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West pulls ahead

Seven Trojans advance to next round

ANDY HAMILTON • IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN • FEBRUARY 20, 2009

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DES MOINES -- The seats inside Wells Fargo Arena are padded and plush, but David Solis would rather stand.

ADVERTISEMENT The West High junior assured himself of a spot on the medal stand at the state wrestling meet Thursday, and his remarkable rise has helped put the Trojans back in the Class 3A team title chase.

Solis and six of his teammates advanced to the semifinals with victories Thursday to help the Trojans regain the lead. West finished the day with 73.5 points, 3.5 more than second-place Waverly-Shell Rock.

The Trojans were banking on state champions Dylan Carew, Nick Moore and Derek St. John to reach the semis. They were counting on freshmen stars Jack Hathaway and Justin Koethe to do the same. They had medal hopes for senior Matt Behnami to get there, too.

Nobody was penciling in Solis as a possible medalist at the beginning of the season, and certainly not last year when he finished his sophomore season with a 4-10 record.

"It doesn't feel real, not at all," Solis said. "Last year, I was up in the stands watching everybody else wrestle and watching everybody else jump up and getting excited, and I'm not doing anything but clapping my hands in the stands. Now I'm able to jump up and get excited like everybody else."

City High will have a similar vantage point for the rest of the tournament. The disastrous tournament for the Little Hawks ended when they lost all four of their matches and finished the day in 44th place with 6.5 points. City's three qualifiers, seniors Stephen Blayer, Jimmy Lazaro and Kevin Harp, were eliminated after the second round of consolation matches.

"There's not much to say," City coach Brad Smith said. "They didn't get the job done. ... I felt they all had the potential to place, but it just didn't happen."

West, on the other hand, will have seven wrestlers on the medal stand when the tournament concludes Saturday night. The Trojans think they have enough firepower to hold off the top-ranked Go-Hawks. West lost freshman Gradey Gambrell and sophomore Garrett Hathaway from the tournament after consolation defeats.

Waverly-Shell Rock has a pair of wrestlers still in the consolations to go with five semifinalists -- the No. 1 quartet of Eric DeVos (112), Cody Caldwell (125), Jake Ballweg (135) and Cody Krumwiede (215) and third-ranked Jordan Rinken (119).

"I know it's the state tournament and all, but I don't feel like we need to upset anybody with those five guys," Waverly-Shell Rock coach Rick Caldwell said. "We just can't get upset."

Top-ranked Moore (43-0) dodged defeat in the quarterfinals, hanging on for a 5-4 win against third-ranked Spencer BeLieu of Indianola at 152. The two-time state champion was relieved to advance and run his career record to 125-1, but he was upset with his performance.

"I don't know if it was me, him, him changing it up or me not adapting to what he was giving me, but I just couldn't catch on," he said. "It's just disappointing with how you train and what your coaches expect of you and everything else."

St. John (42-0) continued his tear toward a third title. The nation's top-ranked 160-pounder decked fifth-ranked Meredith Meader of Indianola for his second first-period pin of the tournament.

Fourth-ranked Jack Hathaway (39-4) rolled into the semifinals with a 9-0 major decision against Linn-Mar's



Press-Citizen / Matthew Holst

West High's Jack Hathaway works to take down Linn-Mar Marion's Greg Keating wrestling at 103 pounds Thursday in the Class 3A quarterfinals of the 2009 State Wrestling Tournament at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines.

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No. 9 Greg Keating at 103.

Top-ranked Carew (26-1) ran up the score on Cedar Rapids Prairie's Cole Schulte before notching a second-period fall at 140 to continue his quest for a second title. His first championship came as a 103-pound freshman in 2006. He spent the past two years watching four of his teammates collect eight individual titles.

"Every time we come here it's bittersweet because I see my friends doing well, and there's the good memory I have of winning this tournament," Carew said. "But the losses are what motivate me to win now."

Koethe (42-6) said he's been driven by a January loss to top-ranked Ballweg. Koethe earned an opportunity for a semifinal rematch with his 18-12 win in a wild 135-pound quarterfinal match against Marshalltown's Gustavo Martinez, who pinned Ballweg in December at the Five Seasons Duals in Cedar Rapids.

Koethe and Martinez flopped around like a pair of cats in a washing machine, each racking up multiple sets of back points and nearly pinning each other before the sixth-ranked West freshman topped off his third victory in six days against a top-five opponent.

"He's explosive," West coach Mark Reiland said of Martinez. "We knew he was explosive, but he's probably even beyond what we anticipated."

Solis has been better than the Trojans imagined, and perhaps so, too, has Behnami.

Solis (32-10) clinched a spot on the medal stand with Thursdays' quarterfinal pin against Pella's A.J. Arrendell at 171.

"He's come light years from where he was a year ago," Reiland said. "A year ago, he was wrestling anywhere from 160 to 215. That's tough to ask of anybody, especially a sophomore. We knew he was going to have some success, we probably didn't know he was going to have this kind of success now. We thought he could maybe do it eventually."

Behnami (30-15) qualified for the state meet last year as a junior, but his stay was short. He won his first match, got pinned in his next two and vowed to come back and do better as a senior.

Behnami's 4-3 quarterfinal win against Stefan Breittling of Ames assured him of at least a sixth-place finish at 215. Not bad for a guy who lost nearly as many matches as he won as a freshman on the JV level.

"I was a JV kid and didn't really care much, I just went out to do it," Behnami said. "I was probably one of the worst JV kids. I started hanging out with Dylan and all them they'd always go to practices in the summer, and I started doing that. I worked my way up in the off-season with a lot of hard work. I trained the right way, and it also helps having some of the best kids in the state and nation. Even though they're lighter than me, they can still push me."

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