

For Immediate Release

February 1, 2007

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Meramec Magic Athletic News

February, 2007

Sutton To Be Featured On Ch. 5 Sunday Sports Plus Feb. 4
Wrestlers Head To Harper, Central Zone In Stretch Run

If there ever was a stretch run of the season, this is the definitive “crunch time” for the wrestling squad. They have just one dual meet left, the Harper Duals Feb. 3, followed by the Central Zone Tournament at Triton College in Chicago Feb. 11. The Central Zone is a post season event that determines qualifiers to the NJCAA National Tourney in Rochester, Minn. Feb. 23-24.

At nationals, Meramec volunteer assistant coach **David Mirikitani** will be inducted into the NJCAA Wrestling Hall Of Fame in recognition of both his wrestling career at Meramec in the early 1990’s and his recent administrative work with the NJCAA serving in a board position as secretary. As secretary, Mirikitani helped establish the current rankings system and the system for the national tourney bracket. David will join his father, head coach **Ron Mirikitani**, in the national hall.

“I think my dad and I might be the first father-son to go in, so that’s really neat,” said David. “The only thing that would be better than going into the Hall Of Fame is getting the team trophy the same day. If we could win a team trophy before my dad retired and then I never went into the Hall Of Fame I would make that trade.”

Based on the team’s recent performance, Mirikitani may not have to make that trade - the Magic could earn it on their own. Meramec recently went 5-1 at the Meramec Duals with their only loss a narrow 21-18 defeat to nationally-ranked Colby. At the Duals, **Ryan Sutton** (Oakville) at 197 lbs. and **Cedric Powell** (Duncan, OK), a heavyweight, stepped up their outstanding seasons with a combined nine pins in 10 matches and a 10-0 mark.

“There’s a couple of things I need to sharpen up a little bit,” said Sutton. “But, overall, I’m happy. You can’t be disappointed going 5-0 in a tough tournament like the Duals here. The one match I did need a pin (against Colby’s Naoto Saga) I couldn’t get it because all the kid was doing was running, running, running. He wouldn’t tie up, he wouldn’t engage.”

Sutton, whose four pins were all in the first period, is ranked second nationally in his weight and will be the subject of Channel 5's Sports Plus Sunday night (Feb. 4) at 10:30. He is 28-4 on the season and has not lost to a junior college wrestler.

Powell, a 2005 All-American, has also been dynamic as his number one national ranking bears out. He won all five matches at the Meramec Duals by pin, four of them in the first period.

What could make a team trophy a reality is other teammates also peaking. **Darrin Green** (Oakville), at 133 lbs., is now ranked fourth nationally and had two impressive pin wins at Meramec along with three forfeit wins.

Peter Koelinger (Webster Groves) at 141 lbs. Went 4-1 at the Duals, including a hard-fought 8-6 win over Rochester's Brent Bunne. Koelinger executed a takedown for the two point margin in a third period 6-6 match with just 30 seconds remaining.

"Controlling the matches and my conditioning is a lot better than it was a couple of weeks ago," said Koelinger. "I'm the one in control of the match and that's what's been working for me. I'm working my moves, I'm opening up, I'm headed in an upward direction."

Also headed in that same upper direction is **Kyle Foley** (Oakville) at 149 lbs. Foley went 3-2 at Meramec with all three wins coming by pin. Foley has come on strong of late in a highly competitive weight class. He won his first collegiate medal Dec. 9 at the Triton Invitational with a fifth place finish, then followed that up Jan. 6 with an even more impressive fourth place showing at the grueling Colby Invitational - a showcase tourney of the nation's best grapplers.

Several other team members are wrestling well, including sophomore **Jason Akers** (Parkway South) at 174 lbs., **Nick Hanify** (Washington, MO) at 157 lbs., **Mitch Barnett** (Liberty, MO) at 184 lbs., **Gabriel Edwards** (Webster Groves) at 125 lbs., and **Silvino Gomez IV** (Miami, FL - Killian) at 165 lbs.

Gomez proved his toughness against Colby Jan. 27 when, in a close meet, he rose to the occasion to down Taylor Finley 7-5 and keep the Magic's hopes of winning alive.

"Coach just told me I had to step up because we need a big win for the team, and because it (final meet score) was going to come down to within one match," said Gomez.

Coach Mirikitani later praised Gomez, telling him it was his finest match of the season. The Magic are 8-1 in dual meets after sweeping the Lincoln Duals Jan. 20. The major feat at Lincoln was defeating nationally number one ranked Labette (KS) 21-20. Meramec was down in the meet 20-15 going into the final match at heavyweight and needing a pin - a simple win by heavyweight Cedric Powell would still allow Labette to win the meet.

