

At the Game

Wrestlers ready to go; season commences Saturday

By Betty Jean Winston

"The attitude is really good," Larry Gabel, head wrestling coach, said, concerning the 2002-03 high school squad, which is busy preparing for the new season.

"There is more enthusiasm than in some years and good leadership by the seniors."

It is hoped that this enthusiasm and dedication can carry over for the next three months as the team progresses through not only league duals but a number of tournaments including the all-important regional and 2A state tournaments.

Each year the season begins with the very strong St. Francis Invitational, where 10 Colorado and Kansas teams take to the mats. Last year Colby emerged victorious but it is a new season and possibly a new winner (St. Francis Invitational story on Page 1.)

The first Northwest Kansas League dual takes place Thursday, Dec. 12, when the Colby Eagles visit St. Francis. Matches begin at 6:30 p.m.

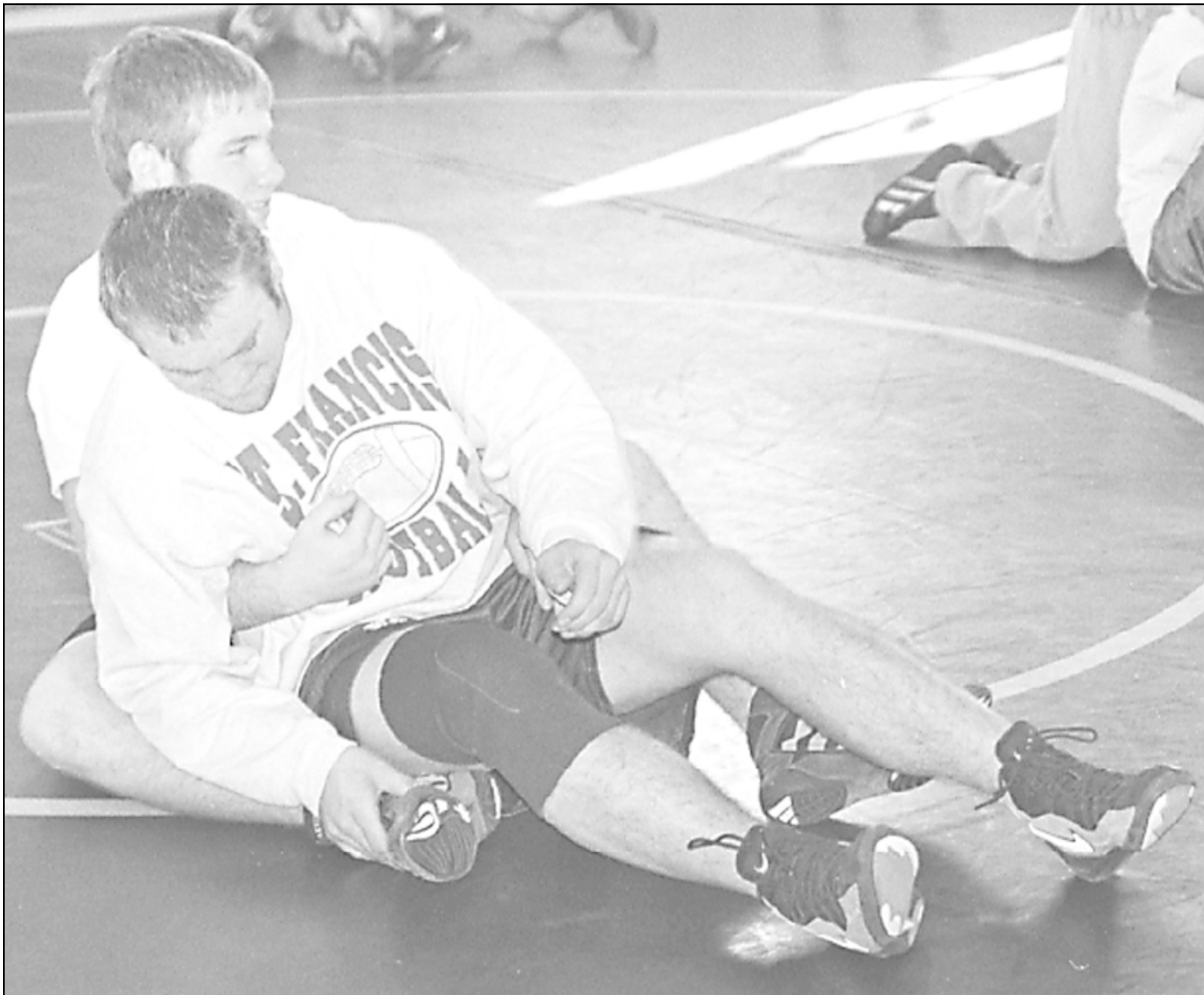
Between the opening match Saturday and the Christmas break, the varsity Indians are scheduled for three tournaments (St. Francis, Brush, Wray) and four duals (Colby, Brush, Manitou Springs, Oberlin).

"The wrestlers want success this year," Coach Gabel said. "St. Francis has a strong wrestling tradition."

