



# SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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## Spartans buck the odds to retain OFSSA title

By STEVE LeBLANC

*The Champion*

Against all odds.

That's exactly how E.C. Drury High's perennial powerhouse wrestling team remained atop the provincial pecking order last weekend at Guelph Memorial Gardens.

The Spartans' 2001 OFSSA contingent was only half the size of last year and none of its members had ever medaled before — so it's not too surprising that their chances for a successful title defense were written off by many experts.

But Larry Jaroslowski's spirited squad refused to accept this anticipated fall and fashioned a championship sequel that was in fact more decisive than the original.

Top 12 finishers were delivered by all eight grapplers — who collectively out-gunned Hagersville 169-145. Taking third place was Port Credit.

"The first championship is always the most exciting, but this one is much more satisfying because we weren't expected to win," said Jaroslowski, whose team failed to take this year's Halton/GHAC crown but came away with the bigger prize instead. "We went in with half the numbers and not exactly a star-studded lineup. But we beat the odds because these guys really wanted it. There's no other reason."

### Holmes grabs gold

Drury's OFSSA repeat was led by a gold medal performance from senior co-captain Chris Holmes. The 54-kilogram wrestler became just the fourth individual OFSSA champ in the school's history — joining Mike Devries, Chad Merritt and Colin Widdis — with a handful of victories.

Following a slim semifinal decision over Korah's Tim Day, Holmes put the finishing touches on his title run by shading St. Pats' Greg Blois 4-2.

"I threw him early in the match and just held on (for the win)," he said. "I was more focused this year. I medaled at the nationals last spring and that boosted my confidence and took me to the next level. I'm very happy with this, it's always been my dream to win OFSSA."

Co-captain Sean Burnham also wrapped up his high school career in medal-winning fashion — securing silver in the 57.5 kg. division.

Becoming just the eighth Spartan to ever reach the finals — after an 11-7 win over former champion Rob Stone that was unsuccessfully protested — he was defeated 7-3 by Resurrection's Mitch Sanche.

Before that, the graduating wrestler collected three straight close-fought victories.

Said Burnham, "I think it was just the motivation of this being my last year that really pushed me. I wanted to place as high as possible."

Weight class teammate Andy Wadeson — who according to Jaroslowski symbolized Drury's determination last weekend — finished fourth with a gutsy uphill climb after dropping a close second-round match.

The OFSSA veteran rallied with five straight wins including a thrilling overtime decision against Stone. While his bid for bronze fell one point short against Parkside's Scott Dionne, Wadeson earned the distinction of being the only Spartan to record three top-six finishes at OFSSA.

Also finishing fourth was Rory McDonell. The 64 kg. wrestler reached the semifinals before losing to eventual champion Sean Roulston of Brennan.

He rebounded by soundly defeating GHAC rival Tosh Jeffrey of Bishop Ryan 10-0.



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

E.C. Drury's Chris Holmes (foreground) shows off his OFSSA gold medal while wrestling teammates (clockwise from bottom left) Andy Wadeson, Rob Petherick, Rory McDonell, Sean Burnham, Adam Baxter and Matt Baxter proudly display their OFSSA championship wrestling banner. Absent from the photo is Matt Knock.

In the bronze medal final, McDonell led through the early going but slipped while attempting to pad his lead and got caught in an unfortunate pin.

Drury's Baxter brothers — Matt and Adam, both first time OFSSA qualifiers — delivered dynamite debuts with fourth and fifth-place efforts respectively.

Matt highlighted his weekend with an overtime win against Hagersville's Ryan Dutcher in the semifinals before losing a three-point decision to Nick Tritton of Perth in the bronze medal match.

Adam came agonizingly close to earning a trip to the gold medal round, surrendering a lead with just one second remaining to Amherst's Pat Ferrar. He recovered in fine form to blank Ancaster's Jimmy Feng 10-0 in the fifth-place match.

Rounding out the championship squad with top-12 finishes were Rob Petherick and Matt Knock — a sophomore grappler who'll no doubt be a future building block for Drury.

E.C. Drury's consecutive championships follow back-to-back silver medal performances in 1998 and 1999.

## Heffron captures silver at nationals

Kevin Heffron's OUA wrestling efforts were good enough to bronze late last month.

But during his university nationals debut last weekend in Thunder Bay, Milton's gifted grappler one-upped himself — securing silver at the CIAU Championships.