The big man responded with a pressure, third period pin with under a minute remaining to give Meramec the upset win. Also scoring big wins to aid in the upset were Nick Hanify, a 9-4 winner, **Jose Caceres** (Miami, FL - Killian) at 165 lbs., a 8-6 winner, and Ryan Sutton.

Women's Basketball Squad Reaches .500 Mark In 6-2 Month

It took two months, but the women's basketball squad has battled back to the .500 mark to close out January with a 12-12 mark. And, it has been against all odds with an eligibility depleted roster that has the Magic down to seven players.

Coach Steve Jarvis was hopeful of the luxury of having eight bodies, but a recent severe knee injury to sophomore center **Samantha Turner** (Oakville) has the squad at seven. Turner is believed to be out for the remainder of the season.

"It's just a challenge," explained Jarvis of the small roster. "Last night's game we had three players who had to play 40 minutes - that's rough. We have to be a little more deliberate now at times and change up our defenses a little bit more.. We also have to be a little more cognizant of staying out of foul trouble, we can't get the cheap fouls 90 feet away from the basket."

And, the team has been following Jarvis' advice to the letter. They've won their last three straight games to even their record at 12-12, heading into a February that has five games slated followed by the Region XVI Tournament beginning Feb. 17. Role players like freshman guard **Liz Tudor** (Northwest) have found ways to stay fresh on the floor without a lot of bench substitutes to spell them.

"A lot of girls pace the tempo," said Tudor. "If somebody slows down then that kind of slows down the team. But after two minutes we'll be back up to our same tempo."

Tudor has definitely picked up the pace with her 20 point outburst in a 66-50 win over rival Forest Park Jan. 24. "We really wanted to beat them because they beat us last time so it was like payback."

Another role player who has fueled the win streak has been sophomore forward **Lauren Soukup** (Seckman.) She had 17 points in the win over the Highlanders.

"If those two (Tudor and Soukup) come along and score for us that gives us more threats," said Jarvis, "and it's hard for people to try to just focus on Ceara and Michelle only."

Sophomore guard **Ceara Brown** (University City) and freshman forward **Michelle Senf** (Mehlville) have shouldered a lot of the scoring early in the season. And, Senf can do more than score.

"She's also these last few games had four, five, or six assists in each of the games," said Jarvis. "That helps us from the standpoint when they key on her she's able to see the open player and we get some easy baskets."

Coach Jarvis says Brown, likewise, has her own attributes that make her effective. "She's going to score for us and play aggressive defense and get a key steal for us in a situation. The important part is that people have to defend her because she's a threat. That opens things up for other players."

Those other players also include freshman guard **Porscha Smith** (O'Fallon Township, IL), freshman forward **Kathleen Spisak** (Parkway South), and freshman forward **Stephanie Godfrey** (Marquette), primarily a soccer player for the Magic.

"Before it's all said and done she'll be a threat for us to be able to score and defensively she gives us another good-sized player in the middle," said Jarvis of the 5'11" Godfrey.

A key test will be on the road Feb. 2-3 when the Magic call on Region XVI teams Penn Valley and Cottey. Meramec defeated both by 10 point margins earlier this season and need to win these for post season seeding.

"It's really important because this will tell us where we stand in regionals," said Tudor. "We just have to win one game to at least get second (seed) but we're looking forward to beating both teams even though they want payback from us - we beat them on our home floor. Cottey's got some of their good players back that were hurt when we first played them."

Despite the smaller roster, Jarvis is hoping quality will win out over quantity. "I think we're playing the best basketball that we've been playing even with all the obstacles," he said.

"We're playing together a lot better, we're a lot more intense, and we're doing some positive things."

Men's Basketball Team Wraps Up Busy 8-3 January

Playing through a busy 11 game January schedule, the men's basketball team finished the month at 8-3 with a season 16-8 mark.

The team started the month in the Scottsdale, Arizona Tournament winning two of three games for fifth place. The Magic also beat Div. I Juco Kaskaskia 87-81 on Jan. 8, and squeaked by North Central 80-75 on the road Jan. 13. Another Region XVI rival, Forest Park, gave the Magic a close game Jan. 24 losing to Meramec 84-78.

Against Washington University JV Jan. 27, Meramec held on for a 77-71 victory behind 20 points by sophomore forward **Alex Jackson** (Ladue), 12 points by sophomore center **Adam Kaatman** (Hazelwood West), 11 points by sophomore guard **Jake Hackerson** (Seckman), and 10 points by freshman guard **Jake Prosser** (Francis Howell North.)

