

Grappling with Success

By Ken Belbin



COURTESY OF PEAN

Though they fell just short of a tournament title, the varsity wrestling team still enjoyed a championship season, says head coach Dave Hudson. "Watching kids pick up the sport here and accomplish what they did is one of the most rewarding things about coaching at Exeter."

"We really did have a good winter," is head coach Dave Hudson's succinct description of the varsity wrestling season.

Hudson could be talking about the team's 20-5 dual-meet record, the third most wins in team history. Or the team's second-place finish in the Class A tournament in mid-February, or their strong showing just a few weeks later at the New England Prep School Championships, where the squad placed third out of 44 teams. Two of Hudson's wrestlers captured individual Class A championships, one earned an individual New England title and two more were named All-Americans. All of which adds up to a substantial improvement from the previous season, when the team was 11-10 and a sixth-place finisher in the Class A tourney.

Yet what set this season apart for Hudson wasn't just that the program enjoyed its biggest turnaround in recent memory; rather, it was the type of student-athletes who helped turn the season around. He points in particular to the leadership of the team's five seniors: Casey Sullivan of Rye, NH; Sadiq Okocha of Lagos, Nigeria; James Gettinger of New York City; Jarett Matlock of Trotwood, OH; and Nate Allukian of Boston, MA, who together posted an eye-catching season record of 94-7.

All five reached the finals in the Class A Tournament in their respective weights, and Sullivan and Okocha won individual titles. Each senior placed in the top five in the New England Championships. Okocha won the New England title in his weight class and was selected for All-Scholastic honors by the

Boston Globe, while Sullivan and Allukian earned All-American honors, placing in the top seven at the National Prep Tournament at Lehigh University.

The seniors' athletic strengths were, Hudson adds, matched by their strength of character. For Sullivan, Okocha and Matlock, that included a willingness to learn the sport from the mat up. All three entered the program with no previous wrestling experience, and went on to become among the team's top performers.

Team captain Casey Sullivan may not have known how to wrestle when he first arrived at Exeter, but he says he did know "the respect that came with the sport," thanks to his older brother Conor '02, who had wrestled for Exeter. "I look up to Conor a lot, and he had a good experience with the sport."

"Casey is a true leader," says Hudson, "and one of the hardest working and most respected kids I have worked with."

"Like any new members of the team, we all had to wrestle against kids who had more experience than us," recalls Sullivan. The varsity and junior varsity squads practice together, which helps novice wrestlers integrate more quickly into the program and fosters a strong sense of team spirit. "The coaches did a great job of bringing us up to speed with them very quickly," Sullivan adds.

Jarett Matlock had no plans to wrestle when he arrived at Exeter; in fact, he tried out for basketball instead. But after assistant head coach Ethan Shapiro encouraged him to give wrestling a try, Matlock learned that he enjoyed the sport. "Wrestling isn't for everyone," he reflects. "There has to be a drive that pushes you to succeed. That's why having captains and seniors lead by example is so important. It makes younger wrestlers want to be like them, whether on or off the mat."

After four years, Matlock's appreciation for the sport extends well beyond the mat. "There is something about wrestling here that builds character," he says. "I know I would be a different person had I not wrestled for this team. I can't say exactly how or why, but it has changed me, and for the better. Wrestling has bonded us together because we are the only ones who know what the sport demands, especially at a place as academically challenging as Exeter."

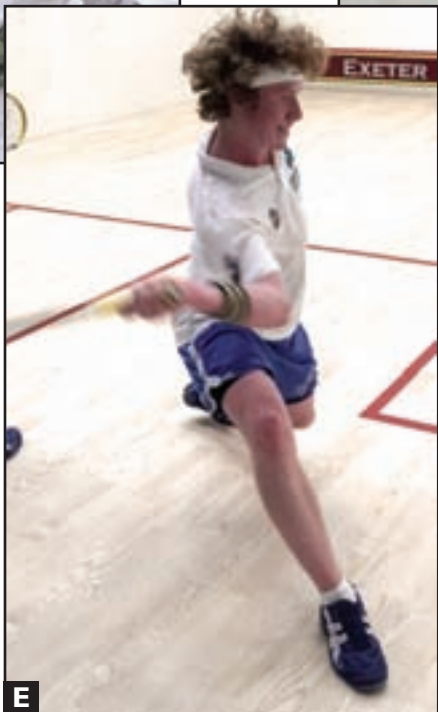
Since its founding in 1933, the Exeter wrestling program has known quite a few "good winters," including a long run of championships under legendary coach Ted Seabrooke, who led the team from 1945 until 1976. Hudson, who came to Exeter in 1982 as a three-sport coach, has also overseen his share of winning teams. In 1985, Exeter wrestlers won the New England Class A Championship, the first of five straight titles they would win under Hudson's guidance. For good measure, in 1987 the team also won the first of three consecutive New England Prep School Championships.

