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Panther Sports News

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY, Charleston, IL 61920
DAVID KIDWELL, Sports Information Director
OFFICE: (217) 581-2920 HOME: (217) 345-4166

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLESTON, IL--Geno Savegnago (Carol Stream-Glenbard North), 190 lb. All-American, will carry the banner this season for Eastern Illinois University, one of the nation's top collegiate wrestling teams.

The 1980-81 season commences for the Panthers with some mid-November Open tournaments at Wis-Stevens Point, St. Louis and Chattanooga. The first home meet is Wednesday, Dec. 3 against Purdue.

The Panthers have won 32 of 33 dual matches the past four years placing fourth, third, second and third, respectively, at NCAA II finals.

Savegnago is the lone returning All-American, and has earned that honor in both NCAA I and II the past two seasons. He was runner-up in Division II and fifth in I last winter.

He also was 34-7 and named the Most Valuable Wrestler in the Mid-Continent Conference after defeating a two-time national champion.

"Geno's grown about an inch and put on more than 10 pounds . . . he's got two years experience at the nationals, and when you're fourth or fifth in Division I, you're not far from winning it all," said Coach Ron Clinton.

Savegnago will have plenty of company in the win column, says Clinton. "We're solid at every spot but 142 . . . we've got the personnel to win a national championship. I think it'll be a dog fight between us, Augustana (SD) and California-Bakersfield.

"Bakersfield lost six seniors from its championship club and Northern Iowa, which has always been a tough challenger, has gone Division I. Even with the kids we lost, I think we can be right up there."

Clinton most likely will be without two returning All-Americans, one by choice and one not. Bob McGuinn (Ingleside-Grant), at 134, will undergo surgery this month and is unlikely to return this season.

Randy Blackman (River Grove-East Leyden), a 118 lber., will redshirt this season to allow fifth year senior Bryan Murphy (LaGrange-Lyons) an opportunity to emerge in the lightest weight class.

"Bryan is about equal in ability . . . could be a surprise since he hasn't had an opportunity to wrestle much before," Clinton said.

Lettermen fill most of the rest of the spots. Derek Porter (Mims, Fl.-Titusville), second in the MCC last season, is set at 126.

Doug Schafer (Sterling), hampered by injuries throughout his career, moves up to McGuinn's 134 slot. "Doug is 100% right now and if we can keep him healthy, he'll be instrumental in our success."

Sophomore John Bahlenhorst (Oak Forest) will start at 142 with two year letterman Ken Blackman (River Grove-East Leyden) at 150.

"Kenny's technique is as good as anyone . . . we felt he lost quite a few matches in the closing seconds last year so we've tried to overcome that through an extensive summer weight program."

Another conference runner-up, Mike Polz (Riverside-Brookfield), returns at 158. "Mike lost at nationals last year in two overtimes to the eventual champ . . . after coming that close he has developed a stronger committment."

Mark Gronowski (Titusville, FL), ineligible second semester last winter, returns at 167. He was 18-4 early in the year and Clinton describes him as "relentless in his pursuit of opponents."

Other than Savegnago, the heavier weights will be dominated by freshmen. Earl Edwards (Peoria-Central) and Derrick Waldroup (Harvey-Bremen) are competing at 177.

Edwards took fourth in the state at 167 while Waldroup was fourth in Greco style wrestling at a national summer meet.

Kelly Walls (Skokie-Niles East), fourth in the state at heavyweight, has the inside track to replace three time All-American Dave Klemm at the top spot.

Dennis McCormick (Springfield), a transfer from Minnesota, will become eligible the second semester which may cause some shifting in the 167-177 classes.