The squad ended the month with a 75-69 loss to Mineral Area College at the Edward Jones Dome.

Another sophomore guard, **Marcus Seidel** (CBC), has been the team's leading scorer for the season, averaging nearly 14 points per game. Jackson has averaged 12 points a game, while Hackerson has averaged 11. Kaatman is averaging nearly 10.

In the rebounding category, Jackson is the team leader with eight per game, with Kaatman chipping in five a game.

At the free throw line, Hackerson has been in a zone, hitting 86% on the year.

February will be a key month in determining Region XVI seeding for the post season tournament. Currently, Meramec is 3-1 in regional games with four more ahead - one against each of the Region XVI opponents - Florissant Valley, Forest Park, Penn Valley, and North Central. The Region XVI Tournament will be played Feb. 27-Mar. 3 at Westminster College in Fulton, MO.

Talented Diamond Trio Heads To Magic Hall Of Fame April 9

The 11th Annual Magic Hall Of Fame Dinner/Induction ceremony will unfold Monday, April 9 at 6:30 at the Holiday Inn Southwest. A trio of Meramec athletes who made their fame on the ball diamond highlights this year's inductees.

Baseball pitcher T.J. Mathews could be perhaps the most ironic inductee. That's because he was the main player the St. Louis Cardinals traded to the Oakland A's in mid-season 1997 to bring home run slugger Mark McGwire to Busch Stadium.

The irony in the midst of much national steroid controversy over McGwire's reputation implosion is that Big Mac was denied a spot in Cooperstown this year. Yet, Mathews, the ticket that brought McGwire to St. Louis, will enter a hall of fame - Meramec's.

"At the time, I was very upset," recalled Mathews about the famous trade. "Growing up in the St. Louis area and getting the chance to play for the St. Louis Cardinals - I was just so upset and frustrated. It was rough on everyone associated with me because I was just in such a bad mood for a long time to get traded from my hometown playing in front of my family."

Mathews earned his spot in the Magic Hall with a two year pitching mark of 17-2 during the 1989 and 1990 seasons under coach Ric Lessmann. The Columbia, Il native helped Meramec to a conference championship both years.

“Ric was one of those guys who was not only a good coach but a good teacher as well,” said Mathews. “He taught us the right way to play the game and he also made it fun for us which is very important.”

After Meramec, T.J. pitched for the University of Nevada - Las Vegas for two years before becoming a major leaguer. He was drafted by the Cardinals in the 36th round of the 1992 draft and made his Redbird debut July 28, 1995 with a scoreless inning of relief against the Florida Marlins.

After the historic McGwire trade in 1997, Mathews stayed with Oakland through July, 2001 when he was traded back to the Cardinals. He finished his major league career with a 2002 stint with the Houston Astros and also pitched briefly for the Astros Triple A minor league team in 2005.

Currently, Mathews has been active in a New Jersey independent professional league as a player/coach, as well as serving as an instructor at a baseball academy. The 37 year old is engaged, and has a seven month old son. He plans to possibly move back to the St. Louis area soon. But, unlike McGwire, this player *will* receive a hall of fame induction in 2007.

“Any time you can be considered to be a Hall of Famer at a school like Meramec that has such a history and such a record that speaks for itself, it’s definitely an honor and I couldn’t be happier,” said Mathews.

A different Meramec diamond, the softball field, yielded the other two inductees. **Glennis Donnelly**, a recent Magic memory on both the soccer and softball fields from 2000 to 2002, earned her spot with excellence in two sports.

The South St. Louis city resident, a Career Academy High graduate, was first recruited by soccer coach Jeff Karl as a goalie and led the Magic to a fourth place finish at nationals in 2000.

“When I think of Meramec,” said Donnelly, “I think of soccer and I think of coach, Jeff Karl. He’s an old guy, but he taught me so much. The look on his face when he presented me the award for most shutouts in a season - he was so proud of me and so happy for me. I’ll always remember that image.”

That spring, she helped the softball team to a fifth place national finish and a 55-12 record - the most wins in a season in program history. The following fall in soccer, Donnelly shattered the aforementioned school career shutout record with 21, and career saves with 243. Prior to Jeff Karl, she had another important coach in her life, her father, Norman.

“He (Norman) supported me throughout my athletic career, gone to the practices, and gone to the games, taught me how to hit, and taught me so much,” said Donnelly. “Even though he’s not a big soccer guy he’s always been there to get me into that sport and try to learn as much as he can. He never pressured me - he’s always been very positive.”

