

ESG — Weightlifting

Veteran Silvestro returns after long layoff

by JASON NADOLINSKI
Reporter

To say that Western Region weightlifting coach Steven Titus is optimistic about his team's chances would actually be a bit of an understatement.

Titus fully expects his 2008 squad to not just contend for, but claim the team gold medal, and he is also confident that all eight of the lifters have a very legitimate shot at bringing home individual medals as well.

That's what happens when your roster is as loaded as Western's. "This year's team is far and away the best that I've been able to put together," said Titus, who works with a number of Western's lifters at the Steel Mill Gym in Lackawanna. "We took silver last year after getting team gold in 2006, and we fully expect to bring home the team gold this year.

There's definitely a chance that all eight of our lifters can walk out of this competition with medals."

Titus personally coaches half of Western's roster outside of the Games — mainly for regional and national competitions — so he had a fairly good idea of what he could expect from his roster even before it was officially compiled.

"I was never that good of a lifter myself when I started the sport about a decade ago, but I absolutely loved the sport, so I started learning as much as I could about it because I knew I'd eventually coach," Titus said. "So now, I go with about half of this year's team, the ones I coach outside of the Games, to other meets nationally. I train those guys about three or four times a week. With the rest of the team from the Games, the ones I don't train on a regular basis, I've just offered more of a

guiding hand to this point."

Weightlifting at the Empire State Games is Olympic style, meaning competitors will complete the snatch and the clean and jerk lifts. Titus emphasized that leg strength is a definite necessity in order to excel at the sport, so aside from the specific techniques that go along with each lift, he's been having his lifters work pretty heavily on their leg strength to prepare for the Games.

"You've got to have strong legs to be an Olympic lifter, no doubt about it," Titus said. "You've got to be able to squat heavy to be a good Olympic lifter."

Like just about every sport, there aren't too many things that will trump experience when it comes to performance, which is why Titus is extremely confident going into Binghamton Thursday. Western has either former or defending medalists in nearly every weight class, which will only bolster the squad's chances at achieving its goal of a team gold.

Lancaster native Michael Graber is hoping for a triumphant return in the 62-kilogram weight class after missing last summer's Games while finishing his MBA program at the University at Buffalo. This will be Graber's sixth Games appearance in seven years, and he's hoping to add to his collection of medals despite having not really lifted as much as he'd like to have over the past two years. Before taking off last year's Games, Graber had won four consecutive gold medals to go along

with a silver in his first year of competing.

"Steve's done a good job of getting me back into shape," Graber said. "I've been training three days a week with about an hour to 90 minutes of Olympic lifting each session, so I've gotten a lot of my strength back. I'm a lot leaner than I was even a year ago too, so I think I'm ready to go. I'm in good physical shape and the technique is there, so I feel pretty confident that I should win my weight class."

One of the more interesting weight classes should be the 77-kilogram division, since Western has the defending gold and silver medalists in Buffalo's Jonas Westbrook and Cheektowaga's Mark Miskovski, respectively. Miskovski is a prime example of what hard work and dedication can do; after a last-place finish in 2006, he powered his way to a second-place finish in Westchester County in 2007.

"I've coached Mark personally for five years, and he's made great improvements in that time," Titus said. "He placed sixth at junior nationals a month or so ago, so hopefully he'll hit some bigger lifts at the Games and open some eyes."

West Seneca's Jill Burzynski is another of Western's returning lifters from 2007. While she finished out of the running for a medal, Titus is optimistic that she'll have a better finish this week.

"This is Jill's second year going to the Games," Titus said. "Her

older brother was a former heavy-weight, and she wound up picking up the sport and really liking it."

East Amherst's Kurt Silvestro is also a returning lifter, though he hasn't been on the team in a while. Still, Titus is impressed with what Silvestro can do and is looking forward to working with him at the Games.

"Kurt is the seasoned veteran of the team and he's just a great guy," Titus said. "He came out of nowhere and qualified, so I'm really looking forward to working with him. All of his experience will make me a much better coach."

Titus was going to have his team go through a few final practices in the days leading up to the Games, but at this point, he's not going to push his athletes too hard down the stretch. For now, the focus will be on reclaiming the team gold.

"We've got a few workouts left, but otherwise we're going to relax and try to stay fresh," Titus said. "You're not going to get any stronger in the last 10 days before a meet, so we're just going to rest so we can go down there and have fun. We plan to go down there and win."

"After losing the team medal last year, we want to get those bragging rights back again," Graber said. "I feel very good about our team. I think we should contend for at least five individual gold medals."

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New

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Nichols and for the Buffalo Bisons 19U team so far, so I'm hoping this will be similar to tournaments like we play with the Bisons."

Faso, who also plays for the 19U Bisons, was encouraged, like the rest of her Bison teammates, to try out for the Games, but she was actually surprised to make the roster. But, now that she is on the team, Faso is thinking this could be a helpful bit of scouting for the high school season, among other things.

"Our coach wanted us to all try out, so I thought, 'I'll go out there and have fun,'" Faso said. "I didn't really think I was going to make the team because there are a lot of really good kids on the team. A lot of the kids from Rochester have a lot of good skill, so you just try to keep up with them. I'll be playing against them during the season, so it's nice to get a feel for how they play."

One Buffalo-based player who doesn't attend Nichols is Mount St. Mary sophomore-to-be Emily Terranova. A goalie who only started playing the position four years ago, Terranova also took her 19U Bisons coach's advice and tried out for the Western team. Much to her surprise, she also made the team.

