

King of the hill

Gillespie scores a sweet NCAA title



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Former Webster Schroeder wrestler Gregor Gillespie had the right "mat-itude" at the NCAA Division I championships Saturday night.

The Edinboro (Pa.) University sophomore knew the vast majority of the spectators at The Palace in suburban Detroit would be pulling for University of Michigan junior Josh Churella. And he realized that if he paid attention to their jeers and cat-calls, his back and his dreams would end up being pinned to the mat.

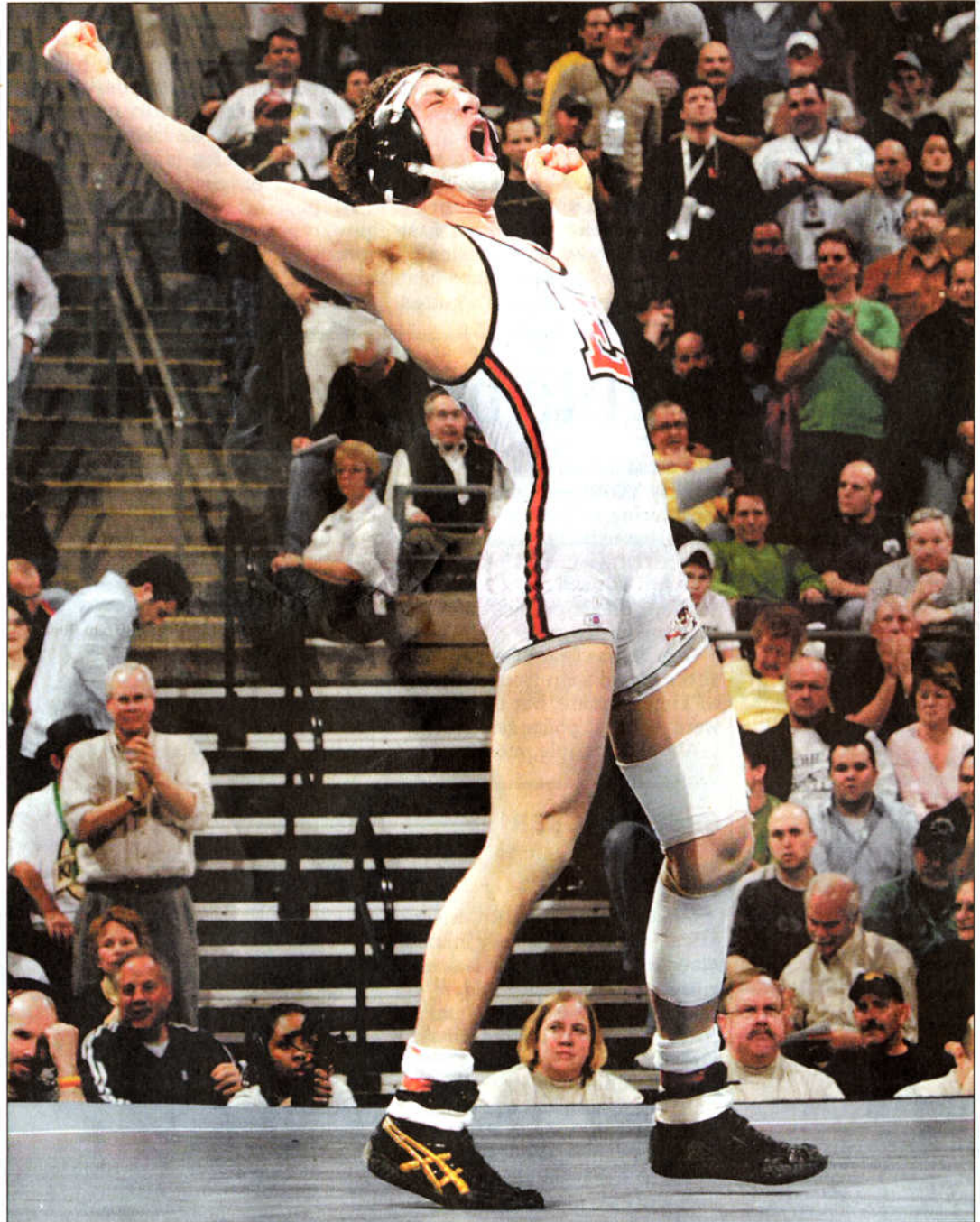
So after he shook hands with Churella to begin the match, Gillespie's focus on winning became so keen and so intense that he heard nothing the rest of the way. It was as if he had inserted Dick Vitale-proof ear-plugs.

It wasn't until he watched a tape Monday of his dramatic 3-1 overtime victory in the 149-pound weight class that the fifth-seeded wrestler realized how hostile the environment had been.

"I saw that they had been really loud," said Gillespie, the first wrestler from the Rochester area ever to win a Division I title. "It's probably a good thing I didn't hear anything while I was out there on the mat, because we were really outnumbered."

What he did hear moments after his decisive takedown in overtime was the public address announcer saying his name and the words "national champion."

"I like the sound of that," Gillespie said Monday via cell phone from the Edinboro campus. "But it still feels a little strange. It hasn't really sunk in yet."



JULIAN H. GONZALEZ Detroit Free Press

Edinboro's Gregor Gillespie, a sophomore from Webster Schroeder, became the first Section V wrestler to win an NCAA Division I championship when he upset Michigan's Josh Churella on Saturday night.

