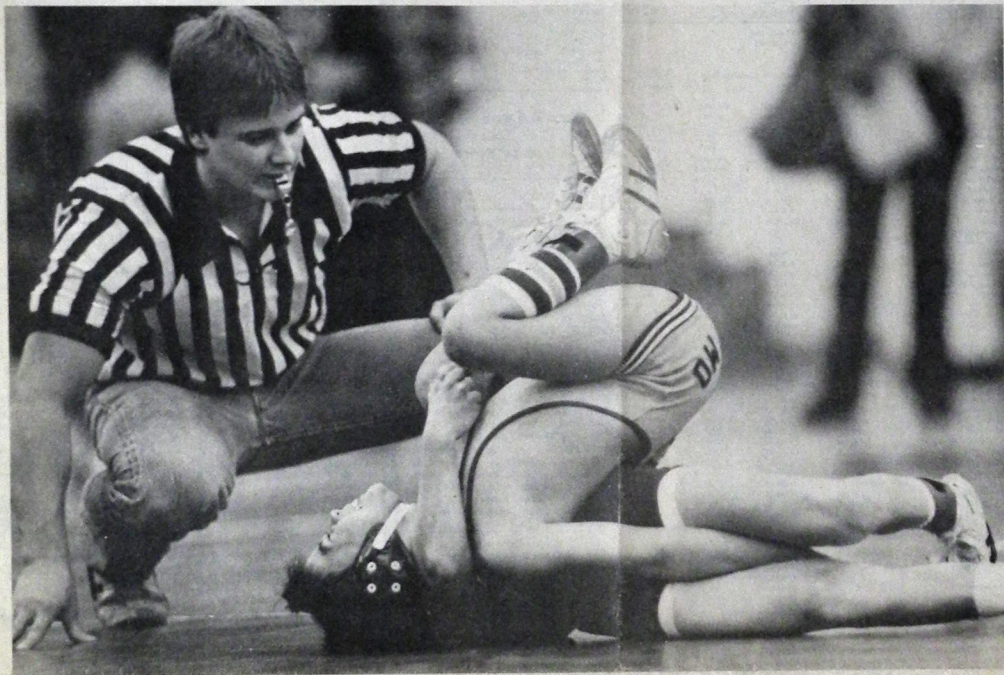




Coach Jim Lindsley gets into a match.

Kids compete



Official John Olson watches as a JCWC member attempts to pin a St. Jo. wrestler with a cradle.



Clay Center kids have mixed feelings on teammates performance.

Photos
and
Text
by
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Damond Johnson, top, gets wrapped in a ball.

Patty Manns sits anxiously on the edge of the mat each time her son Dainel gets ready to wrestle. Although some of the parents of children in the Junction City Wrestling Club stay up in the bleachers, Patty would not miss her ringside seat for anything.

Daniel, 7, is in his second year of wrestling competitively. He was just one of 23 local tykes to take part in the JCWC Invitational Tournament in the North gymnasium at Junction City High School on Saturday.

"It tears your heart out the first time they wrestle," Patty says. "It stuns you."

"The first tournament Daniel was in, there were only four kids in his weight class so he got a medal. I was so proud for him. It breaks your heart to see your child do his best and lose. And then on the other hand you're so happy when he wins."

Like tiny cherubs the youngsters parade around the gym in their miniature singlets. They are the junior gladiators, some of them as young as 5 others 15 and 16.

This is their day. Most Saturdays during the winter, members of the JCWC and their parents can be found traveling the state on the way to meets. Each time it's something different for the competitors. The high school gyms are usually in a chaotic state filled with youngsters ready to wrestle when they arrive.

"Wrestling is fun," says Daniel who is a first grader at Franklin Elementary School. "It's hard and it's fun."

In the JCWC, it is a family affair. The parents are involved in helping to run the organization from the administration right on down to the coaching. Parents acting as coaches this year include Howard Briggs, Gordon Kuntz and Larry Setter.

The club also benefits from volunteer coaches who have come up through the ranks of Kids Wrestling here and elsewhere and want to return the favor. They include Jim Lindsley, Rick Bartlett, Tim Eller, Max Craft and Mike Collins. Since the program began in 1966 with the help of the Family YMCA, kids from all types of socio-economic groups have become members. The program has fostered several athletes who went on to excel in high school. Currently, 11 members of the Blue Jay squad have wrestled with the group.

"I wrestled in high school and enjoyed it and because Kevin's not very big I tried to encourage him to see if he'd like it," says K.C. Goreham, step-father of 9-year-old Kevin Wood. "It wasn't so bad for me (watching him wrestle). Initially it wasn't too good for mom (Mary Goreham). When we got to the first match she did OK when she saw it was supervised and that Kevin was wrestling somebody his own age and size."

Most of the families have become hooked on the wrestling program. It provides them an opportunity to interact with their children in a recreational environment.

"I put Daniel in wrestling last year because he was the youngest and smallest kid in our neighborhood," Manns says. "He was beginning to develop an attitude of, 'why play this because I'm gonna lose anyway.'"



Jody DeLay hugs son, Richard.