

Tearful Jeffery claims 120 state title

Written by Jim Ecker

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DES MOINES - Linn-Mar senior Alijah Jeffery rarely shows any emotion at a wrestling tournament, but he made an exception Saturday night at Wells Fargo Arena to savor the best moment of his career.

Jeffery finished his perfect season Saturday with a 7-0 victory over Paul Glynn of Bettendorf in the Class 3A 120-pound finals to end the season as an undefeated state champion with a sparkling 41-0 record.

Jeffery raised his arms in celebration, saluted Linn-Mar fans in the sold-out arena, leaped into assistant coach Ryan Gotto's arms and was mobbed by happy teammates as he left the floor in tears.

"It's kind of overwhelming," he said a few minutes later. "It's hard to believe it finally happened."

Jeffery was the only state champion from the Metro area this year. Trey Blaha (152) of Prairie, Skyler St. John (160) of Prairie and Andrew Holladay (195) of Linn-Mar all lost in the finals.

Jeffery placed 3rd as a freshman at 103 pounds in 2011, finished 3rd again as a sophomore at 113 pounds in 2012 and finished 5th last year at 120 pounds, just missing a trip to the top of the bracket each time.

Not this time, however.

"It feels great," he said. "It's been what I've been working for all year and during my high school career. I finally got it."

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Jeffery was ranked No.1 in his class all season and ended the year on the top step of the victory stand.

Linn-Mar Coach Doug Streicher invited Brian Jeffery, Alijah's father, to distribute the medals to the Class 3A wrestlers during the awards presentation, which ended with Mr. Jeffery giving his son an affectionate tap on the cheek. Brian Jeffery is not one of Linn-Mar's coaches, but Streicher has a tradition of asking parents to make the awards when their son is a champion.

Streicher found Mr. Jeffery in the crowd and summoned him to the floor after the 120-pound finals. That's when Streicher popped the question about giving out the awards.

"I was kind of shocked," Mr. Jeffery said. "I'm not a big crowd person, but I was happy to do it."

Streicher said Mr. Jeffery played an important role in Alijah becoming a state champion who will wrestle at Northern Illinois University next year.

"You don't get to be a Division I athlete and a Division I recruit without being darn good," said Streicher. "He's spent a lot of time honing his craft."

"That's why I wanted his dad to give him his award. His dad took him everywhere as a little kid. A lot of miles, a lot of hotel rooms. It's paying off right here."

Jeffery got a takedown in the first 25 seconds for a quick 2-0 lead against Glynn (39-12) in the 120-pound finals. He escaped in the second period for a 3-0 lead, then executed a quick takedown and two-point near-fall for a 7-0 margin in the third period.

The celebration began a few seconds later.

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"He's a hard worker," said Streicher, searching for words to explain why Jeffery is a successful wrestler. "It's hard to explain, because he doesn't show any emotion. It's hard to get a read on him. He knows what he needs to do and he gets it done."

"No one knows he's there. He just does his thing," the coach said. "It's really nice to have him in our room and have a kid like that in our program."

Jeffery is a technically sound wrestler who makes it look easy on the mat, although of course it's not. "It's been one of my strong points," he said about being a technician. "Keep your composure and your stuff will open up."

Jeffery won his first two matches at the state tournament with pins, but he had to survive an overtime bout in the semifinals to make the finals. Once there, he left no doubt about being the best in his class.

Jeffery remained a lightweight throughout his prep career. He had to cut 13 to 15 pounds to make 120 this season, but indicated it was not a big deal.

"I don't really get that big," he said. "I walk around at about '33 or '35. I kind of peak there. I'm going to really hit the weights and try to bulk up for college and be ready for the tough competition."

Blaha lost to Travis Willers of Pleasant Valley, 3-0, in the 152-pound finals to finish the season with a 39-11 record. Blaha placed sixth at 126 pounds in 2012 and finished fourth at 138 pounds last year and ended his prep career as a three-time placewinner.

St. John lost to top-ranked Isaiah Patton of Dowling Catholic, 3-2, in the 160-pound finals to end the year with a 44-4 record. St. John placed fifth at 145 pounds last year as a junior.

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Holladay was pinned by top-ranked Marcus Harrington of Waterloo West in 5:18 in the 195-pound finals and finished the season with a 39-5 record. Holladay placed fifth at 182 pounds last year as a junior.

Bettendorf won four individual titles Saturday and claimed the team championship with 162 points. Southeast Polk, last year's champion, finished second this time with 158 points. Waverly-Shell Rock was third.

Linn-Mar finished solidly in fourth place with 91.5 points. The Prairie Hawks placed fifth with 74 points.

Xavier finished in 13th place with 43 points. Jefferson was 19th with 29.5 points. Kennedy placed 34th with 14.5 points.

[Saturday's Class 3A Results](#)