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Knights lose to Conard Injuries mount for the Southington gymnasts

By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

Amanda Mirando's shoulder was packed in ice as she strolled through the West Hartford gym offering encouragement to the younger gymnasts. Toni Penta kept grabbing at her sore ankle, and Olivia Morrell had a noticeable limp.

Gymnastics

On Thursday, Jan. 26, the Lady Knight gymnasts competed for the first time in two weeks. The layoff gave the girls a chance to start healing from their recent injuries, but it wasn't enough to get them back 100 percent. Southington fell far short of their typical 140-point scoring range, and the girls lost to Conard, 137.95-135.1.

"It's just one meet," said senior co-captain Mirando. "We have five or six more. We have states and opens. It's really hard on your body, and it's really hard on yourself. It takes a lot to even come out."

“We're going to get better. We can't take everything so hard, so we've got to get back into the gym and keep working hard.”

”
Amanda Mirando,
SHS gymnast

Southington had some good performances. Freshman Lexi Rothstein led the Knights on beam with an 8.4. Penta shrugged off her sore ankle to lead the Knights on floor (9.2). Kayla Nati led the Knights on vault (9.1) and bars (8.5) and scored in the top four for beam (8.0) and floor (8.75).

Conard's Jackie Palermo led all scorers with 36.0 points in the all-around, but Nati placed second overall with 34.35. Rothstein placed third overall with a 34.1, but Southington struggled at times with their injuries and inexperience.

"We just weren't on top of our game," said Southington assistant coach Steve Kiback. "We had a lot of misses and bobbles out there. We just weren't tight. I think that's our biggest problem right now. We have to get a little stronger and tighten up our stuff. Then, we'll be fine."

Nati and Rothstein scored in all four events. Penta scored on vault (8.3) and floor. Freshman Lindsey Socquet scored on vault (8.7) and bars (7.6), while freshman Sarah Leahy scored on bars (8.05) and floor (8.65). Morrell contributed on beam (8.0).

Jan. 26

Conard 137.95
Southington 135.1

With Coach Byron Knox in Florida with his college team, much of the leadership fell on Southington's upperclassmen. Mirando said that it was a learning experience, and the team will continue to get better.

"It just wasn't our day," said Mirando. "A lot of us were hurt, and we were pulling back. We're going to get better. We can't take everything so hard, so we've got to get back into the gym and keep working hard."

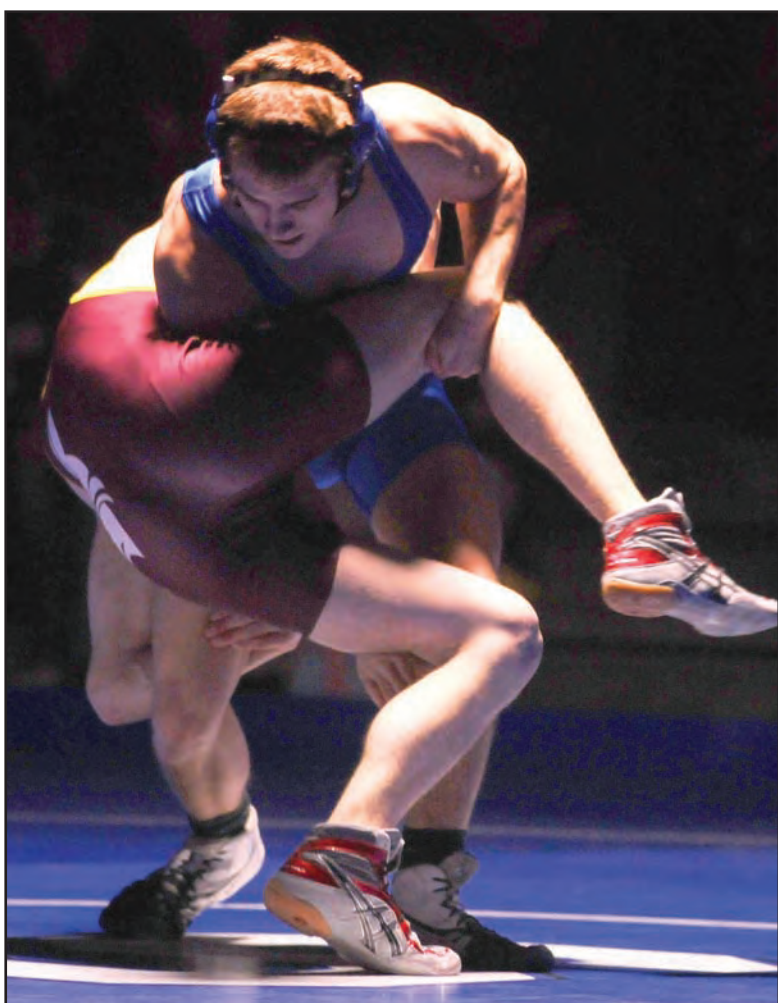
The Knights fell to 1-1 in the early season and fell to sixth in the state rankings. Conard improved to No. 4 with a 136.1 average.

