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## Raising the stakes

### Higher weight class brings a greater challenge for two-time champ Moore

ANDY HAMILTON • IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN • FEBRUARY 18, 2009

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DES MOINES -- Nick Moore's path to history has been lined with potholes this season.



His challenges have literally been bigger, the close matches have been far more common, and so, too, have the flare-ups in his surgically repaired shoulder.

But the West High junior is still undefeated, still No. 1 in the state and still on track to become the first three-time state champion in school history with the possibility of a pursuit for a fourth on the horizon.

What's more, this is his favorite time of the season, some extra rehabilitation has eased the discomfort in his right shoulder, and Wells Fargo Arena is the place where Moore has transcended his skills in the past.

"I get excited," he said. "Every time you go in there, the place is packed, and they're there to watch you. It gets you excited, and you want to do the best you can."

The spotlight of the Class 3A state wrestling meet will shine brightest this week on Moore and teammate Derek St. John. Only 65 wrestlers have won three Iowa state high school titles in 88 years of the tournament. The West stars could join the list Saturday night.

Their quest begins at 1 p.m. when the tournament starts this afternoon inside Wells Fargo Arena.

"Some people get nervous and clam up there," Moore said. "I get excited."

It was in that venue two years ago where Moore knocked off Waverly-Shell Rock state champion Mark Ballweg in overtime in the 130-pound semifinals and then torched Newton's Isaiah Smith, winning by technical fall as a freshman in the state finals.

Moore moved up two weights and beat Davenport North's Alec Hoffman by a 12-2 major decision in last year's 140-pound championship.

This year, though, hasn't been as smooth. Moore bumped up two more weights to 152, and bigger opponents have tightened his margin of victory at times. Still, Moore takes a 41-0 record, the state's top ranking at 152 and a No. 3 national ranking into this week's tournament.

"He's had closer matches than some of us want him to have," West coach Mark Reiland said. "But he's done the things he's needed to do to continue to win. He's wrestled well enough to win at times and well enough to dominate at times. Hopefully, we get the guy who dominates this week."

St. John (40-0), on the other hand, has been remarkably dominant. The top-ranked 160-pounder in the country has only had one decision this season -- a 14-7 win against Isaiah Gonzalez of Montini (Ill.) Catholic

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in the championship match of a loaded bracket at the Dvorak Memorial in December.

In January, the Iowa recruit tore through a bracket at the Ed Winger Invitational in Urbandale that featured the top five 160-pounders in the 3A rankings, scoring nine takedowns in the finals in an 18-8 mauling of Urbandale's Michael Moreno.

St. John, a senior, said he looked at that tournament as an opportunity to keep from "giving anybody any hope at all."

"I didn't know how big of a gap there was going to be, but that's definitely what I was looking for," he said. "I guess you can always do better. That's the way you can look at it."

St. John enters the tournament with a 174-8 career record. He hasn't dropped a match to an opponent in Iowa since losing to Des Moines Roosevelt's Montell Marion in the 130-pound semifinals as a freshman.

"He's going to have some tough matches," Reiland said. "There are some kids that want a shot at him. If he takes them for granted, he could be in for a tough match. If he goes out and gets after them like he did against Moreno earlier, I think his job is going to be relatively easy. He's one who steps up, and I wouldn't expect that to change."

The Trojans are banking on the same from Moore, who has a track record of performing his best in the later rounds of the tournament.

"For semis and finals, you're so prepared for it that nothing can get in your way," he said. "You're so prepared that winning the lottery couldn't faze you. You're just set on winning that match."

He takes a similar approach toward looking at the big picture. The chatter about his chances of becoming a four-time state champion started almost instantly after Moore won his first title two years ago and intensified after he claimed his second last year.

"I've still got to get the third," he said. "I get whipped on enough in the practice room by the coaches. They question me about getting three first. They keep you going. They keep you on your feet. They never (let) you (get) satisfied. You always want to keep getting more. They keep me working hard and going after one goal at a time."

And if Moore ever needs an extra push, the West coaches know which button to push. Every now and then, Moore said they remind him of the loss on his 123-1 career record -- a defeat against Ballweg in the 2007 state duals.

"They say some good things, they say some bad things, they bring up some things from the past," Moore said. "I've got a loss on my record that keeps me going."

"It gets you fired up. It's not like I get mad about it. But I could've worked harder to win that match, and if I don't work hard now, I might not win the match I want to win down the road."

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