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West is still the best

Newcomers help veterans dominate MVC again

ANDY HAMILTON • IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN • FEBRUARY 1, 2009

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MARION -- The common thought inside West High's wrestling room at the start of the season was that the Trojans were a good team with elite potential.

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The prevailing belief was that three talented freshmen had the upside to take West's star-studded roster up another level and into a category where the Trojans were collecting championships again.

Freshmen Jack Hathaway, Gradey Gambrall and Justin Koethe each won individual titles and West added another Mississippi Valley Conference trophy to its case Saturday. The three rookies were joined by multi-time conference champions Derek St. John, Nick Moore and Dylan Carew, helping the Trojans rack up 266.5 points and run away with their sixth straight MVC title. Cedar Rapids Prairie finished second with 200 points.

"As a coach, I keep thinking there's going to be a letdown at some point, and there hasn't been," West coach Mark Reiland said of his team, which hasn't lost since Jan. 8. "Today might have been as close to a letdown as we've had and we lost 11 matches. I don't think you can call that a letdown."

West went 34-11 on the day, and all 14 of the Trojans placed seventh or better. St. John became the fifth wrestler in tournament history to win four titles, Moore stayed on pace to join that exclusive group with his third championship in three tries, and Hathaway, Gambrall and Koethe looked like viable contenders to join the club with their performances.

"They're going to be pretty salty," said Carew, who dropped down to 140 this week and won his second MVC title with a pin in the finals against Cedar Rapids Prairie's Cole Schulte. "They're tougher than nails right now, and they're getting better every single day with the workout partners they've got. They can't ask for anything better."

"All three looked really good, really dominant," Reiland said. "Jack pinned his way through, Justin pinned his way through, and Gradey beat three kids who have been ranked or are ranked. That's a pretty good day."

It wasn't such a good day for City High. The Little Hawks wound up without an individual champion for the third time in four years and finished seventh with 97.5 points. City stumbled in the final two rounds, winning just four of 20 matches to finish in the middle of the pack. Stephen Blayer, the only Little Hawk to reach the finals, dropped an 8-3 decision to Prairie's Jake Rizzio in the finals at 130.

"Our last two rounds, we didn't wrestle very well at all," City coach Brad Smith said. "We just didn't get the points when we needed, we didn't open up our offense enough, we lost some close matches and we lost some not-so-close matches."

One of the not-so-close matches was a stunner. Second-ranked heavyweight Kevin Harp suffered his first



Press-Citizen / John Richard

West High's Dylan Carew, right, squeezes Cedar Rapids Washington's Will Hart in a 140-pound match Saturday at Linn-Mar High School in Marion.

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loss of the season, getting cradled three times in an 11-2 semifinal loss to Conner Herman of Cedar Rapids Jefferson. Harp was looking forward to a possible championship bout with top-ranked Trayvonious Pendleton of Waterloo East.

"Probably a little too much," Harp said. "Probably looking past Herman a little too much."

The Trojans left the rest of the pack behind when they pushed seven wrestlers into the finals. Hathaway pinned all three of his opponents Saturday in the first period and decked Linn-Mar's Greg Keating in the finals at 103. Gambrell took Prairie's Trevor Hardin to his back for five points in the first period on his way to a 6-4 win at 125. Koethe whipped Prairie's Zach Witte over for a second-period fall at 135.

"I think a lot of people underestimate me," Koethe said. "I like that, though, because they don't really know who I am. But I think they're starting to learn my name."

West's three other champs have been prominent names across the state for years. Carew is ranked No. 1 at 145, but he dropped down to 140 this week -- he said he thinks it will help the Trojans' state title hopes in the postseason -- after beating No. 2 Michael Kelly of Cedar Falls in the finals at 145 in last weekend's Ed Winger Invitational in Urbandale.

"Urbandale was a lot better tournament at '45, so that's why I wrestled '45 there," Carew said. "I was ranked No. 1 in the state at '45 and I wanted to show I was because I think five of the top six kids were there."

Moore pinned his first two opponents Saturday in a collective 1:34 and won a 5-0 decision in the finals against Waterloo East's Quinten Haynes at 152. St. John, ranked No. 1 nationally at 160, notched a pair of falls and hammered Cedar Rapids Kennedy's Zach Parsons 17-4 in the finals.

"It's kind of hard to wrestle somebody who doesn't want to be out there," said St. John, who improved to 36-0 and seemed bored near the end of his championship match. "I've never really had anybody who went out there and just tried not to get pinned."

St. John joined Moore's brother Nate and cousin Cliff Moore, Johnny Galloway Jr. and Mitch Mueller as the tournament's only four-time champions. Meanwhile, three of his teammates took the first step Saturday to accompanying him.

"They have a good chance," St. John said. "I'd like to see it happen."

MVC wrestling tournament

Team scores -- 1. West High 266.5; 2. Cedar Rapids Prairie 200; 3. Waterloo East 150.5; 4. Cedar Rapids Kennedy 135; 5. Cedar Rapids Jefferson 117; 6. Waterloo West 110; 7. City High 97.5; 8. Cedar Falls 97; 9. Dubuque Hempstead 84.5; 10. Linn-Mar 71.5; 11. Dubuque Senior 60.5; 12. Cedar Rapids Xavier 56; 13. Cedar Rapids Washington 52; 14. Dubuque Wahlert 38.

Championship results, local place-winners

103 -- Jack Hathaway (W) pinned Greg Keating (LM) 1:34.

112 -- Shane Williams (CRK) dec. Jon Skarda (W) 5-3 OT; 4. Alex Jensen (C).

119 -- Nick Sand (WW) dec. Kirk Sallis Jr. (WE) 8-4; 3. Hunter St. John (W); 4. Jimmy Lazaro (C).

125 -- Gradey Gambrell (W) dec. Trevor Hardin (CRP) 6-4.

130 -- Jake Rizzio (CRP) dec. Stephen Blayer 8-3; 3. Garrett Hathaway (W).

135 -- Justin Koethe (W) pinned Zach Witte (CRP) 3:06; 8. Jacob Welch (C).

140 -- Dylan Carew (W) pinned Cole Schulte (CRP) 3:08; 3. Ryan Africa (C).

145 -- Michael Kelly (CF) pinned Payton Wagner (CRP) 3:30; 4. A.J. Bailey (W).

152 -- Nick Moore (W) dec. Quinten Haynes (WE) 5-0; 8. Kody Dailey (C).

160 -- Derek St. John (W) major dec. Zach Parsons (CRK) 17-4.

171 -- Kyven Gadson (WE) pinned Aiden Brock (CF) 4:20; 5. David Solis (W).

189 -- Jason Shupp (CRK) dec. Josh Lambrecht (CRP) 6-2; 6. Dexter Curry (W); 8. Brad Gingerich (C).

215 -- Onazi Agbese (WE) dec. Tyler Soppe (DH) 9-6; 3. Matt Behnami (W); 8. Bo Wallace (C).

Hwt. -- Trayvonious Pendleton (WE) dec. Conner Herman (CRJ) 5-3; 3. Kevin Harp (C); 7. Brandon Kuehl (W).

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