

THE TIMES

SPORTS

FRIDAY, AUGUST 3, 2007

Wrestlers are turning up heat

■ Summer workouts and matches are the building blocks for success

By Ben Enos
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Look beyond the brilliant purple mat, past the inspirational quotes on the wall and past the deafening roar of hard rock that rains down on wrestlers.

Then, and only then, will you see the last noticeable item in-

side the tiny room at College Park High School that the Pleasant Hill Wrestling Club calls home.

It's the row of laminated pictures that lines one wall of the room and extends all the way up a staircase.

There are shots of College Park coach Jim Keck as a collegiate wrestler, legendary Falcons wrestler Casey Strand raising his arm as a state champion and even current Las Lomas stand-

out Jason Welch when he was 7 years old.

They all had to start somewhere and, for most, the building blocks for success were crafted in the heat of summer.

For Keck and the Pleasant Hill faithful, summer afternoons are spent pouring sweat into their own purple mat, welcoming all comers and anyone who wants to put in the time and effort to improve.

"If you want to wrestle, sum-

mer wrestling is big," Keck said.

Practice is one thing, getting matches is another. To that end, the Community Youth Center in Concord hosts several Match Nights throughout the summer. Wrestlers from across the state come to CYC to get match experience and wrestle against top competition.

"At this point in the year, there aren't many tournaments," De La Salle wrestler and CYC member Tyler Sheridan said. "(Match

Night) is good for younger and more inexperienced wrestlers to take what they've learned in practice and try it in a match."

Much of the success that De La Salle has enjoyed over the past few years can be traced directly to the infrastructure for success that Mark Halvorson has laid at the CYC. Through summer wrestling and Match Night experiences, Halvorson, head

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coach at both De La Salle and the CYC, has found several Spartans who have become key contributors during the high school season.

"This is good for the young kids," Halvorson said. "They get to wrestle all skill levels.

"I had several kids who did the summer-league stuff," Halvorson said of his De La Salle team. "And they competed at the varsity level just because of that."

A prime example of the lengths that wrestlers will go to get match experience came when the CYC hosted a Match Night primarily for those gearing up to compete in the Junior National Tournament in early July. San Leandro's Mark-jay Acosta, Alhambra's Aaron Westphal and Sheridan were

among the notable names who not only worked on their own skills but also helped with younger wrestlers hoping to improve.

"Even though I'm wrestling guys who might be bigger or stronger, my technique still has to be very fine-tuned," Sheridan said. "It helps you point out where your flaws are."

The Delta Wrestling Club in Brentwood has hosted Match Nights for several years, but it hosted only one this summer because of a low turnout. But that doesn't mean that the wrestlers pack up and go home.

It simply means they hit the road.

The wrestling community truly is a community. Maybe that's because of the nature of the sport — the pain endured and the work needed to excel in a sport that demands total focus and extreme resolve.

When wrestlers come from

Los Gatos to Concord or the travel from Pleasant Hill to Chik just to get match time, the familial ties that bond wrestlers are accentuated. The kids who take those links and expand their sometimes become state champions.

"One of the biggest reason Jason (Welch) is so good is he goes anywhere, anyplace, anytime and wrestle people," Keck said. "(Wrestlers) get a family in here ... It's a family outside of you family."

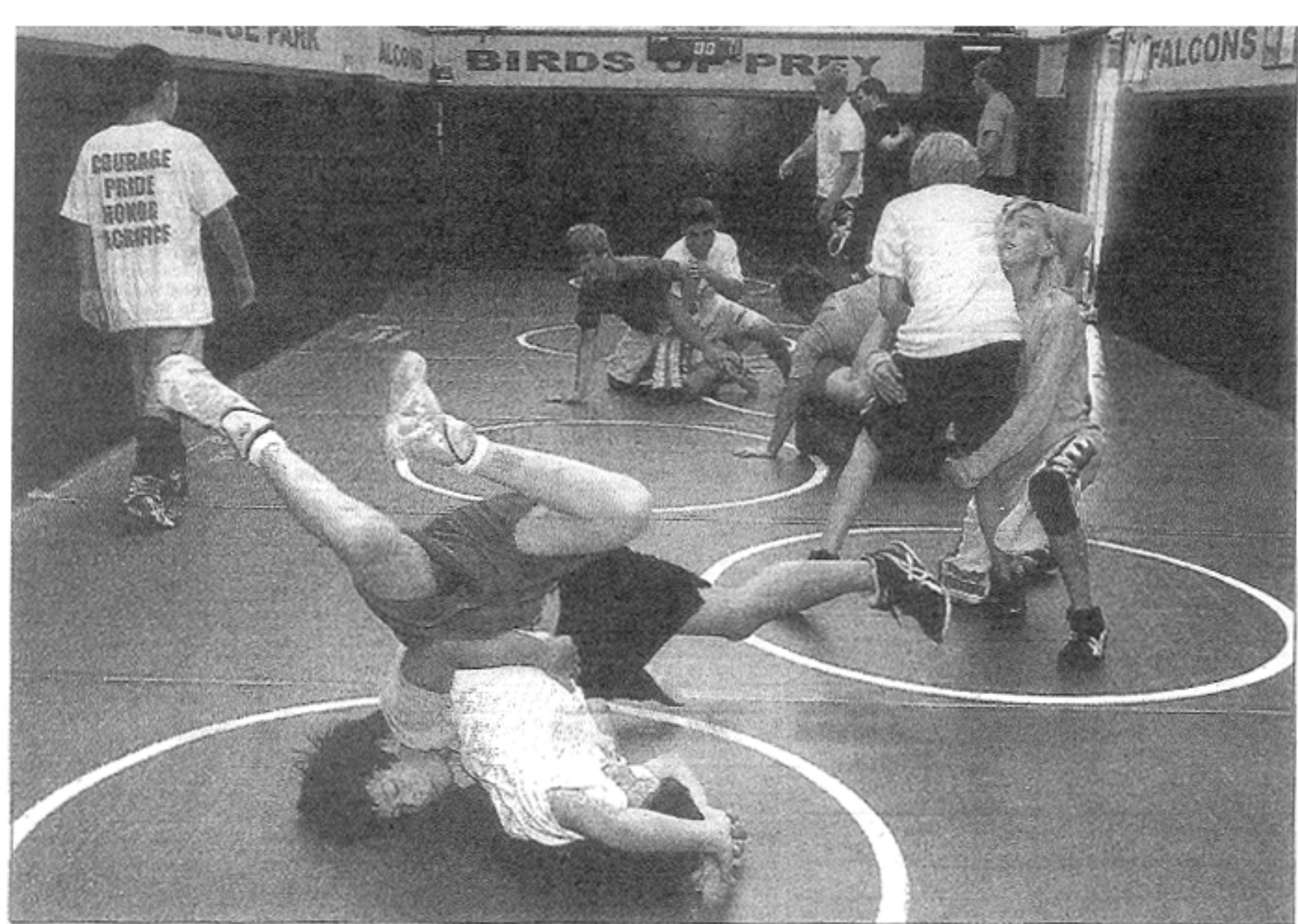
When the high school wrestling community reconvenes in March to crown state champions, the results of a summer spent honing craft will be there for all to see.

The winner's podium is no far removed from the narrow room filled with purple mats at College Park.

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DIAN COPPOLA

DE LA SALLE'S Tyler Sheridan, left, and Jonathan Urango of Ventura County battle during Match Night at the CYC in Concord.



NGUYEN NGUYEN, front left, and Ben Altman are just a few of the high school wrestlers who cram into a tiny room at College Park for summer workouts.

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