

Reintgen rules when it comes to UNC wrestling

By KEITH JONES
Staff Writer

The names and faces of Phil Ford, Mike O'Koren, Amos Lawrence and Dee Hardison are quite common around the UNC campus. And rightfully so, for they are the best at what they do in their respective sports. They get the publicity — they get the pictures.

Few persons, however, would recognize Carolina's best wrestler — Jeff Reintgen — if they saw him on the street.

Reintgen, a senior from Latrobe, Pa., has compiled a 24-1 record this season, losing only in the finals of the Wilkes Invitational Tournament over the Christmas holidays. Last year he didn't lose a dual meet and ended up with an overall record of 26-2 with one of those losses coming in the NCAAs in March. This year he's hoping to end his career at Carolina by becoming a national place winner.

Along with Mike Benzel and Carter Mario, one of his practice partners is coach Lam, himself a national champion not long ago.

"One of the best things about wrestling with coach is that he pushes me harder than anyone else in the room," Reintgen said. "It's excellent for my stamina and my technique."

Reintgen has to work hard, though. By his own admission, he can't afford not to.

"As captain of the team, I have to set an example for the rest of the guys," Reintgen said. "It's my responsibility and I like to set that example on the mat. I try to give my best effort all the time."

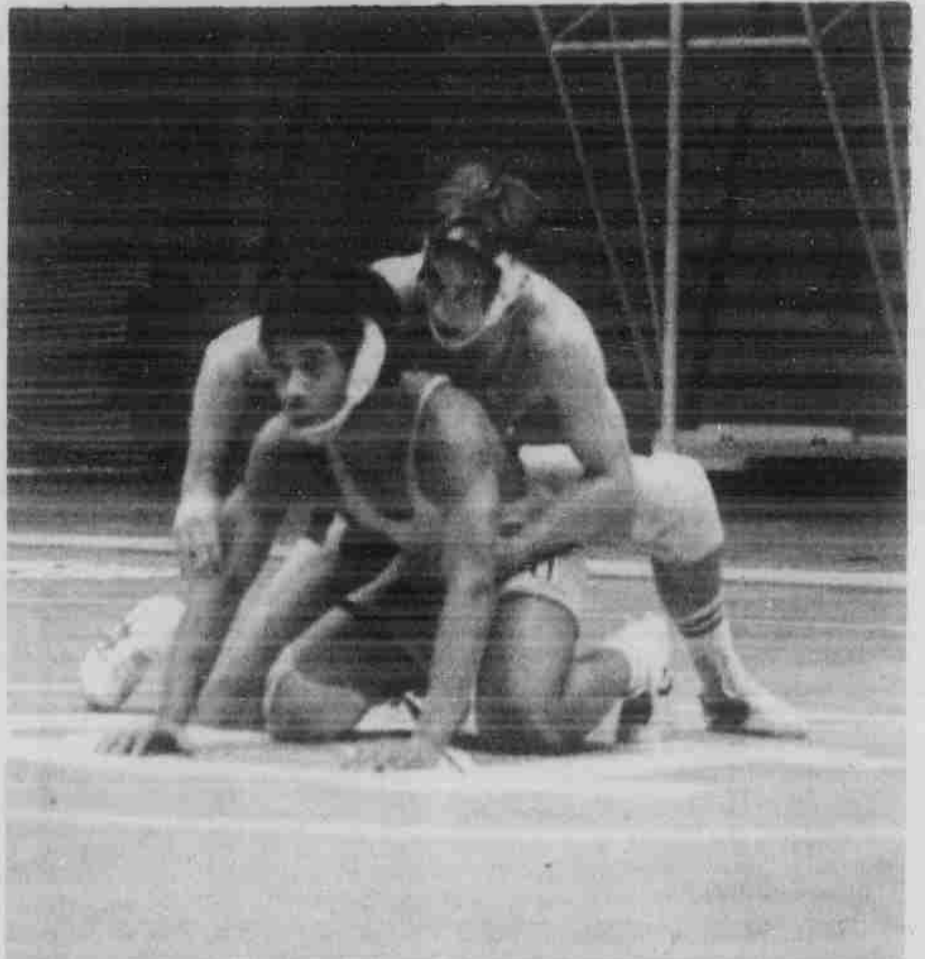
Everybody expects me to be the best on the team and I try to live up to that."

Reintgen and the rest of the Tar Heel wrestling team will be in College Park, Md., Saturday for a big meet with the Terps. Reintgen, who has wrestled most of the year at 158 pounds, will be down to 150, the weight at which he has won the ACC championship for the past two years. Carolina, following its 35-10 win over Duke Tuesday, is 5-1 overall. Maryland defeated Duke 31-9 in its last ACC match.

Persons who are unfamiliar with the sport of wrestling are probably unaware of the physical grind the sport demands. One must be in top physical condition to survive an eight minute match. Many wrestlers will lose in excess of 20 pounds during a season to make weight. To keep in a good mental frame of mind throughout the season while not eating or drinking much and feeling tired much of the time is extremely difficult. And if he expects to be able to work hard in practice and wrestle well in matches, he has to be in a good mental frame of mind.

"It's the toughest sport mentally and physically I know," Reintgen said. "It requires an incredible amount of self-discipline. It makes you deal with things. We sit around and drop weight while everyone else can go out and party. I can't think of any other sport that takes as much conditioning and mental toughness as wrestling."

Even with the great demands of wrestling pressing him most of the year, Reintgen still maintains a 3.4 average in chemistry and hopes to go to dental school somewhere next fall. Lam attributes his fine grades to what he



Jeff Reintgen (top) defeated Evert Neal at 158 pounds in Carolina's wrestling match against Pembroke State earlier this week. Photo by Keith Jones.

called Reintgen's "very positive mental attitude."

"He could have gone elsewhere to wrestle but he came here to get himself a good education. He's a very intelligent individual."

Reintgen began wrestling years ago when his brothers introduced him to the sport.

"I was in the third grade when I started wrestling," Reintgen said. "When I was little all my brothers were better than me. I always tried to catch up with them. Now that I've been around it for so long, it's become part of my life."

You learn to love it. It's very hard to get away from."

Does a person who has been wrestling since third grade and run up a record of 50-3 over the past two years still get nervous?

"Yeah, I get nervous. But it's a little different nervousness than it used to be. Now I don't really care who it is I'm going to wrestle because I know that I'm going to do the best job I can and if it's not good enough to win then there's not much more I can do. I think my nervousness comes from a growing anticipation of the match."

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