

IHSAA Individual Wrestling

1996-97 State Finals in Review

VEGA, BRADLEY, MALDONADO REPEAT AS STATE CHAMPIONS

Leroy Vega of Portage, Steven Bradley of Beech Grove and Bill Maldonado of East Chicago Central earned their second state titles in the 59th Annual Indiana High School Athletic Association Wrestling State Finals February 21-22, 1997 at Market Square Arena in Indianapolis.

Vega led all the way in posting a 5-2 victory over junior Greg Schaefer of Evansville Mater Dei in a battle of unbeaten and former state champions at 112 pounds. Bradley completed a 38-0 season by defeating John Leavell of Decatur Central 5-1 at 125 pounds. Maldonado finished 41-2 at 135 with a 3-2 decision over Darrell Carr of Wawasee.

Besides Vega and Bradley, five other wrestlers were crowned unbeaten champions. Those athletes were:

- At 119, senior Vince Sessa of Lake Central finished 41-0 with an 8-7 decision over senior Nick Hull of Lawrence Central. Hull was the 112-pound state champion in 1996.
- At 152, senior Jake Warner of Portage needed overtime to outlast Pete Peterson of Pike and finish 51-0.
- At 160, senior John Kopnisky (41-0) of Carmel battled senior Shane Wagner of Zionsville to a 6-3 decision.
- At 215, junior Anton Talamantes (30-0) of Fort Wayne Dwenger defeated Scott Gross of Shenandoah, 7-4.
- At 275, senior Joe Willis (36-0) of Southport defeated junior Dustin Bentz of Madison, 5-2.

Portage and Carmel were the only schools to produce multiple winners. Vega and Warner doubled for Portage, while Kopnisky was joined by Todd Wright at 189.

Attendance records fell for the championship round and the overall state finals. A crowd of 10,665 was on hand Saturday night, boosting the total two-day mark of 37,020. The previous records were 10,530 for the championship round (1995) and 36,528 overall (1996). It was the fifth straight year that overall attendance had shown an increase.

The IHSAA Executive Committee selected Jared Williams of Evansville Harrison High School as the 1997 recipient of the Ward E. Brown Award for Mental Attitude in Wrestling. Williams completed the season 46-1 as the runner-up at 171 pounds. A four-time sectional champion, Williams had been the fourth-place state finisher at 160 pounds in the 1996 state tournament. Farm Bureau Insurance, corporate partner of the IHSAA, awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to Evansville Harrison High School in the name of Williams.

A total of 298 schools and 6,221 athletes began competition at the sectional level.

The 59th Annual IHSAA Individual Wrestling State Finals

February 21-22, 1997

Market Square Arena, Indianapolis, Indiana

103 -- Gary Schmucker (40-1), NorthWood, def. Brian Paxson (33-2), Bluffton, 5-0.

112 -- Leroy Vega (50-0), Portage, def. Greg Schaefer (44-1), Evansville Mater Dei, 5-2.

119 -- Vince Sessa (41-0), Lake Central, def. Nick Hull (41-2), Lawrence Central, 8-7.

125 -- Steven Bradley (38-0), Beech Grove def. John Leavell (21-5), Decatur Central, 5-1.

130 -- Brian Smiley (36-2), Plainfield, def. Adam Johnston (37-3), Hammond, 10-5.

- 135** -- Bill Maldonado (41-2), East Chicago Central, def. vs. Darrell Carr (41-2), Wawasee, 3-2.
- 140** -- Eric Sakon (42-3), Indianapolis Cathedral, def. David Himes (30-2), Roncalli, 6-4.
- 145** -- Donny Sands (35-3), Pendleton Heights, def. Joey Strausburg (33-1), Center Grove, 8-4.
- 152** -- Jake Warner (51-0), Portage, def. Pete Peterson (38-2), Pike, 4-3 (OT).
- 160** -- John Kopnisky (41-0), Carmel def. Shane Wagner (25-3), Zionsville, 6-3.
- 171** -- Josh Hardy (40-3), Princeton, def. Jared Williams (46-1), Evansville Harrison, 10-6.
- 189** -- Todd Wright (38-1), Carmel, def. Richard Clevenger (36-6), Warren Central, 6-4.
- 215** -- Anton Talamantes (30-0), Fort Wayne Dwenger, def. Scott Gross (44-2), Shenandoah, 7-4.
- 275** -- Joe Willis (36-0), Southport, def. Dustin Bentz (45-2), Madison, 5-2.