

Hawks sending 8 to state

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 09 February 2013 23:02 -

Linn-Mar wrestling coach Doug Streicher never panicked when the Lions kept losing to Cedar Rapids Prairie during the season.

He knew he had a potent lineup that could accomplish great things this season once it was healthy and fully assembled.

They proved it Saturday.

Linn-Mar topped Prairie for the Class 3A district title with an impressive performance Saturday and qualified a school-record 12 grapplers for the state meet.

Only Southeast Polk, with 13 qualifiers, will have a larger contingent when the state meet begins Thursday at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines.

The Lions have put themselves in position to challenge for the Class 3A state title.

"Oh yeah, no doubt about it," Streicher said. "I thought we had a chance before today, and now you get through the day and you perform like you should and you realize you're in position to make that next step."

Seven Lions won individual district titles with Matt Wempen (113), Alijah Jeffery (120), Joel Northrup (145), Ross Lembeck (152), Dakota Digmann (160), Andrew Holladay (182) and Justin Green (220) all climbing to the top step of the awards stand.

Five Lions finished in second place to qualify for the state meet with Damon Griffin (126), Toby Northrup (132), Shea Hartzler (138), Luke Wempen (170) and Sam Nowak (195) punching their tickets to Des Moines.

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Linn-Mar will have a contestant in 12 out of 14 weight classes.

"That's a record for us," said Green, who won his 220-pound title with a takedown at the buzzer. "As an individual, you want to make the team proud. They're pretty much your brothers for three months during the season.

"I think we really made each other proud with the way we wrestled today."

The Prairie Hawks, missing two key wrestlers due to injuries, finished second in the team standings with five district champions and eight qualifiers. Josh Wenger (126), Trey Blaha (138), Cam Rathje (170), Casey Becker (195) and Andrew Netolicky (285) won titles. Sam Uthoff (106), Skyler St. John (145) and River Whitters (160) also qualified for state by placing second.

Prairie will have the fourth-largest contingent at the state meet, trailing only Southeast Polk (13), Linn-Mar (12) and Waverly-Shell Rock (9).

"I don't think I've ever gone through a district day and been totally happy or satisfied," said Prairie Coach Blake Williams. "There's always one or two guys you wished you could have gotten through."

Austin Gould and Dylan Becker, two of Prairie's top wrestlers, missed the district meet due to injuries and therefore cannot wrestle at the state meet.

"Anytime you can get eight guys in the state tournament, that's a good number," said Williams. "Now it's a question of how many points we can score with those eight guys.

"A lot of our guys could be right in the mix. You never know what could happen."

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Michael Moncivais won the 132-pound district title for Cedar Rapids Jefferson, which will send four wrestlers to state. Kyle Briggs (113), Patrick Rashed (120) and Drake Allen (182) placed second in their brackets.

Zac Gillis of Cedar Rapids Washington finished second at 285 pounds and also will go to Des Moines.

Mason City has tied Prairie with eight qualifiers for the state tournament. Dowling Catholic, Algona, Glenwood, Bettendorf and Pleasant Valley each have seven qualifiers.

Southeast Polk won 10 individual district titles. Linn-Mar and Waverly-Shell Rock won seven titles and Bettendorf won six. Prairie, Dowling, Iowa City West and North Scott crowned five individual district champions.

Lembeck missed about six weeks of the season with an undisclosed injury, but he returned to the lineup for the regional dual meet tournament on Wednesday and looked in top form Saturday. He's looking forward to the state meet.

"I think we have a good chance to get a lot of guys on the podium," he said. "I'm looking forward to next Saturday night. I think 12 guys is a good number to get some points on the board."

Joel Northrup also liked the way his team performed Saturday.

"Team-wise, we're peaking at the right time," he said. "We can't be complacent just getting there. Individually, our eyes should be set on winning it."

Prairie defeated Linn-Mar in a pair of dual meets and beat the Lions for top honors at the

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Mississippi Valley Conference tournament. The Hawks put on a good show Saturday, but the Lions had the stronger lineup.

"It's exciting, any time you get that many kids to state," said Streicher. "We wrestled pretty well.

"You raise the bar for your program and keep raising the bar for the individuals. This is what we expected of them and they came through.

"We wrestled well and we earned it."

The biggest challenge will come in Des Moines, he warned.

"I feel really good about where we're at, but we have to make it happen for ourselves come Thursday," he said, pointing to Day 1 of the three-day state meet. "What they're going to remember is how we do at state next week.

"We have to keep that in mind as we go through this week."

Linn-Mar and Prairie have both qualified for the state dual meet tournament at Wells Fargo Arena on Wednesday. Streicher and Williams now have to finalize plans about how they'll approach the dual meet tournament, whether they'll put their top lineup on the mat or rest their top guys for the individual tournament.

Both coaches were non-committal Saturday.

"We'll make sure we're as ready as can be for Thursday," said Streicher.

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TEAM STANDINGS

1. Linn-Mar 261, 2. Prairie 241, 3. Jefferson 170, 4. Dubuque Senior 133, 5. Dubuque Hempstead 94.5, 6. Kennedy 73, 7. Marion 57, 8. Washington 53.5.

CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND

106 - Chase Lynn (DS) major dec. Sam Uthoff (CRP), 14-5.
113 - Matt Wempen (LM) pinned Kyle Briggs (CRJ), 0:25.
120 - Alijah Jeffery (LM) pinned Patrick Rashed (CRJ), 1:56.
126 - Josh Wenger (CRP) dec. Damon Griffin (LM), 9-7.
132 - Michael Moncivais (CRJ) pinned Toby Northrup (LM), 0:51.
138 - Trey Blaha (CRP) dec. Shea Hartzler (LM), 10-3.
145 - Joel Northrup (LM) dec. Skyer St. John (CRP), 5-1.
152 - Ross Lembeck (LM) pinned Brandon Haas (DH), 1:38.
160 - Dakota Digmann (LM) major dec. River Whitters (CRP), 11-2.
170 - Cam Rathje (CRP) pinned Luke Wempen (LM), 0:51.
182 - Andrew Holladay (LM) dec. Drake Allen (CRJ), 11-5.
195 - Casey Becker (CRP) pinned Sam Nowak (LM), 4:42.
220 - Justin Green (LM) dec. Gannon Gremmel (DH), 3-2.
285 - Andrew Netolicky (CRP) pinned Zac Gillis (CRW), 4:13.

WRESTLEBACKS FOR 2ND

145 - Skyler St. John (CRP) tech fall Levi Lochner (MAR), 19-4.
152 - Jake Steffen (DS) pinned Brandon Haas (DH), 0:29.
160 - River Whitters (CRP) pinned Mitch McElmeel (DS), 5:42.