

Dameron: solid as a Rock

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

BY ALL rights, Dave Dameron should be the cockiest, most arrogant young man walking around Plymouth Salem High School these days.

Let's face it, he has done virtually everything he had set out to do when he joined the Rocks' wrestling team four years ago.

Last Saturday, the blond-haired, blue-eyed 126-pounder capped off a prolific high school career by winning the state Class A title in his weight class. He finished his career with a 148-34 record, 50-1 this season.

He is the winningest wrestler in Salem's proud wrestling history. He owns all but two individual school records.

This season, he eclipsed six team records (see graphic) — three of them held by John Beaudin (most wins in a season, most points in a season and most pins in a career), two by Jeff Brown (most wins in a career and most team points in a career), and one held by Harry Walkley (most pins in a season).

ALL THESE accomplishments — plus his aggressive, overpowering style of wrestling, his tightly compacted, muscular physique and his implish good looks — have given him almost a legendary prominence within the wrestling community.

Such is his fame — a young girl approached him for an autograph at the Western Lakes league meet last month at Westland John Glenn. When he won the league title (for the third straight year), the Glenn cheerleaders fought amongst themselves for the privilege of presenting the championship medal to him. The girl who finally won out presented Dameron with both the medal and a lingering hug.

Such success has been the rule of many high school athletes over the years. But success, like virtually every 126-pound wrestler in the state, hasn't been able to bring Dave Dameron down.

He is not cocky or arrogant. If anything, he's shy about his achievements and determined to work harder to achieve even more after high school.

HIS DREAM is to some day compete in the Olympics. He'll take his first step next weekend in Grand Rapids. He'll compete in a United States Wrestling Federation tournament — winners from which could be selected to a Michigan team heading for competition this summer in West Germany.

That dream, plus some unpleasant experiences both early and later in his career, have helped keep Dameron hungry and humble.

"The hardest thing I had with David was getting him to be confident in himself," said Salem wrestling coach Ron Krueger, who saw Dameron's potential four years ago and groomed and coached him into a state champion. "He was as good a wrestler last year as he was this year, but he lacked the experience and maturity that comes with being in the big competitions."

Dameron placed fifth in the state last year, somewhat of a disappointment. He had been ranked No. 1 in his class most of the season.

"THEY RANKED him No. 1 all year, but the minute somebody beat him, everyone turned on him," Krueger said. "This year, same thing. He's No. 1 and getting all the hoopla and attention, then he loses and everybody turns on him again. It's like everybody was always trying to predict who would beat him."

"I guess he took it all pretty good. He wound up No. 1."

There were other disappointments for Dameron along the way. He won 23 matches as a freshman, more than any other frosh in Salem history. He won 32 matches as a sophomore — but the midpoint of that sophomore season may have been the low point in Dameron's career.

He lost three straight one-point decisions to Todd Gattioni of archival Plymouth Canton. Displayed on Dameron's refrigerator door at home were newspaper photos of Gattioni beating him — a haunting reminder.

"They were all real close matches," Dameron said, still remembering. "He just had more experience than me. It was disappointing, but it didn't bother me too much. I knew I had two more years to show what I could do."

ACTUALLY, HE showed what he could do in the league meet that season. He beat Gattioni for the championship, 1-0 in overtime.

From that point, Dameron became an overpowering force in Observational wrestling.

"He's really strong, he became confident, he's good with his moves, he's got a good upper body attack and he's super quick," Krueger said. "He's certainly one of the two best wrestlers I ever had (the other being Beaudin). I hate to do all that 'who's the best' thing. I'll just say that it's going to be a while before anyone gets a shot at his records."

Dameron pointed his entire senior season toward winning the state meet. He suffered a frightening setback, losing the district title to Ann Arbor Huron's Andy McNaughton. But Dameron came back to win the regional and took a No. 1 seed into the state finals last Saturday.

"THERE WAS a lot of pressure," Dameron said. "Everything I had done for four years leaned to that moment. It just made me want to work harder. I had to win."

He did. He beat Mark Smith of Holt 4-2. Smith had knocked off McNaughton earlier in the tournament. But the way Dameron was wrestling Saturday, it may not have mattered who he wrestled.

