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FEATURED

## MVC wrestling teams show parity, strength; stars lacking

MVC teams show parity, strength; stars lacking

Takedowns Dave Dyer Mar 15, 2017



It was another great season for area wrestling in 2016-17. Or was it?

Well, it depends on how you look at it. For team success, it was definitely a banner season.

Timberlane was again supreme, winning top honors in New Hampshire and finishing 21-1, its only loss coming to New England champion Danbury. The Owls have won 143 straight dual meets in the state.

Methuen (22-1-1) and Central Catholic (20-2) were among the cream of the MVC and depth-shy North Andover won the Division 2 state title. Also, Lawrence won 24 meets and was highly competitive and Georgetown went 22-1 and won its first Cape Ann League regular season crown.

Moreover, nearby Chelmsford won the North sectional and was runner-up at the Division 1 state meet while Billerica was second at All-State.

One had to keep this in mind during the All-State and New England tournaments. Local placers were hardly plentiful at either, not only for this area but for the MVC and southern New Hampshire in general.

Timberlane sophomore Connor McGonagle provided a championship, at 126, Windham's Mike Tanguay was runner-up at 195 and the area had six placers overall, the next highest being a fourth by Timberlane's Dylan Tremblay at 170. Salem's Tristen Cabinta and North Andover's Joey Valentino netted fifths and Methuen's Darius Franklin was forced to injury default to sixth.

Thus, there were only two local MVC placers at New England. There also weren't so many local MVC wrestlers competing. Of the 29 local New England qualifiers, 20 were from New Hampshire including 12 from Timberlane.

"I think the league (MVC) was overall strong — we had more parity than ever with Haverhill and Billerica stepping up — but we lack star power," said Andover coach Mike Bolduc.

Methuen coach Bill James agrees.

"Individually, we have not had the same amount of wrestlers winning/placing high at States, All-States and New England's over the last few years," said James. "Part of it is that there are so many clubs throughout the state that more and more wrestlers are training year-round. That makes it even more difficult to win.

"I can't speak for the rest of the MVC, but I am hoping we can get more of our guys to be more consistent in their off-season work. A strong off-season commitment is critical for wrestlers to develop. We have had some wrestlers working in the offseason, but lately it is only a small group and for the most part they have not been as dedicated as some of our high level wrestlers of the past.

"It is difficult to be successful in the big post season tournaments when you only wrestle for three months a year."

Lawrence coach Rob Niceforo seconds that.

"I don't think the MVC has slipped," he said. "Of the top 25 teams in the state, six were from the MVC. But we don't have as many super wrestlers. We're going to need our top guys do a little more in the offseason."

If the MVC has slipped at all, team-wise or individually (clearly a little), part of the reason is because Lowell is no where near as strong as it used to be. For decades, the Red Raiders were among the elite in the MVC and often the state and boasted New England-caliber stars, but that is no longer the case and the whole league suffers as a result.

Perhaps we should just be satisfied that the area remains one of the strongest throughout New England. But one can still hope that we can return to having both superior teams and a flock of superstar individuals.

#### CHALLENGE TO OWLS

There is no question that Danbury has the makings of a mini-dynasty, with three star underclassmen returning next year, including Outstanding Wrestler Jakob Camacho, and a great feeder system, but it says here that Timberlane can give the Hatters a run for their money next year, both in their dual meet and at New England.

The Owls return 11 starters from their 21-1 squad, nine of whom wrestled at New England this year. If three to four returnees can improve enough in the offseason, they could have enough firepower to overcome Danbury and Mount Anthony, which graduates five seniors.

#### AWARD TIME

There are so many deserving individuals, but following are the best wrestlers by class this year:

Senior — Windham's Mike Tanguay

Junior — Timberlane's Dylan Tremblay

Sophomore — Timberlane's Connor McGonagle

Freshman — (tie) Haverhill's Jake Nicolosi, Salem's Matt Adams, Pinkerton's Sterling McLaughlin

For most improved, one must consider Tanguay and Lawrence heavyweight Stanley Alberto, but there are certainly no lack of good candidates.

#### WRESTLING FAB 5

The Eagle-Tribune's final ranking of area high school wrestling teams:

1. Timberlane 21-1
2. Methuen 22-1-1
3. Central 20-2
4. Lawrence 24-10
5. North Andover (13-9-1)

Honorable Mention: Georgetown/Ipswich 22-1

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