



## SENIOR POWER – BENCIVENGA, SCHORK, HALPIN, SMITH, BLEVINS, ROPER, SWANSON

# Cougars Are Keeping Bar High in Wrestling this Season

By DAVID B. CORBIN

*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times*

High standards and goals have been set and most of them have been achieved through the past several years by the Cranford High School wrestling team and this year is no different for the Cougars, who intend to keep the bar of achievement at a high level. They have tacked on an even tougher schedule.

"We did get a tough schedule this year with tougher teams with the Henry Boresch duals (Newton). It's South Plainfield,

Hanover Park, Paulsboro, big time teams. We also picked up a Tri with Emerson and Hunterdon Central and we are still in the Tri with High Point, Cedar Grove. We are keeping the bar high," Cougar Head Coach Pat Gorman expressed.

Last year after the graduation of five NJSIAA qualifiers and five 100+ career victory athletes, very few opponents may expect the Cougars' ability to operate at a high level. But the Cougars stunned them all when they captured their fourth straight

Union County Tournament (UCT) crown and placed second in the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 3 Tournament to finish with a 14-7 record. In the UCT, the Cougars pulled off some key victories to nip a very tough Roselle Park team by two points, 187-185.

"The county title is always a goal for the team. Last year it was a team effort. We are looking forward to that again. We are looking forward to our conference. Definitely the county got a lot tougher this year," Coach Gorman commented.

To help attain their high level of

excellence, the Cougars have acquired two very talented assistant coaches with Derek Francavilla and Cory Marcovitch. Francavilla had been a standout for the rivaling Scotch Plains-Fanwood Raiders and Marcovitch is a home-grown Cougar.

"We have two new coaches, Derek Francavilla, who wrestled at Columbia, and Cory Marcovitch, who wrestled at Ursinus. They are bringing a new kind of aspect and new style that works well with our middle weights and our upper weights. It's like a rebirth. Some of the techniques are changing and it's keeping it fresh for the kids," Coach Gorman said.

Another good thing for the Cougars is senior leadership.

"We have a lot of seniors in the

room this year and looking forward to a good year for them," Coach Gorman said.

One senior, who had a standout finish last year, is AJ Bencivenga, who placed third in the district tournament, beat some key wrestlers to place third in the region to qualify for Atlantic City (AC) then after losing his first bout, regrouped to win three straight at AC. Bencivenga finished with a 33-9 record at 145-lbs. Bencivenga will remain at 145-lbs.

"In the regions, he turned the corner when he beat [Rhise] Royster from Rahway and he came back and beat the kid [Jacob Stasil] from Watchung Hills. After he beat Royster, it got in his head that, 'I belong to be here

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