"He was in control of himself," Krueger said. "He wasn't wild like he has a tendency to be. He stayed within himself and took the points when he could get them."

Dameron is hot property for major college wrestling programs. The universities of Michigan, Indiana and Ohio State are among those in pursuit. Krueger mentioned sending a letter to the nation's No. 1 college team, Iowa. "I think he could help them," Krueger said.

RIGHT NOW, Dameron is uncertain about which school he'll attend. He is enjoying his success and preparing for the federation meet in Grand Rapids. But somewhere in his mind, the dream lives: Olympics — 1988.

Don't bet against him. Said Krueger: "Hey, if he gets with a good college coach, I don't see anything stopping him."



BILL BASLER/staff photographer

Dave Dameron, Plymouth Salem's talented 126-pounder, won the state title Saturday helping Salem to a seventh-place finish.

State crown caps a perfect season

By Brad Emons
staff writer

How did Livonia's first state wrestling champion celebrate his victory? A little prime rib at Mountain Jack's was the order, capping an exciting day at the state Class A meet Saturday at Grand Valley State College in Allendale.

"We just ate and ate," said a smiling Salem Yaffai, who won the 112-pound crown for Livonia Churchill.

Yaffai, who had trained hard and cut weight all season, splurged with his close friends from Plymouth Salem, Dave and Dennis Dameron, who were first and third in their respective weight classes.

"It's like it's all over and now there are new goals," said Yaffai, who completed a 42-0 season to go along with 34 pins.

Yaffai, who came to Churchill last fall after Bentley High School closed, wanted to better last year's second-place finish, which he settled in the 105-pound class.

"We knew Salem would be real tough this season," Churchill coach Mike Abdo said. "He had a lot of determination to win. Nothing would hold him back."

YAFFAI, WHOSE older brothers, Abe and Anwar, were outstanding wrestlers at Bentley, showed why he was the class of the 112 field.

He opened with an 18-3 decision over Kevin Fust of Walling Lake Western, followed by an 11-1 win over Sol Cogan of Southfield-Lathrup. In the semifinals, Yaffai blanked Hazel Park's David Saylor, 5-0, and won the crown with a 7-1 triumph over Tom Norris of Lansing Eastern, last year's 98-pound Class A champ.

"Salem has great endurance and never gets tired," Abdo said. "He knows where he's at on the mat at all times

and he has great balance. He's just the perfect wrestler."

Abdo calls Yaffai a quiet person.

"But he talks wrestling all the time," Yaffai was thrilled with the victory.

"He was pretty ecstatic," Abdo said.

"His brother (Abe) came out of the stands and picked him up. Salem was very happy, and he showed more emotion than I've ever seen."

ABDO SAID that Yaffai has been nothing but a positive influence on the Churchill wrestling program.

"It's great to have him in the school and have his leadership on the team," he said. "It's definitely going to help our other kids go for a state championship."

Although Yaffai still proudly dons his green Bentley letter jacket, his transition between schools was smooth.

"A lot of my friends were coming to Churchill and so was my coach (Bill Riddle, now a Churchill assistant)," he said. "It was no big deal."

Although his brothers have been his practice partners in the past, this season Yaffai wrestled daily with 126-pounder Mike Krause, Churchill's other state qualifier.

"We usually were working hard, but we knew when to relax," Yaffai said. "The day of the meet we'd slack off a bit."

YAFFAI'S FUTURE plans are not set.

He'd like to wrestle for the University of Michigan and has filled out some questionnaires that coach Dale Barr has mailed to him. Yaffai also has the grades (3.1 GPA) to get into U-M.

This weekend he'll wrestle at 123 pounds in a junior age group meet at Grand Rapids Junior College, eventually hoping to qualify for the AAU Junior Nationals in July.

But for now, Yaffai can bask a little and eat, "as long as it's not junk food," he said.



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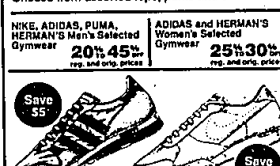
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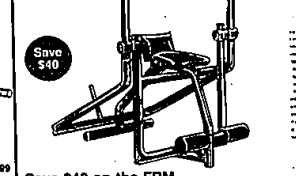


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