CC's Hancock captures coveted title

By Paul Beaudry
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Mitch Hancock was mad. Real mad. Nail-spitting mad.

By his own admission, he'd just punted a four-point lead and given away the 1999 Division I 160-pound wrestling title.

Right then and there, the Detroit Catholic Central senior decided he wasn't going to let that happen again.

He didn't.

All the hours of hard work, sit-ups, running when he didn't want to, and even snorting Vicks Vaporub when he couldn't breathe finally paid off. Hancock capped a 50-0 season by winning the Division I 160-pound wrestling title Saturday at Detroit's Joe Louis Arena with a 15-7 decision over Roseville's Matt McCartney.

"In every match this season, I wrestled like it was the state finals," said Hancock, who ended his high school career with a sterling 190-13 record.

"After four years ... all of the push-ups and all of the miles ... it finally paid off."

Before there was a pay off, there had to be a payback. In Friday's semifinal, he faced a familiar foe – Brad Anderson of Grand Rapids Forest Hills Northern, the same Brad Anderson Hancock led 6-2 in the finals before losing 8-6 in overtime. Hancock tried to stay loose. His coaches were trying not to let their nerves show and doing a poor job of it.

"We were waiting to go on the mat for the semis and we were sitting there – silent, calm and thinking," said Hancock. "And I looked at (CC coach Mike Rodriguez) and said, 'You are nervous! I can't believe it! I worked 365 days for this. I'm going to dominate him!' It broke the tension."

State champ: *Mitch Hancock acknowledges the cheers of classmates during a school pep rally Monday.*

Staff Photo by Bryan Mitchell

It also set the tone. Hancock stopped Anderson – a two-time state champion – 7-3 and advanced to the finals.

"I had beaten him once this year at Goodrich, 9-7, and it was a little bit of revenge, but I knew that match didn't count," Hancock said. "The only one that counted was this weekend."

It almost turned out that the win didn't count at all. Friday night, Hancock was hit with the flu. He couldn't breathe, he was sick and he couldn't sleep. Two things helped him through it. The first came from Anderson, who told Hancock before the finals it was his turn to win. The other came from Cheeseborough-Ponds.

"All day Saturday, I was coughing up a storm and couldn't breathe," Hancock said. "So I was stuffing Vaporub up my nose so I could breathe. A lot of fans saw me do it and they couldn't stop laughing."

The finals were almost anti-climactic. Hancock, who had beaten McCarney three previous times during the year, kept him on his heels for most of the match, taking a 13-2 lead after the second period before allowing McCarney to comeback a bit in the third.

"I really wanted to stick him or at least win on a technical fall," Hancock said. "I think I started getting tired in the third period. I gave up a takedown and I don't give up takedowns.

In the end, Hancock got his title.

"I really expected to win it. Anything else would have been a disappointment," Hancock said. "I just wanted my face up on the (CC) Wall of Fame with all of those other great wrestlers."

Hancock will go to the high school nationals in Pittsburgh later this month. He wants to wrestle in college but hasn't decided what school he'll attend.

WRESTLING

Simmons from page C1

beat the same kid twice."

Beyar believes Simmons, who was a district and regional champion this year, might have been a state champion with the benefit of a full four years of high school wrestling. His career record is 66-21.

"He had an outstanding short career at Farmington High," Beyar said. "I'm sure, if you compared his career to anyone else, for the length of time he wrestled, he would rank up there with the best."

The discipline required to be an athlete has also been a help to Simmons in his academic pursuits, according to Beyar.

"This sport has turned Jon around," he said, adding assistant coach Barry Walsh has had a positive influence on Simmons, too. "(Wrestling) has taught him the value of setting goals and the need to focus his energies to achieve them."

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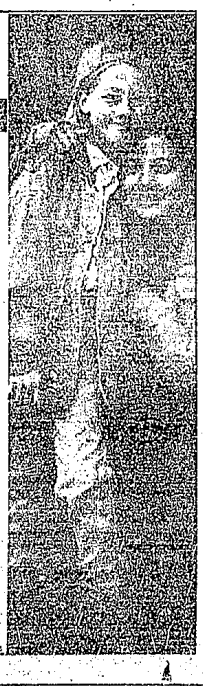

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