

# Rhinos pin down reputation with tourney

By Jaclyn Shambaugh

Correspondent

Throughout the year, the Rhino Wrestling Club, a Fayetteville AAU team composed of 60 athletes between the ages of 4 and 18, travels the country competing in tournaments as far away as Michigan and Florida.

But when January rolls around, it's the Rhinos who play host to the rest of the country's amateur wrestlers in their annual Rhino eXtreme Wrestling Tournament.

This year's tournament, which will take place Jan. 26 at the Crown Expo Center, is the fourth annual eXtreme, and the event has grown in importance and size since its inception in 2005.

The eXtreme will act as a qualifier for both the Tournament of Champions, the national AAU championship held annually in Ohio, and the Border Wars Tournament, an annual championship tourney in Michigan.

The Rhino eXtreme is the final tournament in the Marine Corps Challenge, a three-event series sponsored by the U.S. Marine Corps that allows wrestlers to earn points at each event. The top 50 will receive a belt as a symbol of their accomplishments.

The first events of the challenge were the Cougars' Den Wrestling Tournament, which took place in Asheboro on Dec. 8, and the Eastern North Carolina Brawl, held Jan. 5 in Winterville.

The tournament was originally held at Jack Britt

## YourSport

High School, where 180 wrestlers from 20 different teams competed in 2005, but moved to the Crown Expo Center last year, where 450 wrestlers from 39 teams competed.

Rhinos coach Marty Bartram anticipates between 600 to 800 wrestlers from more than 50 teams to compete and expects the 11 mats at the tournament to be packed. He attributes a portion of this increase to a clarification in the rules regarding the participation of high school wrestlers in AAU events.

At past tournaments, it was believed that athletes who participated in high school wrestling were ineligible to compete at events not held by the North Carolina High School Athletic Association. Bartram has cleared up that misconception this year.

"In general, a wrestler cannot compete in his school uniform or represent his school in a non-North Carolina High School Athletic Association sanctioned event," the coach said.

High school wrestlers will be present at the event, but they will be competing as AAU athletes rather than as high school competitors.

The Rhinos have learned a great deal about holding a tournament since the 2005 Rhino eXtreme, a tournament that the team started with the

See **YOURSPO**R, Page 22E



Staff photo by Cindy Burnham

Coach Marty Bartram, center, speaks to his AAU wrestling team, the Rhinos, before practice at Jack Britt High School on Monday. The Rhino Wrestling Club will hold the fourth annual Rhino Xtreme tournament on Jan. 26-27 at the Crown Expo Center.

## OPEN HOUSE

January 17th  
Thursday Night, 6-7:30 pm

Where: 908 S. McPherson

## VILLAGE

Christian Academy

"Committed to God..."

## WANT TO WRESTLE?

If you would like to know more about Rhino Wrestling, contact Marty Bartram at (910) 436-2437 or (910) 824-0024

or by e-mail at [rhinocoach@rhinowrestling.org](mailto:rhinocoach@rhinowrestling.org). The organization's Web site is <http://www.rhinowrestling.org>.

## YourSport

From **Page 19E**

intent to mirror the competition that the Rhinos faced at the national level.

At that time, local tournaments divided wrestlers by age, making sure that an athlete would square off against someone within two years of his age. However, at national tournaments, wrestlers in kindergarten through fifth grade were matched up with no age separation.

"The first year, we did a single age-group tournament," Bartram said. "We looked out for big age differences in the division for safety reasons, but generally the weight classes took care of themselves."

The Rhinos have since modified the format, dividing the competitors into three age divisions.

For the first time, the eXtreme will feature a novice tournament, run by Team Cabarrus, to give first- and second-year wrestlers under the age of 13 a chance to exhibit their skills.

The Rhinos have also established a three-match guarantee this year for any wrestler in a bracket containing four or more competitors.

While Bartram and the Rhinos expect a huge turnout at the eXtreme, less than 20 wrestlers are currently registered. Bartram shrugs off the low number, saying that wrestlers commonly wait to register until close to the

deadline, in this case Jan. 24.

"There's a tournament every week," Bartram explained. "It's a matter of financial output, I think, for a lot parents. The last two, three days, there'll be hundreds (of entries)."

The entry fee is \$25 for the Rhino tournament and \$15 for the novice portion. All spectators must pay a \$5 admission fee. The fees are minimal considering the cost for putting on a tournament of this size.

The tournament costs in excess of \$13,000, a sum the Rhinos manage to meet with the help of corporate sponsors. The tab for awards alone can be as much as \$5,000, as Rhino eXtreme individual and team champions can win belts, medals and trophies.

Bartram expects the tournament to continue to grow. The coach uses his wrestlers as ambassadors for the eXtreme, with them showing off belts won at the event. As the Rhinos travel throughout the year, they spread the word of the tournament they hold, drawing participants in with the promise of tough competition and unique awards.

"Everywhere we go, we bring the belts with us," Bartram said. "And people always want to know, 'What's the deal with the belt, and where do I need to go to win it?'"

**Recycle  
newsprint**



For those y

As the years unfold  
soul. Here, we

that unite friends and f  
living suites are design  
include home mainten  
housekeeping, and act  
to be part of our grow

**Join Us**

Wine & Cheese  
Friday, January 18  
4:00 - 6:00 pm