Both soccer seasons Donnelly was an NJCAA All-American in the nets. But, she wasn’t through with the Meramec record books yet. The shortstop belted home runs out of the field her sophomore year in softball to a new school season mark of 16, eclipsing the previous record of 11.

“I still have the home run ball that was the record breaker that the whole team signed,” said Donnelly. “It’s sitting in my living room. I still have such fond memories, especially the players. I remember the great group of girls and the great coach (Celeste Knierim) who stuck on me like white on rice telling me to ‘get my butt together and keep practicing.’”

The 2002 squad finished 39-19 with a seventh place national finish and an All-American plaque for Donnelly. After Meramec, Donnelly headed west to the University of Utah primarily as a softball player for two seasons, but also played soccer goalie for one season. Her senior year (2004) she was named an Easton All-American. She graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in Economics.

Donnelly now resides in Mesa, Arizona and will graduate from the Mesa Police Academy in late March before becoming a police officer there. The induction honor caught her off guard.

"I'm in shock, it means a great deal," said Donnelly. "I never thought that an honor like this would go to me."

Another diamond dandy headed to Meramec's Hall is Linda Meng-McQueen, a softball player from another generation, the 1970's. Meng-McQueen used her athletic prowess not just in softball from 1976-1978, but also field hockey and basketball - all under the same coach - Celeste Knierim.

"I really enjoyed my days at Meramec and what they did for me," said Meng-McQueen. "They really did a lot for me so it's really exciting to be represented in the Hall Of Fame - it's quite an honor."

And, Linda had quite a softball career. Her true spot to shine was in the 1978 NJCAA National Softball Tournament where the centerfielder and leadoff hitter batted a sizzling .455 and earned a spot on the All-Tournament team. The then-Warriors took home a second place finish, losing to Golden West College of California in the title game. The tourney, held in Ft. Dodge, Iowa, would prove to be déjà vu for Meng-McQueen some 26 years later as an assistant coach to Knierim.

"I remember the national tournament because the year that I was coaching with Celeste we were back at the same place - Ft. Dodge, Iowa," recalled Linda.

Even more eerie was another parallel between the 1978 and 2004 trips to nationals for Meng-McQueen.

"It was funny," she explained, "Celeste and I talked about how in '78 we went through the winner's bracket and Golden West had to beat us twice and did. And, that's what also happened when I was coaching there in '04."

In 2004 Phoenix nipped Meramec for the national title with a pair of wins. Meng-McQueen was a part of the team's two highest finishes in program history - one as a player and one as a coach.

After Meramec, she transferred to Southwest Missouri State, a NCAA Div. I softball power where Meng-McQueen picked up her first nickname.

"They (SMS) usually didn't take transfer students so my nickname was 'JT' - junior transfer," she said. "Because of my experience at Meramec they made an exception and recruited me. We ended up finishing ninth in the country in Division I."

And, "J.T." got an extra dividend at Southwest Missouri State when the field hockey coach learned of her experience in the sport at Meramec and recruited her. The team wound up winning a national championship!

In more recent years, Meng-McQueen has stuck with the sport she loves, coaching the Lutheran South High School varsity softball team for the last 18 years. During that span, she's helped her players achieve five Final Four appearances (four third place finishes) that included one state title.

"I guess the Lord just gave me the strength to be able to do all the things I've needed to do," she said.

Smugala Inks First Soccer Signees, Lindbergh Duo, For '07

The first two pieces to the men's soccer 2007 season are in place with the signings of a pair of Lindbergh High senior star players. Defender **Jason LoRusso** and midfielder **Scott Gyllenborg** recently signed with the Magic. LoRusso, a center sweeper, comes from a strong soccer background - his father, Joe LoRusso, has been active with CYC soccer for years.

"I'm looking forward to it and have high expectations," said Jason of this fall at Meramec. "I think we can really go somewhere. A national championship is obviously the goal - to get that again like we did in the past."

Gyllenborg brings a different style of soccer and experience from across the Atlantic - he's only been back in St. Louis for a couple of years after spending most of his life in England.

"When I came over from England I was looking for a school that wants to win and Meramec is definitely that place," he said. The center midfielder says the American style of soccer has its differences from British strategy.

"It's (English style) a little less physical," explained Gyllenborg. "It's a lot more go-towards-goal and it's more a possession game. I enjoy playing a different style and I enjoy learning different styles."

Coach Brian Smugala describes the pair as "hard-nosed players". Meramec went 14-4-1 in '06, winning a conference championship.