

Tie makes Raiders' O'Leary smile

Jim O'Leary's wrestling teams have never beaten Westland John Glenn in his 17 years at North Farmington. His teams never will.

But the Raiders made O'Leary a happy man Thursday night. Previously unranked in Observeland, North took on No. 1-ranked John Glenn to a 33-33 standoff.

O'Leary has announced that he will step down as wrestling coach after this season to devote all his energies to the Raider football program. Thursday's meet was his last chance at defeating

the Rockets in dual-meet competition. The Raiders and Rockets, currently tied for first in the Northwest Suburban League with 3-0-1 records, will meet again in the league meet Saturday, Feb. 11. Barring an upset, the meeting will be for the title.

Although his team came away with a tie, O'Leary was satisfied.

"This was a great meet. The kids had never beaten Glenn, so to come away with a tie was a moral victory for us," he said.

wrestling

ESPECIALLY PLEASING to O'Leary was his team's ability to come from behind. North trailed 11-1 after the first five weight classes. But the Raiders pulled out the tie by winning six of the final eight matches.

North trailed 33-30 entering the

heavyweight match — the final match of the meet. With the home crowd and teammates worked up to a frenzy, North's Greg Collier outpointed the Rockets' Kurt Potulski, 5-3, gaining three points for the Raiders and the tie.

"I thought that if we could get to 128

(pounds) we'd be tough," said O'Leary. But he hadn't counted on being 17 points behind at that stage.

The Rockets took four of the first five matches, three by pins.

At 88 pounds, Glenn's Dave Hart felled Jeff Balogh in 1:28. After North's Jeff Cook won a 10-0 decision from Jeff Delby at 105, Glenn's Rick Gilles (112) and Duane Barkley (119) pinned their opponents.

Barkley was trailing Mike Zorelic 12-2 when he caught the Raider in a roll and pinned him at 4:13. Gilles took Dan Scully down in 1:33.

MIKE ROSSI decided North's Todd Brown 9-4 at 128. Then the Raiders got tough.

At 132, James Benda pounded Mark Sullivan, 16-2. At 138, it was Matt Gasser over Darrel Grassmeyer, 8-8.

At 145, Pat Leavy pinned Mark Kropp in 3:02.

Glenn's Tom Forchione broke the string of North wins with a pin at 155. He took down Steve Stabile in 1:42. Rob Benda (167) and Brian Hood (185) put North ahead with a pair of quick pins. Benda stuck Eric Nelson in 1:38 and Hood got Tim Glenn in 1:30.

The lead was short-lived. Glenn's Vaughn Vier pinned Matt Burnas in 2:40 of their 168-pound match.

That set the stage for Collier's dramatic victory at heavyweight to gain the tie.

"It was just an unbelievable meet," said O'Leary.

North (8-0-1 overall) will end its NSL regular season Thursday at home. The Raiders will take on Garden City, who had been rated No. 5 in Observeland. Glenn will host Livonia Franklin Thursday in its final NSL dual meet.

Harrison netters gain strange split

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After racing to a 4-1 start this season, the Falcons find themselves 5-5 and in the throes of a three-game losing streak.

They lost to Livonia Churchill and

Dearborn last week.

"We've been in sort of a slump," said O'Neill. "Since the Walled Lake Central game (Farmington won), we haven't played up to our ability. I think we kind of plateaued at the Walled Lake match."

Despite fine efforts from Laura Varty and Laura Spence, the Falcons lost two straight games to Dearborn, 15-10, 15-10.

The Falcons host Bentley tonight.

"Hopefully, things will pick up again for us. It seems this (the slump) happens every year. We started out so good, then it all back. Everyone's all depressed. We have to get a better attitude. A win would certainly help," O'Neill said.

Modson: Mercy's 1-woman team

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"HER DECISION to go to Mercy had nothing to do with gymnastics," said Cunningham. "I always entertained the thought that if she had gone to public school, I could have coerced her onto my team. But she opted to stay in club gymnastics."

Modson said that getting a private education was foremost in her decision to go to Mercy. But, she thought about gymnastics, too.

"When I was in eighth grade and considering going to Mercy, they had a gymnastics team. I thought, 'Hey, this is great. I'll get to do both.' But the team fell through."

"When asked if going to Salem instead of Canton, where Cunningham was, had anything to do with choosing Mercy, Modson said, 'It was a factor. But, private education was important to me.'"

Modson performed in club gymnastics through her freshman and sophomore years at Mercy, while Beale refined her skills on a team level for Cunningham at Canton.

Last year, all three were reunited. The Michigan High School Athletic Association ruled that coaches can coach more than one team, as long as the team consisted of six or less players. Mercy agreed to declare a gymnastics team for Modson with Cunningham as the coach.

"The idea was, the MHSAA didn't want to let that kind of talent smolder away just because a school doesn't support a team," Cunningham said.

SO FOR THE last two years, Modson has worked out with Cunningham and Canton, (not exactly at the same time because of MHSAA rules, but close), she performs at all Canton's dual meets as Farmington Hills Mercy — as Modson's sister, she's kind of adopted Canton as her team.

And, perhaps most important, Modson and Beale remain close friends.

"The competitiveness is there between them, but it's a friendly competition. They root for each other and they are not upset by each other's success," Cunningham said.

"I really like Linda. She's deserved all she's got. It's not her fault. It's just the way it happened," she said.

Modson's scores are just a shade lower than Beale's. Cunningham said in all-around performance, Beale scores about one point higher.

This season, Modson has qualified for the state regional meet in the floor exercise and the vault. She is one score above 7.5 away from qualifying in the uneven parallel bars, and two away from qualifying in the balance beam.

Her top scores thus far this season are: 8.75 in the floor, 7.8 on the bars, 7.8 on the beam, and 8.65 on the vault.

As an individual, Modson is a standout. Her

But, the subject of recognition is tender to Modson. Because she has been more or less an individual in a team sport, her accomplishments have often been overlooked. Most people at Mercy aren't even aware of what she does. Beale's achievements, because she is part of the Canton team, have been better publicized.

"I'd like to have a team," Modson said. "There's more recognition of it, and I think a lot of times I'm seen as being in it just for myself. I don't like it to sound like that."

Modson doesn't begrudge Beale her publicity, though.

"I'M HAPPY for Linda. She's deserved all she's got. It's not her fault. It's just the way it happened," she said.

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As an individual, Modson is a standout. Her

scores indicate that. But, how does she cope with being so isolated? Cunningham best explained it this way:

"Gymnastics is a spotlight team sport. You do your thing and you are contributing to the team, but when you are doing it, nobody else is up there but you. If you fall down on the court in basketball, it may go unnoticed, but if you fall off the beam, everyone knows it."

Cunningham is friends with an assistant gymnastics coach at U-M. He'll see what he can do for Modson.

In the meantime, Modson will go on preparing for the state meet, where individual achievements receive supreme acclaim. Until then, she will remain a gymnast without a team; or, if you prefer, a gymnast with two teams.

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