

Wrestlers come home

By Karen Krien

Sixty-five former St. Francis Community High School wrestlers attended the Wrestling Alumni held Friday night in the high school gym which was filled to standing room only. It was a fun evening for the wrestlers and crowd as St. Francis had a 53 vs 17 win over the Atwood Buffs.

"It was neat to have the wrestlers home and have them recognized," said Larry Gabel, St. Francis wrestling coach. "Many renewed old acquaintances and seemed to really enjoy the evening."

There were also a number of other wrestlers present who had not placed in state and enjoyed more visiting at the reception following the dual.

"It is nice to be a champion or state placer but it took the effort, support and encouragement of the rest of the team members to get there (state)," said Coach Gabel. "Everyone who was on the team is a winner!"

New this year is the "Wall of Fame" which has many of the photos of state champions. Some of the frames were empty but, as the missing photos become available, they will be placed in the empty frames.

The oldest state placers present were Haddon Leibbrandt and Charles Nighswonger who graduated from high school in 1942. Mr. Leibbrandt, wrestling 138 pounds, placed second in state that year. Mr. Nighswonger wrestled at 112 pounds and placed first.

Ron Schlittenhardt wrestled 98 pounds and thought being able to eat again was his most memorable moment. Mike Frewen, who placed in 1973 and 1974, said having Les Zuege, Brad Schneider and Randy Holzwarth as teammates kept wrestling very entertaining!

A number of the wrestlers mentioned "underwear". Coach Gabel and Coach Jenkins well remember their missing underwear which

would later be found, often at the top of the flag pole.

"They (wrestlers) usually soaked them with water before sending them to the top (of the flag pole) and they would freeze to the pole and the next morning, the janitor couldn't get them down so they could raise the flag," Mr. Gabel said.

Both Sainty and Atwood wrestlers had dug through the old uniforms, wearing whatever would fit. Some uniforms were a little ragged and much shorter legs than today's uniforms but many of the former wrestlers remember wearing them. Referee Robb Ross, Colby, was dressed as referees did many years ago with white shirt and black bow tie.

Greeting the wrestlers as they were introduced were Coach Gabel, coach Steve Jenkins and principal Scott Carmichael. Lavon Schlittenhardt read the introductions. However, first to be introduced were former wrestling coaches Gary Wilson and Kyle Mines.

Wrestlers received booklets filled with facts about the state placers, individual and team records. It was interesting to note that the lowest St. Francis team placing at state was 18th in 2001 and, on a more positive note, St. Francis placed first at state 16 times and were second place winners 10 times. Coaches included Pop Greene, Stanford Harman, Riley Whearty, Gilford Alexander, Pete Christensen, Warren Boring, Maynard Skinner, Frank Brown, Will Derby, Gary Wilson, Gary Nickel, Kyle Mines and Larry Gabel.

"We heard many positive responses from the alumni event to the wrestlers who shook the hands of the older wrestlers before the matches began," said Coach Gabel. "The support of the community was also tremendous."



WRESTLING HOMECOMING brought many State winners and placers to be recognized at the Sainty vs. Atwood dual on Friday. Top: Wayne Goodell shook hands with Haddon Leibbrandt. Standing to the left are former coaches Gary Wilson and Kyle Mines. To Mr. Leibbrandt's left are Charles Nighswonger and Warren Cook. Clockwise: Many enjoyed looking at pictures; Tony Vandike checks out the 'Wall of Fame' which now hangs in the wrestling room; Elmer Zodrow (with the hat) and his wife, both of Oberlin, attended the Homecoming. Dale Rath was looking at Mr. Zodrow's scrapbooks. Mr. Zodrow was a familiar person at wrestling matches and was always recognized by his red hat. Don Krien and Dan Lampe talked about old times.