"They're trying to build back up, but we're just not there yet," said Kiback. "We've got a lot of work to do. We've got to get back in the gym, tighten things up, and get going again."

Amanda Mirando performs on the beam during a loss to Conard on Jan. 26.



JOHN GORALSKI



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Ryan DuPuis takes down his opponent during a 40-31 win over South Windsor on Jan. 25.

It's Mass-Conn Fusion Maxwell, Daly advance to interstate finals

By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

With the consolation finals battling on one mat and the championship round fighting on the other, Southington was embroiled in a four-team race in the middle of the standings. The Knights trailed Trumbull by a thin margin and were clinging to slim leads over Glastonbury and Dracut (MA).

For the third straight year, the Mass-Conn Fusion tournament welcomed some of the top wrestlers from Connecticut and Massachusetts. With six wrestlers in the medal bouts, the Knights were holding their own.

Wrestling

"This tournament is all about getting them ready for big tournaments like the Class LLs instead of getting intimidated by the tournament," said Southington wrestling coach Derek Dion. "I'd like to become a tournament team, but I don't think we're quite there yet. We're going to keep working hard

every day to prepare for the tournament, and that's what we're trying to do here."

If the final rounds are any indication, the Knights are showing signs of becoming that tournament team. Austin Sullivan (182) battled back from a 2-0 deficit and earned a third place finish with a 5-4 win in the consolation round. Zach Bylykbashi (113) knocked off the No. 1 seed early in the day and battled from behind to win his consolation final. As a team, Southington overcame Trumbull to secure a tie for fourth place and held off the other two threats. Dion was pleased with the late performances.

"It's been good because our kids are becoming good at wrestling back. We're getting used to it," he said. "A lot of times, a kid will lose with high expectations in the semi-finals or before and they'll lay down. Hopefully, our kids are becoming more mentally prepared for the grind of these consolation matches."

In fact, a pair of Knights advanced to the finals. Sophomore Zach Maxwell moved up a weight

class to test his mettle against the 195-pound division. He scrambled for a pair of pins and a 7-3 decision before losing a tight battle in the championship finals.

"He had a pretty good day," said Dion. "We put him up a weight class just to see how he'd deal with the bigger, heavier kids, and he wrestled really well. He knocked off the No. 1 seed, so we have to just keep building his confidence and let him go at it."

Travis Daly blew through the tournament in the heavyweight division. He was outsized but collected a pair of pins in under a minute before losing in the finals.

"He's been working really hard in the room, and he's getting to be a consistent guy for us," said Dion. "He's been working really hard to get ready for the big show. He's really coming around. I think he's poised to make a good contribution for us next month at the state meets."

Tyler Mirando (106) and Don Rinaldi (152) both advanced to the

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