

2002-03 Year in Review

Looking back on the 2002-03 wrestling season, Stanford looks to the future for motivation following a trying season that still managed its share of highlights.

The year started off with high expectations following a year of ten dual-meet victories and four NCAA qualifiers. Stanford entered the holiday break with a 2-2 dual meet record and boasted eight placewinners in the annual California Open in Fullerton, Calif. Brad Metzler (133) brought home the team's sole championship after a sound finals victory over Cal State Bakersfield standout Matt Sanchez.

With injuries, eligibility issues, and all-around bad luck pressing the Cardinal squad, Stanford charged through the winter schedule, bringing home three placewinners at the Aggie Open including champion Matt Gentry (157). Other placewinners included Ryan Hagen, third at 174 pounds, and Harold Penson, fifth at 174 pounds.

Dual meet victories proved hard to come by as Stanford's young team ran into tough opponents around every corner. Team leader Metzler was forced to sit out all of January due to a knee injury and came off the bench at one point to secure a dual victory against Portland State.

In February, Stanford again fielded a partial squad at the All Cal Invitational where Nathan Peterson (125) Gentry (157) brought home runner-up finishes in their respective weight classes. Also placing for the Cardinal were Harold Penson, third at 174 pounds, and Larry Ozowara, fourth at 197 pounds.

Putting a challenging regular season behind them, Stanford traveled to Boise, Idaho, for the Pac-10 Championships in early March. There, the "good news/bad news" trend of its season continued, as Stanford placed six out of its ten wrestlers in the Championships; but all six placewinners placed sixth, giving Stanford no qualifiers to the NCAA Championships.

However, due to Gentry's stellar season, he was voted as an NCAA alternate. Should any one of the Pac-10's NCAA qualifiers have been unable to compete for whatever reason, Gentry would get to travel to the NCAA tournament. Sure enough, a week after the Pac-10 Tournament, Gentry received word that a qualifier had been injured, and that he would have the chance to compete at the Tournament.

At the championships in Kansas City, Mo., Gentry drew a preliminary match against Northern Iowa's Chris Bitetto. Gentry won the bout 6-1, moving him into the round of 32. Gentry then ran into No. 2-seed Keaton Anderson of Ohio State, dropping a 12-4 decision to the eventual All-American from the Big 10. Gentry's journey, however, was far from being over.

In the consolation round, Gentry posted consecutive decisions over highly ranked wrestlers. His wins came at the expense of Gabe Webster of Cornell, Missouri's Kenny Burleson (Big 12 runner-up), and Rider's Derek Jenkins to earn himself a spot in the "Top 12" in his weight class. Gentry's win over Jenkins avenged an earlier loss in the season at the Midlands Invitational.

In his next match to earn All-American status, Gentry would run into three-time All-American Shane Roller from Oklahoma State. From the opening whistle, the match was a crowd pleaser. Both Gentry and Roller were taking chances, throwing each other all over the mat. When the dust settled and the first period had ended, Gentry held a narrow 10-9 lead in the bout. Nineteen points had been scored in only three minutes of exciting wrestling.

Gentry then began the second period by riding Roller from the top position, only to be reversed and caught on his back. The bout ended with a Roller pin, but all who witnessed the match remembered it for its roller-coaster ride and the fearlessness that both wrestlers exhibited.

So, with what seemed a long string of unfortunate circumstances behind them, the team is already excited for the 2003-04 campaign to begin. Stanford is excited to get some of its fully healed and rejuvenated key players back in action next season: Paul Gross, Luis Vendrell, Imad Kharbush and Ian Bork all return next year from time off the mat this season.

By season's end, the following achievements/highlights became apparent:

- Stanford placed over half of its starting team at the Pac-10 Championships.
- Matt Gentry notched his second-straight season of 30+ wins, keeping him on par to potentially become Stanford's all-time winningest wrestler.
- Sixteen wrestlers received varsity letters.
- Stanford finished in the top 10 nationally with a cumulative team GPA of 3.141
- Only co-captain and fifth-year leader Harold Penson leaves the squad, leaving Stanford with more returning NCAA points than this year's Pac-10 Champion, Arizona State.
- Young rising stars such as Ryan Hagen, Shawn Ritzenthaler, and Larry Ozowara proved themselves worthy of future glory in the Stanford starting lineup.