The University of Guelph freshman

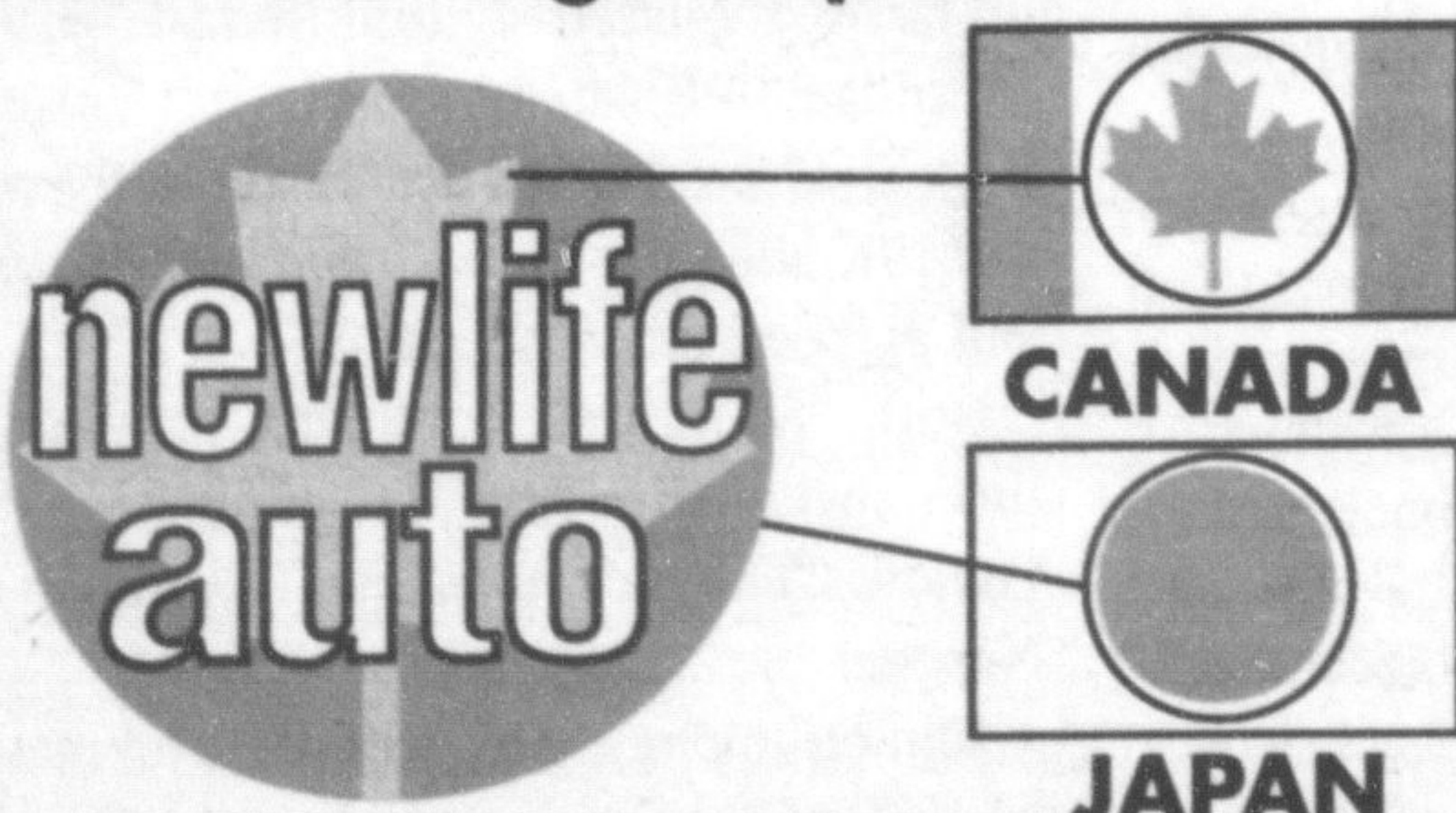
won all but his final match en route to second-place honours and second-team all-Canadian status in the highly competitive 54-kilogram weight class.

Along with his medal-winning performance came the Gryphon's Male Athlete of the Week award — which two weeks earlier was won by fellow Miltonian Chris Denich.

Denich and Chad Merritt — yet another local wrestler, and one of only four E.C. Drury Spartans to ever capture individual OFSSA gold — each finished fourth, in the 68 and 65 kg. divisions respectively.

The local trio helped Guelph grab sixth-place team honours in Thunder Bay.

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