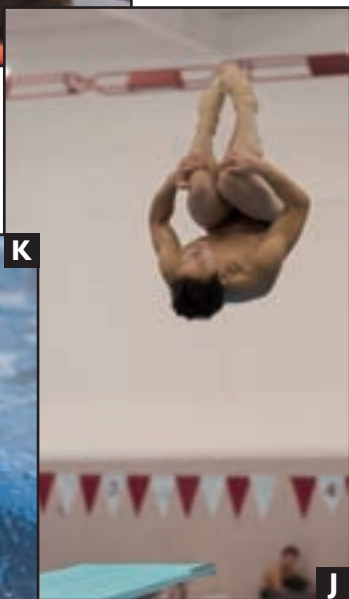
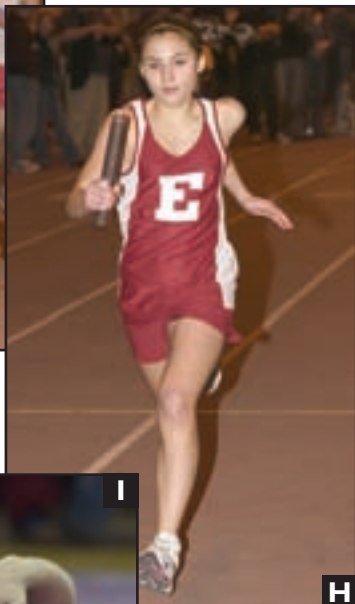
In 1991, Hudson left to coach at St. Lawrence University (and later at Governor Dummer Academy, where he was also director of athletics). But the wrestling squad maintained its strong record under new head coach Ethan Shapiro, who had joined the program as an assistant coach in 1988, going undefeated in 1992 and 1995, and winning several more Class A Championships and New England titles. In 1999, Hudson returned to Exeter as director of athletics, and to the wrestling program as an assistant head coach. When Shapiro—who is also a Russian instructor in the modern languages department—was appointed dean of students in 2001, the two swapped coaching roles once more. All told, Hudson and Shapiro have led their teams to 11 Class A Championships and eight New England Championships.

Even if this year's team stopped just short of a title, for Hudson it was still a championship season. "We have seen [athletes] like this before," Hudson says. "But this group has shown as much progress as any that I can remember. Watching kids pick up the sport here and accomplish what they did is one of the most rewarding things about coaching at Exeter." ●

Three of the squad's top performers had never wrestled before coming to Exeter, including team captain Casey Sullivan '06, who was named an All-American this season.

Winter Sports





(A) Boys Basketball

Record: 13-12

New England Quarterfinalist

Alan M. Tarr Memorial Basketball Trophy, MVP: D.J. Carcieri '06
 Coach: Malcolm Wesselink
 Captains: D.J. Carcieri '06, Trygg Danforth '06 and Josh Owens '07

(B) Girls Basketball:

Record: 16-6

New England Quarterfinalist

Catherine E. Dunbar Girls Basketball Trophy, MVP: Rebecca Austin '06, Alison Maxwell '06
 Coach: Rick Mahoney
 Captains: Rebecca Austin '06, Alison Maxwell '06

(C) Boys Ice Hockey

Record: 17-6-5

Lloyd Bishop Hockey Trophy, MVP: Kevin Crane '06, Kevin McCarthy '06
 Coach: Dana Barbin
 Captains: Chris Downer '06, Nick Downer '06, Kevin Crane '06

(D) Girls Ice Hockey

Record: 7-18-1

MVP: Lauren Greer '09
 Coach: Michelle Mancuso
 Captains: Ann Hulme '06, Ashley Leichter '06, Hadley Gleason '06

(E) Boys Squash

Record: 9-5

Joseph H. Bowen Squash Trophy, MVP: Ed Casserly '07
 Coach: Kirk Randall
 Captain: Mike Manuca '07

(F) Girls Squash

Record: 8-6

Mary Spruill Kilgore Trophy, MVP: Casey Simchik '06
 Coach: Kirk Randall
 Captain: Sarah Odell '06

(G) Boys Indoor Track & Field

Record: 2-1

MVP: Bruce Hallett '06
 Coach: Hilary Coder
 Captains: Alex Godfrey '06, Bruce Hallett '06, Colton Heward-Mills '06

(H) Girls Indoor Track & Field

Record: 2-1

MVP: Laura Tabor '06
 Coach: Hilary Coder
 Captains: Grace Cineas '06, Monica Hernandez '06

(I) Wrestling

Record: 20-5

New England Runners-up
 MVP: Casey Sullivan '06
 Coach: Dave Hudson
 Captain: Casey Sullivan '06

(J) Boys Swimming

Record: 4-3

New England Champions

MVP: Niall Janney '08
 Coach: Don Mills
 Captains: Luke Parsons '06, Mike Scalise '06

(K) Girls Swimming

Record: 6-2

MVP: Lacie Smith '06
 Coach: Jean Chase Farnum
 Captains: Lauren Russell '06, Qian Qian Tang '06