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## West wins sixth-straight MVC crown

Posted on January 31, 2009 by kjpilcher

MARION — The expectations are so high for the Iowa City West wrestling program that Saturday's performance was met with mixed reactions.

Sure, the Trojans defended their Mississippi Valley Conference team title and placed all 14 wrestlers. Don't forget the six champions of seven finalists. Somehow that all fell a little short of what they were expecting from themselves.

Class 3A second-ranked West was still impressive, tallying 266½ 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 66½ points with Waterloo East at third with 150½. Cedar Rapids Kennedy and Cedar Rapids Jefferson completed the top five at 135 and 117, respectively.

Expectations entering the tournament ranged from winning by 100 points to score as much as the second and third place teams combined.

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

There was plenty to be happy about. The Trojans had twice as many champs as the next team. They received the norm from their big guns and some firepower from three freshmen.

Former state champions Dylan Carew (140), Nick Moore (152) and Derek St. John (160) all won titles.

Carew (20-1) pinned Prairie's Cole Schulte (26-7) at 140 and Moore (37-0) won a 5-0 decision over Waterloo East's Quinten Haynes.

St. John (36-0) major decisioned Kennedy's Zach Parsons (23-9), 17-4, in the 160-pound final. He became 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, owning titles at 130, 135 and 145. "Especially with only four other people ever doing it."

St. John could have some company and those expectations will remain high with the West rookies.

Freshmen Jack Hathaway (103), Gradey Gambrell (125) and Koethe (135) were impressive claiming crowns.

"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."

Gambrell (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 doused any ideas of a close race for second early, pushing seven to the semifinals and six into the finals.

Prairie's balance was evident Saturday, placing all but one wrestler.

"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."

Jake Rizzio earned the Hawks' lone championship, dropping Iowa City High's Stephen Blayer, 8-3, at 130.

Rizzio opened with a slick fireman's carry for a 2-0 advantage, adding takedowns in the second and third.

"Jake was pretty solid," Williams said. "Little things that need to get worked on, but he is determined as ever to get high up on that (state) awards stand, so we'll see what happens in the next few weeks, but it was a good step today for him."

Kennedy advanced three to the finals, receiving titles from top-seeds Shane Williams (112) and Jason Shupp (189).

Williams handed West its only lose in the finals, beating Jon Skarda, 5-3, in overtime. Williams trailed by three beginning the third, but forced the extra period with an escape and takedown. He scored the winning takedown midway through minute period.

Shupp controlled Prairie's Josh Lambrecht, breaking open a scoreless match with a reversal and back points in the second for a 6-2 win.

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

Herman advanced to the final with a dominant win over second-ranked Kevin Harp of Iowa City High. Herman, ranked sixth, cinched up a couple cradles to rack up six nearfall points for the 11-2 semifinal win.

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