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I.C. West continues MVC roll

By K.J. Pilcher
The Gazette
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MARION — The expectations are so high for the Iowa City West wrestling team that Saturday's performance was met with mixed reactions.

Sure, the Trojans defended their Mississippi Valley Conference team title and placed all 14 wrestlers. And don't forget the six champions among seven finalists. But somehow that felt a little short of West's own expectations.

Class 3A second-ranked West scored 266 1/2 points to win its sixth straight conference tournament team title Saturday at Linn-Mar High School. The Trojans outscored runner-up Cedar Rapids Prairie by 66 1/2 points with Waterloo East at third with 150 1/2. Cedar Rapids Kennedy and Cedar Rapids Jefferson completed the top five at 135 and 117, respectively.

Expectations around the area ranged from winning by 100 points to scoring as much as the second and third place teams combined.

"We planned on dominating but there was some tough competition here," said West 135-pounder Justin Koethe. "Things don't always work out as planned. I'm happy with it."

The Trojans received the norm from their big guns and some added firepower from three freshmen, crowning twice as many champs as the next team. Former state champions Dylan Carew (140), Nick Moore (152) and Derek St. John (160) won titles.

St. John (36-0) major decisioned Kennedy's Zach Parsons (23-9), 17-4, in the 160-pound final to become just the fifth four-time conference champion, joining Dubuque Hempstead's Cliff Moore (1999), Johnny Galloway Jr. (2002) of Waterloo East and Iowa City High, Kennedy and West standout Mitch Mueller (2005) and former teammate Nate Moore (2008).

"I feel good about it," said St. John, who owns titles at 130, 135 and 145. "Especially with only four other people ever doing it."

Freshmen Jack Hathaway (103), Gradey Gambrall (125) and Koethe (135) were impressive in claiming crowns for West.

"All three freshmen wrestled well," West Coach Mark Reiland said. "They were all dominant. That's pretty good for three freshmen to come in like that."

Hathaway (34-4) decked Linn-Mar's Greg Keating (27-5) in 1 minute, 34 seconds. Koethe (35-6) added a second-period fall over Prairie freshman Zach Witte (29-8), who was a target since beating Koethe last year in AAU.

"I was planning on pinning him," said Koethe, who looked up to his dad, Mark, in the crowd with excitement afterward. "I was happy."

Gambrall (22-8) added another win over a Prairie foe, using a key five-point move in the first to beat Trevor Hardin, 6-4. He scored a big 14-5 semifinal win over second-seed and eighth-ranked Demetrious Taylor of Waterloo East.

"That's probably the best Gradey's looked all year," Reiland said. "He wrestled well. He wrestled smart. He did the things he needed to do to be successful."

Prairie's balance was evident Saturday, placing all but one wrestler with seven in the semis and six finalists.

"It was a pretty big team effort," said Prairie Coach Blake Williams, noting the key semifinal round, "We had some guys who stepped up, too."

Like Bizzio earned the Hawks' lone championship, dropping Iowa City High's Stephen

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and Jason Shupp (189).

Jefferson had a finalist in 285-pounder Conner Herman, who finished second to Waterloo East's Trayvonious Pendleton.

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(Stephen Mally/Freelance)

Cedar Rapids Prairie's Jake Rizzio controls Iowa City High's Stephen Blayer in the 130-pound final at the Mississippi Valley Conference tournament Saturday at Linn-Mar High School in Marion. Rizzio won, 8-3. Iowa City West won the tournament.