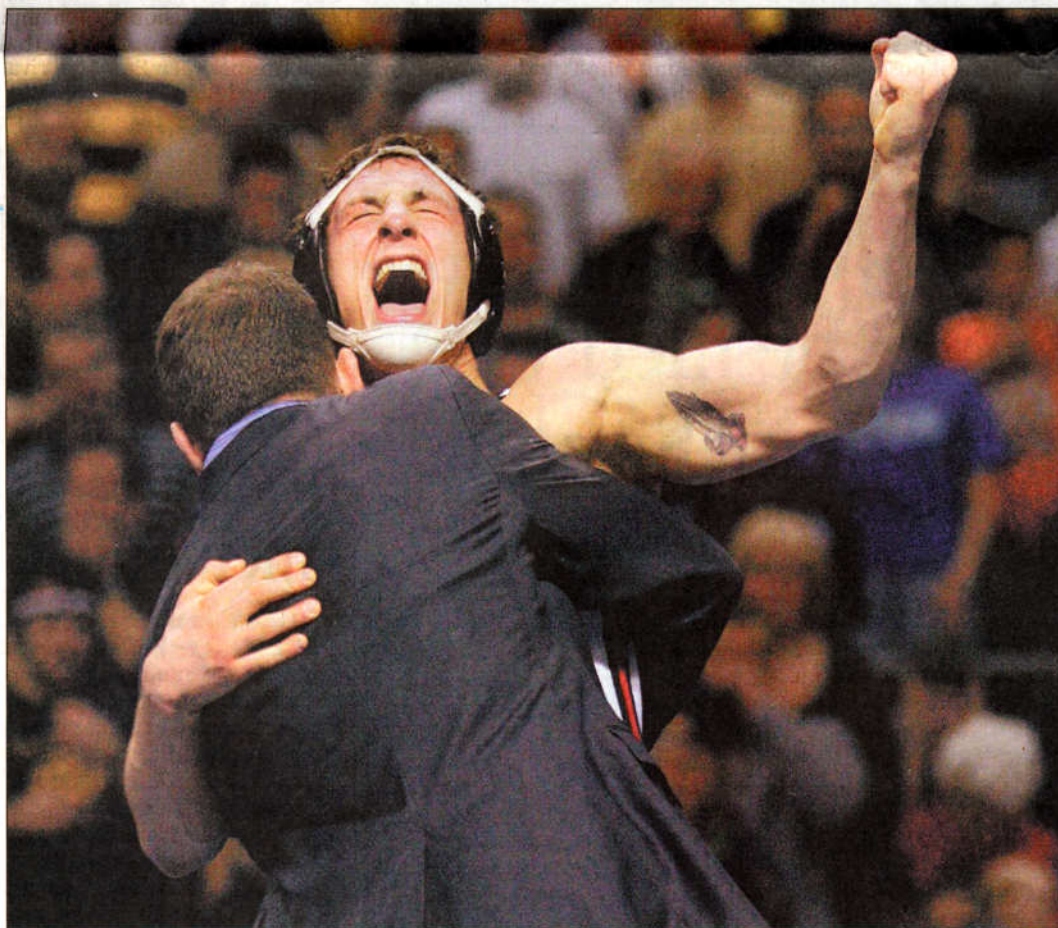
The championship, which improved his sophomore season record to 34-2, was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. His

father, Brad Gillespie, introduced him to the sport when Gregor was just 5. Brad had been an outstanding wrestler himself at

Bath-Haverling High School and went on to earn All-America

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"I didn't want to just compete for a championship. I wanted to win one."



DUANE BURLESON The Associated Press

"It still feels a little strange. It hasn't really sunk in," says Gregor Gillespie, who won the 149-pound NCAA wrestling championship for Edinboro University on Saturday.

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honors at Corning Community College.

Gregor took to the sport immediately and was so advanced that he began wrestling on the varsity as a seventh-grader. He finished third in the state the next year, was second as a freshman and won his first of two titles as a sophomore.

Edinboro coach Tim Flynn became aware of Gillespie while watching a tape of the 2002 New York state wrestling championships during Gregor's sophomore season at Webster Schroeder.

"I was focusing on the upper-classmen when I heard the announcer say Gregor's name and mentioned that he was interested in attending Edinboro," Flynn recalled. "That obviously got my attention. The kid was on my radar screen after that, and the more I saw of him, the more I liked him. He's extremely fast and tough and intelligent, and he's a great kid away from the mat. It's a thrill to have a young man like that

fall into your lap."

Gillespie went 40-4 as a freshman, establishing an Edinboro record for most victories by a first-year wrestler while earning All-America honors.

Those precocious achievements prompted stratospheric expectations for Gillespie heading into this season.

"I expect him to compete for a national championship," Flynn told reporters before the first practice. "Anything less would be a disappointment."

Gillespie didn't feel any additional pressure as a result of his coach's bold comments. In fact, Gregor himself nudged the bar even higher.

"I didn't want to just compete for a championship," he said. "I wanted to win one."

Though he played soccer and lacrosse growing up and enjoyed those sports, wrestling appealed more to him because it was an individual endeavor.

"It's just you and the guy you are competing against — nobody else," he said. "If you lose, you have no one to blame but yourself. You can't say someone missed a block or didn't get you the ball. And if you win, it's because you made the right

Gregor Gillespie

Age: 19.

High School: Webster Schroeder, 2005.

College: Edinboro (Pa.) University.

Weight class: 149.

Wrestling achievements:

Two-time New York state champ in high school. ... won NCAA Division I championship Saturday in Auburn Hills, Mich. ... two-time All-American. ... 74-6 record in first two years.

All in the family: His dad, Brad Gillespie, was an All-American at Corning CC. ... Younger brother Torsten is a high school senior who finished third in the state this season.

Aspirations: Hopes to coach wrestling on the college level.

Major: Undeclared, but is leaning toward psychology.

moves out there and gutted it out. There's a great sense of individual accomplishment, not just physically but also mentally and emotionally."

And Saturday's victory was even sweeter, knowing it was achieved in a hostile environment that Gillespie was able to tune out. □