The Indians come off a year where they won five duals, four of them at the Sterling dual tournament, where they came home with the championship. They lost seven duals, many of them to Northwest Kansas League opponents. The team placed fourth at the St. Francis Invitational, third at the Brush tournament, second at the Wray Invitational, seventh at league, fifth at regionals and 15th at state.

Seven Indians qualified for state last year but five of them have graduated leaving seniors Kevin Brown and Dallas Walz as the only returning mat men with state experience. Brown placed third at state last year at 112 pounds, going 5-1 for the weekend while Walz at 215 pounds was 1-2 for the weekend and did not place. Helping these two returning state placers lead the way will be senior Travis Hilt, who is also an experienced wrestler. These three athletes are the ones providing a majority of the leadership.

Other returning letter winners include Luke Keller, Troy Zwegardt, Trey Hilt, Kyle Buffington, Grant Keller, Nick Keller, Troy Torrence, all



PRACTICING WRESTLING MOVES -Travis Hilt works at getting a reversal as Gabe Walz brushes up his skills on countering the moves.

Herald staff photo by Betty Jean Winston

juniors, and Mario Tafoya, Gabe Gienger, Derek Ross, Seth Swihart, Gabe Walz, sophomores.

"The squad is young but enthusiastic," Coach Gabel said. "There is a talented group of underclassmen."

"The skill level of the squad is ahead of where it was last year at this time. They are learning, improving and increasing their intensity level at practice."

"Junior lettermen (Zwegardt, L. Keller, G. Keller, Trey Hilt, N. Keller, Buffington, Torrence) look ahead to toughen the Indians lineup while some

of the sophomores have proven that they can compete with the best.

"Freshmen Trevor Richard, Dylan Loyd and Gabe Smull have competed in a lot of freestyle and have enjoyed success at the national level. They are quality freshmen but are untested at the high school level."

Each athlete is working hard for a place on the varsity squad for the opening of the season in front of the home fans.

"We do have a lack of depth at the lighters weights," Coach Gabel said. "We have some great people but no

junior varsity at lower weights"

Coach Gabel describes the team goals as (1) have fun; (2) improve each week; and (3) place in the top three at state.

These are worthy ambitions as the improvements each week make the odds of placing at state more attainable.

"It is a plus to have a consistent coaching staff," Coach Gabel said. "Coaches Steve (Jenkins) and Daryl (Loyd) work with the junior high and then again with the high school and this provides consistency."

"The weight program helps develop strength and makes the athletes bigger

and stronger. I'm excited that some of the younger kids worked in the off season to get better

"I'm excited for the year to begin. It should be fun as the kids have a good attitude and are willing to work, which makes it more enjoyable."

The Northwest Kansas League will be strong again this year. Hoxie was the 2A state champions last year and most of their squad is returning. Coach Gabel also expects the two 4A teams, Colby and Goodland to be very strong; Oberlin will be good and Atwood is good at the upper weights.

"St. Francis could be in the hunt,"

Coach Gabel said.

St. Francis will also be hosting the Northwest Kansas League tournament this year. It is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 1.

Hosting this tournament will give local fans two opportunities to see top wrestlers in tournament action. Add the three league duals (Oberlin, Hoxie, Goodland) and there will be some outstanding action on the high school mats.

Roster

Seniors: Brown, Travis Hilt, D. Walz

Juniors: L. Keller, Zwegardt, Trey Hilt, Buffington, G. Keller, N. Keller, Torrence

Sophomores: Tafoya, Gienger, Devin Rohweder, Josh Walters, Ross, John McWilliams, Cody Barnhart, Swihart, G. Walz

Freshmen: Richard, Loyd, Matt Brown, Smull, Tal Earl

Schedule

Saturday, Dec. 7: St. Francis Invitational, 9:30 a.m.

Thursday, Dec. 12: Colby, here, 6:30 p.m.

Friday, Dec. 13: Brush, Manitou Springs, at Brush, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 14: Brush Invitational

Friday, Dec. 20: Oberlin, there, 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 21: Wray Invitational, there, 10 a.m.

Friday, Jan. 10: Hoxie, here, 6:30 p.m.

Friday, Jan. 17: Oakley, there, 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 18: Sterling Dual Tournament, 10 a.m.

Friday, Jan. 24: Prairie Classic, Hays, 3 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 25: Prairie Classic, Hays

Saturday, Feb. 1: NWKL Tournament, St. Francis, 9:30 a.m.

Friday, Feb. 7: Goodland, here, 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 8: Cheyenne Well Dual Tournament, 11 a.m.

Friday, Feb. 14: Atwood, there, 6:30 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 21: Regional Wrestling

Saturday, Feb. 22: Regional Wrestling

Friday, Feb. 28: State Wrestling

Saturday, March 1: State Wrestling

C-team/9-10/novice

Saturday, Dec. 7: C-team tournament, Goodland, 10 a.m.

Saturday, Feb. 8: Goodland, 9 a.m.

Saturday, Feb. 15: Bill Voss Novice Tournament, Colby, 8:30 a.m.