

RECRUITING

More state champs give Fair hope of grabbing NCAA wrestling title

By RANDY PETTITT
Chronicle Sports Editor

Mel Fair walked away from wrestling once and never thought he'd ever return.

But thanks to the persistence of an energetic high school coach, Fair returned to practice a few days later and eventually grew to love the sport. Three years after that fateful return, he finished 33-0 and won the North Carolina state championship at 145 pounds.

Realizing he was too little for football and an unlikely college basketball prospect at 5-8, the fiery High Point Andrews High School graduate figured wrestling would continue to be his claim to fame.

Fair went on to an outstanding college career at North Carolina A&T, where his aggressive style and determination made him the first freshman captain of the squad in the history of the school.

Now as the head coach of the wrestling program at Winston-Salem State University, the three-time All-Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference pick has virtually put WSSU on the college wrestling map. In just his third season, Fair and the youthful Rams have brought home a Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association championship.

His goals, however, stretch much further.

"I want to bring a national championship to Winston-Salem State in wrestling," says Fair, who's wrestlers are still in the shadow of WSSU's highly successful football and basketball programs.

"We won't be settled with just winning the CIAA championship next season," he said. "Our goals reach much higher than that. We want more people in the finals of the Division II Tournament. We want all 10 of our guys in the finals of the CIAA Tournament."

To back up those ambitions, Fair has hit the recruiting trail and is looking at 11 high school prospects, all of whom were at least third-place finishers in state tournaments. Though the WSSU coach says all of them aren't fully committed, seven of the prospects were state champions.

"We like to go after the best in-state kids we can get," said Fair.

Willie Melvin and Brendell Davis, both of 71st High School, and Jerry Hill of Byrd High School are three state champs from Fayetteville who are among Fair's hopes.

Chris Sanders of High Point Andrews, Rufus Erwin of Brevard High School, Ocie Jackson of Northern Durham High School and Jon Bullins of Madison-Mayodan High School are the other state champs looking strongly at WSSU. Brian Brewington, Michael Jackson and Jeffrey Carter -- all from Fayetteville -- join Corey

and I didn't give up on it."

The next season, Fair landed several top prospects and found himself with a team full of state champions.

The Rams didn't win the CIAA that year, but they did finish second and had a respectable 7-6 season.

"I don't have the money to go out of state," he explained.

"So I figured the best chance I had was to get as many top wrestlers from North Carolina as possible. I wasn't even looking at anyone unless they finished at least third in the state."

Beyond his practice of attracting only top prospects, Fair says his ten starting spots are wide open every year.

"I don't care if it's a freshman or a senior starting. The best kid at their weight class is going to be the one wrestling for me."

"I'll give a marginal kid a chance, but he has to work. I don't care if the kid doesn't have but one leg. If he's the best I've got and works hard, then he's going to wrestle for me."

Recruiting on little or no budget is tough for small schools, but Fair is a master of selling the program and the university.

"We won't be settled with just winning the CIAA championship next season. Our goals reach much higher than that."

**-- Mel Fair
WSSU Wrestling Coach**

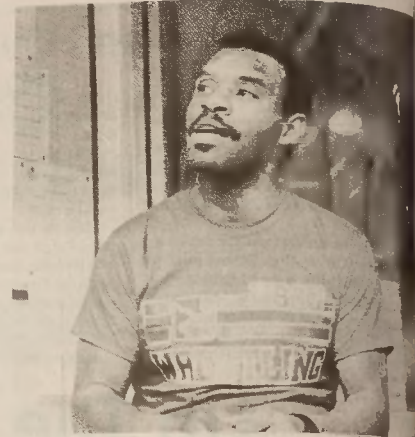
Woody of Durham on the impressive recruiting list.

With little money, no scholarships and nothing to offer but the chance to compete and get an education, Fair uses an in-state recruiting approach. His formula is a proven success, too.

"I'm not used to losing," said the Ram mentor, who never had a losing season as a competitor or coach until he arrived at WSSU.

"We were 3-12 my first year here. I took losing pretty hard at first."

"But then I realized it would take some time to get things started



WSSU Wrestling Coach Mel Fair has hit the recruiting trail again. He has 11 top prospects on his latest shopping list (file photo).

"Football and basketball are always going to have the kids mesmerized, but wrestling might be the only way to compete in college for some kids. I've been in those shoes. All I can do is sell what we've got to offer."

He says wrestling has improved in popularity over the last few years.

"It's a good physical sport," Fair offers. "But if you mess up, there's one to blame. I don't hold no hands. It's you and you alone. What you put into it is what you get out of it."

