



Practice is the key for Vern Martel (left), Darcy Goodkey and Glen Schlivinsky as they prepare for national competition. JOHN MCKENZIE/FREE PRESS

## City trio gets grip on arm wrestling crowns

Three-time world champion and 10-time Canadian champion arm wrestler and Prince George Sports Hall of Fame inductee Vern Martel came out of his self-imposed two-year retirement last weekend at a competition in Williams Lake. And he brought a couple of friends out of retirement with him.

Martel, along with friends Glen Schlivinsky and Darcy Goodkey, have formed a powerhouse arm wrestling trio, and they've made every powerful right-arm between Vancouver and William's Lake nervous.

"We're having teams come up here and using us as a gauge for how well they're doing," says Martel. "We have one guy who comes up frequently and his goal is to beat us so he'll know he's ready. Guys come up and then go back down and tell everyone that they'd better watch out for the Prince George guys."

It's not idle boasting either; Martel has twisted wrists from Moscow to Frankfurt and right in our own northern back yard. And won almost every time. Along with his two teammates he won a place on Team BC who will represent the province at the Canadian National arm wrestling championship in Kelowna on September 2.

It's Schlivinsky's third time on the provincial team. He placed third at the nationals in 1994. It's Martel's 11th time.

Both Schlivinsky and Goodkey are in a position envied by arm wrestlers all over the province. They are able to practice and learn under one of the top arm wrestlers in Canada. And Martel has a lot to teach them.

"I outweigh him by about 100 pounds and he can still beat me. It's not fair," laughs Schlivinsky, who competes in the heavy-weight class. "He's got basically twice the experience we do if not more. He has pulled against a lot of different people and the more people you pull against the more experience you have."

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"It's not size, it's technique. And having the strength to use that technique," explains Martel. Although he's ranked in the 166 to 176-lb class he defeats people nearly twice his size with alarming frequency. And that's without the benefit of leverage from bracing himself with his left hand, which has been paralyzed since a 1984 motorcycle accident. Overcoming that handicap and going on to win two more world championships is something he attributes to superior technique and superior strategy.

For the uninitiated, arm wrestling can seem like a contest of brute strength. But it is a competition that develops on several levels - psychology, skill, and, yes, a bit of sheer muscle is important too.

"You can grip a guy's hand and know right away what they're going to do," says Martel. "Gripping up with them you can tell their weaknesses and strengths. You have to keep constantly changing your own techniques so you can stay ahead of people."

Updating technique is an integral part of arm wrestling, says Martel, and that's where one of the major benefits of being a team comes into play.

"When you're up there you're so focused. Even the roar of the crowd disappears. By being outside of that and watching what each other is doing you can pick up on when the other person missed an opportunity."

Next up for the Prince George trio is an arm wrestling competition at Billy Barker Days in Quesnel, July 15. Schlivinsky and Goodkey will both be competing, trying to gather more valuable experience before nationals. Martel will be refereeing the tournament, but "I might just jump in if there's a lot of heavyweights there." Chances are, they may receive a first-hand lesson from the world-class champion.

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