

Men of St. Patrick

WHENEVER YOU THINK YOU HAVE PROBLEMS.....READ THIS!!!

“Blooms Champion Wrestler Grapples With Life” by Jerry Shnay

“Sometimes I thought about quitting, but I realized I have my own life to live. I have to keep on going.”

Robert Flemming, State Wrestling Champion, 1975

The trouble with the truth is that it's too incredible. And the following is the truth. Robert Flemming of Bloom High School is a state wrestling champion, but few could have survived the personal problems he has lived through in the past four months. (1974-75 school year)

He has seen his father in a coma and given up for dead.

He has seen his mother die in his arms as he was trying to rush her to a hospital at Christmas time.

And he was told, one day before a sectional tournament, that one of his twelve sisters was murdered – first clubbed to death then run over by a car.

And despite all, Robert triumphed. “I did it for my mother,” he says. “When I was a sophomore, she told me to go as far as I can. I was wrestling all the time for her.” Seemingly he gained strength as the long, heartbreaking season grew. His final record was 35-0, winning the state 167-pound title. He set a record for the quickest pin in his division – 23 seconds – and he won the championship by an incredible 21-4. His coach, Tom Koenig, recalls that match. A pin by Flemming would have given Bloom the state title, and Robert tried his best. “He had the other guy on his back in the first seven seconds,” says Koenig. “Maybe some other coaches thought it was a pin, but I guess you have to satisfy this referee.” As it was Bloom tied with Richards for 1st place. But Robert was an inspiration adds Koenig. “Not many could have gone through his ordeal with his mother.

Robert's mother, Irene, had been complaining about her throat for more than a year before her death. She had one operation and shortly before she died, a hospital had sent her home, saying she wasn't sick. “She started having difficulty breathing, and Robert tried to get her to the hospital, but by the time he had carried her to the street she was dead. He told me he just placed her on the sidewalk and covered her head. He knew she was gone.” Anger and frustration gripped Robert, and he lashed out at the first thing he saw. In this case it was his fist against a plate glass window. The cut required 32 stitches. This was just before a holiday tournament and officials let him wrestle. “Towards the end of the meet Robert had to run back and forth from the wake to the gymnasium. He pinned all of his opponents except in the title match where he won 5-0. He said he was wrestling for his mother, and you had to believe him. He seemed to get stronger each match.”

When Robert learned of the death of his sister, Willie Mae, he almost decided to go home. That was on the eve of the sectional tournament at Riverside-Brookfield. He had heard of the murder in a phone call to the motel where his team was staying. He talked it over with Coach Koenig and decided to stay. His father, meanwhile is recuperating from brain surgery after being in a coma and virtually given up for dead.

After all of this what does the future hold for Robert Flemming? I wasn't to go into the free style meets this summer and to school someplace. Wrestling is all I've done and in four years at school I've only lost 10 matches.