And Fair has proven he can indeed get the best out of WSSU and North Carolina.

Winston Lake bows in Atlanta AAU Tournament From Page B1

he was covered," said Feggins.

"So I just waded everyone off and decided to bring the ball down on my own. I beat my man down the court and reached over and fouled me. He grabbed my arm and swung me around."

"He almost threw me out of bounds and the referee said he didn't see it. I was really ridiculous."

Marietta, alert enough to convert on a layup while the Winston

"They (the referees) took it away from us, but we got slack, too," said the 6-6 forward from Mount Tabor. "The bad call really tore us up, but we shouldn't have put ourselves in the position to lose in the first place."

Joe John Bryant said the officiating was a critical part of the outcome.

"The refs really jerked us around," he said.

"They (the referees) took it away from us, but we got slack, too. The bad call really tore us up."

**-- Stu Epperson on
Winston Lake's second loss in Atlanta**

Lake team froze in anticipation of the foul, eventually tied the game and sent it into overtime.

Thompson, who had 16 rebounds, quickly fouled out of the overtime period and the All-Stars fell behind and resorted to the three-pointer to bail them out. Marietta came through with three short baskets and three critical free throws and advanced to the semi-finals with an 81-80 win.

Stu Epperson, who helped but did not completely solve Winston Lake's problems on the outside, said the blame rests on two shoulders.

"In the last few minutes of the game, they wouldn't give us a call at all. Feggins was obviously hacked and the ref was like: 'Well, I'm sorry, I didn't see it.'"

"While we were on his case, the guy takes the ball downcourt and they score to tie the game and send it into overtime. It was really frustrating."

In their opener Saturday morning, the All-Stars further proved they are not fond of playing at 8 a.m.

"I don't know what it is," said Feggins, who had 26 points in the

opening loss. "We can't keep doing that, though. We might get an early game in the state or nationals and that could really hurt us."

The Indianapolis team was much shorter than the Winston Lake squad, but as Bryant pointed out, it worked to their advantage.

"We dominated them on the

inside," he said.

"But they were using their quickness to blow by us on defense and stayed in the game. Then they hit a few three-pointers and some free throws and hung in there to beat us."

"We were disappointed, but it won't affect us when the state tournament rolls around."

Winston Lake will put two 17-and-under squads into this week's state age group tournament in Concord.

But despite the wealth of talent, Coach Ron Hollingsworth said the lack of practice time has hurt his team.

"We have a lot of trouble getting all the guys to show up on time," said Hollingsworth, who's the top group of 17-year-olds from Winston Lake.

"We're going to look at the kids who are willing to work next time. More than 80 showed up at tryouts in hopes of making a team."

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Hall of Fame From Page B1

Mutual Life Insurance Company, which remains a corporate sponsor and supporter of the Sportsmen Club.

Overby, of course, is known as the "Voice of the Deacs" in his many years of announcing Wake Forest football and basketball games. In earlier years, he was instrumental in helping WSJS bring high school football to the AM airwaves, including many memorable broadcasts such as the famed Parkland-East Forsyth mud bath in the first round of the state playoffs and the Mustangs' 10-0 playoff struggle with unbeaten Greensboro Page.

Thompson, with his 30-plus years of athletic service, is known around the county as the dean of high school coaches and affectionately as "The Silver Fox". The Parkland AD is praised by his peers and former players as a loving coach and an administrator who is never afraid to fight for the welfare of the kids.

"The Silver Fox" recently led a fierce opposition to the scrapping of middle school interscholastic sports, which were rid of in 1984 and replaced by a program of intramurals. Thompson noted that interest

in athletics themselves would eventually dwindle because of the lack of sports at the level, and chaired a committee which presented recommendations to the school board on the matter.

Though he is one of the most respected and winningest football coaches in the state, Thompson is admired most for his love of helping young men and women become successful athletes and outstanding citizens.

Ten others were nominated to the Hall of Fame, but not elected by the voting Winston-Salem Sportsmen Club. They include coaches Millard (Doug) Crater, Sandy Ray Gann and Clark Odell Taylor.

Seven players also failed to receive enough votes for election, nominated coaches to remain on the ballot for a maximum of three years. They include: Michael Gordon Culbreth, Bruce V. Shelton, Waldo Hauser, Hessie Smith Jr., David R. J. Plummer, Johnny L. Stoutamire and Wilbert Rice.

The Chronicle will begin a series of articles and profiles next week on the administrator, coach and players who will be inducted.