

## ESG — Gymnastics

## Repeat a tall order for Western



Williamsville's Kristina Arcury placed third on all-around and beam for the Western Region women's open gymnastics team.

File photo

by MATT KRUEGER  
Reporter

The Western Region will be hard-pressed to match last year's performance when it returns to the Empire State Games this week in Westchester County.

Western won all four divisions by whopping margins practically unheard-of in gymnastics. The scholastic women, scholastic men, open women and open men combined to win four gold medals by 24 and a half points over the nearest competition. Usually, the difference between first and second place is a matter of fractions of a point. But Western made the other five regions look like minor leaguers.

"It builds expectations," men's coach Dan Molnar said of winning so easily. "We're always looking to win. It's hard for us to go down there. We know there are other good clubs and other good gymnasts out there. But when you win all the time, you want to keep that up. You want to keep winning. You want to keep doing well. There are expectations on the coaching and the gymnasts."

While the expectations and hopes are there on the team, many of the kids who helped Western win last year are gone. The open women's team lost Emily Green, Sarah Moore and Jenna Raepple, all of whom placed in the top five in the all-around competition. The open men are without Karl Jaanimagi and Matt Long. The scholastic women's team lost Deanna Favero and had

Kayla Gray and Kailyn Arcury move up to open.

"Last year, we were pretty loaded in scholastic and open (women) and we won by pretty wide margins," open women's coach Kurt Stumpf said. "This year, if we win, it will be very, very close."

Here's a look at each division:

#### Scholastic Women

The Western team has a much different look this year, as only Buffalo's Kaitlyn Lopez returns from last year. Lopez finished third in the all-around.

She's joined by newcomers Erin Hamister of Orchard Park, Nicole Radon and Kelsey Kryszak of Hamburg, Chelsea Recor and Mary Hamilton of Lancaster, and Andrea Favero of Youngstown.

"We should do well," Stumpf said. "It's just a matter of if you can be consistent and trying to be well-balanced on all four events."

#### Scholastic Men

Cheektowaga's Aaron Benson came up four points short of winning the all-around title last year, finishing with a 52.2. New York City's John Orozco won with a 56.2.

That loss has motivated Benson, who also took second on rings and floor, to chase down the title this year.

"I think I've improved very much in a couple events, because I worked on form and added a few new skills," he said. "I really want to try to win this year, because I have a very good shot. Hopefully, I can succeed in my goal."

Grand Island's Jimmy Pezzino is also back from his fifth-place

all-around finish and is joined by Williamsville's Nate Roberson, Cody Stumpf and Noah Roberson and Clarence's Michael Wozniak and Adam Arena.

#### Open Women

Lancaster's Courtney Connors tops the team this year after she placed first at the tryouts. She won a silver medal on floor last year.

"I feel pretty comfortable going into the games," Connors said. "I just want to hit 4-for-4 and have fun."

She'll get plenty of help from Williamsville's Kristina Arcury and Kailyn Arcury, Penfield's Alexandra Kourbatova, Sanborn's Nicole Irving, Grand Island's Raepple and Buffalo's Gray. Kristina Arcury finished third in the all-around and on beam last year, while Raepple was fifth all-around.

#### Open Men

Keith Stumpf of Williamsville leads the way for the team, after winning the pommel horse; taking third on the horizontal bar, floor exercise and vault; and placing sixth in the all-around competition last year.

Rounding out the young roster are East Amherst's Michael Morse, Webster's Adam Marou, Buffalo's Kenneth Byrd, Depew's Cory Kowalski and Joe Conti, and Clarence's Joseph Lysen.

"Open this year is going to be super-tough," Molnar said. "I hope we can go out there and win, but they're going to have to have perfect routines this year. They're going to have to really hit."

e-mail: mkrueger@beenews.com

## ESG — Wrestling

## Scholastic features several new faces, open returns Mariachers

by PATRICK J. NAGY  
Reporter

This year's Western scholastic wrestling team features many new up and coming athletes ready to make their mark while the open team fields a veteran pair of twin brothers looking to continue their success at the Empire State Games.

#### Scholastic

For Cheektowaga's Russell Wojtusiak, the ESGs is an opportunity for redemption.

The soon-to-be senior tried out for the scholastic team last year but did not make the roster. Determined to make it this year, Wojtusiak wrestled as much as he could during the offseason at Super Six Wrestling Club at the University at Buffalo and took sixth in a 135-pound Greco Roman tournament in late spring.

All of Wojtusiak's hard work paid off as he qualified for ESGs in the 64 kilogram (143 pounds) freestyle and Greco Roman divisions.

"I was real excited and happy that my hard work finally paid off," said Wojtusiak, who finished 23-15 at 130 pounds this past winter for Cheektowaga Central. "It meant a lot and gave myself more confidence."

The same goes for Clarence's Josh Feiler, who makes his ESG debut in the 59 kilogram (132 pounds) freestyle. The senior-to-be at Clarence said he didn't make the team last year but was really determined to make the Western roster not only for himself but for his high school coach, Jon Vesper, who died on March 30.

