeler, Churchville-Chili, senior; Vince Baiaomonte, McQuaid, senior; Mark DeStefano, Thomas, senior; Paul Gibson, Irondequoit, senior; Rick Sidor, East Rochester, senior; Scott Koch, Olympia, senior; Mark Vanderkarr, Brockport, senior.

Super Heavyweight — Wally Vaughan, Fairport, senior.