"I've never really been coached as a goalie before; when I first started playing, it was just as a house goalie, just for fun," Terranova said. "I kind of developed the skills on my own, and I've gotten better through help. So when I showed up here, it was like, 'Whoa, I have some big competition.' I had to step up my game to even be close to making the team. Beating out nine or 10 other goalies to get this position really boosted my confidence."

While the exact schedule for the Games was not available at press time, it's pretty apparent that Western isn't about to take anyone lightly.

"I think if we do what we're doing and practice, and do those things well, we should do pretty good at the tournament," Matecki said. "I think we've got a pretty good idea of what to expect thanks to the girls who've played in the Games before."

"I'm looking forward to the challenge," Terranova said. "I like going up against the best. It's just having to keep up with that faster level of play. This team has better shooters than I've seen anywhere else. It's more of a boom-boom-boom thing. It's intense."

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Western

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Schneider leaves St. Joe's as the school's leader in single-season goals, single-season points, and career points. He will report August 22 to the Mahoning Valley Phantoms in the North American Hockey League, a Tier 2 Junior "A" team in Youngstown, Ohio.

Schneider tallied three goals and four assists for Western last year.

Komm is slotted as Western's No. 1 goaltender after playing behind former Sweet Home star Derek Mohney in 2007. Komm started twice, making 11 saves in an 11-0 win over New York City, and 22 saves in a 6-4 victory over Long Island.

"Even if you're backing someone up, you go in with the same mindset — to be prepared to win every game if called upon," said Komm. "As a veteran, I know I have to step up my game and show some of the rookies how it's done to keep us rolling."

Komm finished with a 1.60 goals against average, a 92 save percentage, and a 16-7-2 record for Williamsville North last winter. He will repeat his junior year this fall with the Northfield Mt. Hermon prep team in Massachusetts. He will also be playing travel hockey with the

Greater Boston League Bruins. Hamburg's John Cullen will also see time between the pipes.

Two of Komm's former high school teammates, Williamsville's Nick Angelo and Nick Fronczak, make their ESG debuts.

Angelo, a forward, scored 14 goals and added 19 assists while Fronczak, an All-Western New York defenseman, tallied three goals and 13 assists for Williamsville North. Both are going to be seniors in high school.

Players making their ESG debuts at forward are East Amherst's Matthew Grazen, Orchard Park's Adrean Copeland, East Aurora's Tyler Underhill, Grand Island's Ryan White, Pittsford's Stu Wilson and Rochester's John Padulo, Michael Conderman, and Brant Sherwood.

Debuting on defense are East Aurora's Tyler Matecki, Batavia's Ian Chapman, Lewiston's Hayden Fitzpatrick, and Rochester's Nick Padulo.

Grazen, who played his sophomore year at Clarence feels Western is the best crop of talent he's ever played with.

"Our forwards are really quick," said Grazen, who will only play this upcoming year for the Buffalo Regals 18U.

Kensington Lions 33rd annual football classic set

ADPRO SPORTS will be presenting the 33rd annual Kensington Lions Club All-Star High School Football Classic at 7 p.m., Wednesday, July 30, at North Tonawanda High School, 405 Meadow Drive.

Players must have graduated from high school to be eligible to play in the game.

Among the North team representatives are Amherst's Viron Hale; Cardinal O'Hara's Jackie Feggans and Reggie Garner; Clarence's Matthew Krumm and Greg Stevens; St. Joe's Collegiate Institute's Jon Rossi; Kenmore West's Chuck Savasta and Randolph Diamond; Sweet Home's Marcus Johnson and Nick Christman; Williamsville East's Zach Stubbendeck and Tyler Durinka; Williamsville North's Josh Barrett and Andy Steinhaus; and

Williamsville South's Anthony Erbacher.

The North team is coached by Grand Island's Dean Santorio with assistants Mike Staufer and Steve Steck, both of Grand Island, Burgard's Jason Kolb and Clarence's Tom Goddard.

Among the South team representatives are Cheektowaga's Adam Piscitello and Jake Haver-nick; Cleveland Hill's James Griffin and Michael Golombek; Depew's Greg Osika, Jon Bayerl and Kevin Dudkowski; East Aurora's Shane Biggs; Iroquois' Paul Evans, Tommy Lewis and Josh Jesonowski; John F. Kennedy's Mike Bartoszek and Chris Scharf; Lancaster's Marcellus Jones; Maryvale's Nick Nolder and Tim Kopp; Orchard Park's Joe Leavell and Randy Bloom; St. Mary's of Lancast-

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"We have some of the best goalies and it seems like we're scoring on them a lot in practice."

Matecki, a soon-to-be senior at St. Francis, said making the team after getting cut last year, is a great honor.

"It's going to be a test playing against older players, some my age, some older, because the older kids are a little bit faster and stronger," said Matecki.

Matecki will play on the Buffalo Junior Sabres this year after playing last year for the St. Francis prep team.

Western opens with Adirondack at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday at Broome Community College in Binghamton. Western will also play Hudson Valley at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, New York City at noon and Long Island at 8:30 p.m. on Saturday, and Central at noon on Sunday.

"All of the teams are gunning for us," said Owczarczk, a senior-to-be at West Seneca West. "We've got big shoes to fill. We're shooting for gold. We don't want anything less."

"We want to make sure we bring that baby back for a ninth consecutive time," said Carriere.

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