"He really wanted me to go and wrestle at 132 pounds," said Feiler, who finished 30-10 and qualified for the Section VI tournament this past winter. "At ESG tryouts, I could hear him talking to me when I was wrestling. I felt like I was wrestling

for him and myself."

Another reason Feiler would like to participate in the Games is to follow in the footsteps of former high school teammates, Alex Siedlecki and Dan Audy, who took silver and bronze, respectively, in the 70 kilogram (154 pounds) and 59 kilogram (132 pounds) freestyle divisions in 2005.

"It would mean a great deal for me to carry on the tradition and win a medal," said Feiler.

Other newcomers to the scholastic team are East Amherst's P.J. Abbarno (75 kilogram, 165 pounds, freestyle), East Aurora's Arthur Garvey (125 kilogram, 275 pounds, freestyle and open), Williamsville's Robert Hamilton (64 kilogram, 143 pounds, Greco Roman), Marilla's Joseph Kalinka (48 kilogram, 106 pounds, freestyle) and Tonawanda's Jeremy Ruiz (55 kilogram, 123 pounds, Greco Roman).

Abbarno, a soon-to-be senior, had a 29-8 record with nine pins at 160 pounds for Williamsville North. He also won the Williamsville North and Depew Wildcat tournaments, took third at the Class AAAA tourney and third at the Section VI New York State qualifier. In addition, Abbarno was a 160-pound ECIC Division I and All-ECIC all-star.

Garvey, a soon-to-be senior, took third in the Class AA tournament and second at the Section VI state qualifier for 275 as a member of East Aurora. He received an at-large bid for the Division II state tournament.

Hamilton, a member of St. Mary's of Lancaster's team, took fourth at 119 at the state Catholic High School Championships. Kalinka, a soon-to-be sophomore at Iroquois, won the Class AAA tournament at 96 and took third at the Section VI state qualifier.

Returning scholastic wrestlers include East Aurora's Nicholas Czapla (75 kilo-

gram, 165 pounds, freestyle and Greco Roman) and Mark Manganaro (59 kilogram, 132 pounds, Greco Roman).

Czapla, the reigning Section VI champion at 152 pounds, is also a defending champion at the ESGs, taking gold last year in the 70 kilogram (154 pounds) Greco Roman division. The senior-to-be at East Aurora was also fifth at the same weight class in freestyle with a 3-2 record. Manganaro went 1-2 last year in the 55 kilogram (123 pounds). The Iroquois junior-to-be finished fourth at 125 at the Class AAA tournament.

#### Open

The open team is highlighted by twin brothers Lucas and Reece Mariacher of Elma.

Both will compete in the 69 kilogram (152 pounds) Greco Roman open division. Lucas is also scheduled to compete in the 69-kilogram freestyle.

Their younger brother, Matt was scheduled to make his first appearance on the open team in the 63 kilogram (139 pounds) freestyle and Greco Roman divisions, but instead will be at a camp training with his college team at American University in Washington, D.C. Matt Mariacher capped off an undefeated senior season with a New York State championship at 130 pounds. John Bonaldi of Greece-Olympia is replacing him at the Games.

The Mariachers, all Iroquois grads, are no stranger to the ESGs. In 2005, Lucas defeated Reece for the scholastic 64 kilogram (143 pounds) gold medal in Greco Roman. That same year, Reece won the scholastic freestyle title, also at 64-kilogram, and Matt won the scholastic 59 kilogram (132 pounds) in Greco Roman.

Lucas and Reece finished fourth and fifth, respectively, in the open 69 kilograms (152 pounds).

"I hope to do a lot better," said Lucas Mariacher, a soon-to-be sophomore at Arizona State University. "Last year, I was wrestling at 135 during the season and the weight class I wrestled at Empires was 152 so I was kind of small. This year I filled out and actually lost weight to make 152. Getting a little bigger will be an advantage for me."

Lucas Mariacher said there's a chance he could face Reece in a medal round match but would rather face another competitor.

"I've never won a gold medal besides beating my brother," said Lucas Mariacher. "It would be nice to beat a different opponent for it... If we were to meet, it would be a nice rematch. Two years ago, I ended up pinning him but it was pretty close. Maybe he wants revenge. We'll see."

"I'm not sure what would happen (if there was a rematch)," said Reece, who finished 20-8 at Brockport State College this past fall. "I've never won a gold medal in the open division."

Also competing in open is Amherst's Thomas Lester, a 2005 Amherst grad and soon-to-be sophomore at Oswego State College. Lester will wrestle in the 97 kilogram (213 pounds) freestyle division. He took fourth place in the scholastic 100 kilogram (220 pounds) in 2005.

"I've never wrestled open before so I have no idea whose going to be there which makes it more exciting because in scholastic, you know it's all going to be high school kids," said Lester, who finished with 77 career wins at Amherst. "Now I could go up against anybody."

Competition gets underway on Thursday at Mount Saint Michael Academy, 4300 Murdoch Ave., Bronx.

e-mail: pnagy@beenews.com