

Wrestlers go to 'hell and back'

Locals put through paces, prep for Guelph Open

GREG LAYSON
Mercury Staff

GUELPH

If you've ever wondered how a champion wrestler is made, drop by the University of Guelph's west gym early on a Saturday morning to find out.

There you'll see strength and conditioning coach Doug Pflug running roughly 15 wrestlers ragged.

It's a fine line between training and torture as the wrestlers -- nine of whom are carded by Athletics Canada -- perform a cardiovascular testing step aerobic program for 60 minutes. And only after an hour of wrestling.

"Some of them vomit," said Pflug, who has -- and shows -- no mercy. "When you're on the mat, they're not only physically trying to beat you but mentally, too.

"We're constantly setting our burnout point higher through the intense training."

Pflug is a former University of Guelph wrestler himself. He lettered at the school in 1985 and 1986. He's now a police officer and the Guelph Storm's strength and conditioning coach.

Pflug's program focuses on calf strength, core stability, balance, quick feet, agility and explosive strength. It's paying off according to two-time defending 67-kilogram national junior champion Allison Leslie, a Fergus native, who also won the weight class in 2006 as a juvenile.

"It's hell, but it make us stronger," she said. "Doug's awesome. He's so encouraging. He makes you want to work out.

"My legs are a lot bigger. I'm in better shape. I don't get as gassed in matches. It's helped overall."

Leslie is preparing for this Saturday's Guelph Open at the University of Guelph. It's a meet she'd like to win.

"It's nice, you're on your own turf," she said. "There's no travelling. You're well-rested."

Leslie also has hopes of defending her junior title one last time this year. She moves up to senior in 2010.

"There's a lot of pressure to stay on top," she said. "I would love to have one more shot at world championship. I really, really want it."

Which is why she travels, as Pflug puts it, "to hell and back" every Saturday morning.

glayson@quelpmercury.com



Greg Layson, Guelph Mercury