

Prairie wrestlers chasing past glory

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 27 November 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 30 December 2010 12:13

Prairie finished the highest of all Metro schools at the Class 3A state wrestling tournament last season, so that was good.

But the Hawks tied for 17th in the team standings, which is not so good for a school with a rich tradition in the sport.

Prairie won state titles in 1979 and 1995 and finished second in 1978, '80, '83 and '97, during the glory years. Coach Blake Williams is trying to steer the Hawks in that direction, and thinks he's getting closer.

"We're going in the right direction, that's for sure," he said. "We're getting there."

When Williams became the head coach eight years ago, he had 18 wrestlers on the team. Now he's got about 50.

The Hawks have reached the State Duals tournament five of the last seven years and they won a Mississippi Valley Conference division title last season (their 14th MVC title since 1987) with 10 freshmen and sophomores in the lineup. They finished 19-3 in dual meets, including 8-0 in the Valley.

Williams was proud of last year's accomplishments, especially with such a young team.

"It was neat," he said. "To have that to build on, it should be a good step in the right direction."

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All that talent is back.

“I’m looking forward to a pretty good season,” Williams said.

Prairie has won 25 individual state titles, led by three-time champ Barry Davis (1978-79-80) and two-time champs Dan Dubishar (1970-71), Jim Zalesky (1978-79) and Matt Hatcher (1991-92). Williams isn’t claiming the Hawks are ready for that kind of success, but he won’t rule it out.

“That would be great, and that’s what we’re always striving to get to,” he said.

Zach Witte placed second at the state tournament as a freshman in 2009. He failed to qualify for state last year, but he’s determined to make it back to Des Moines this season.

He hated missing the action last season.

“It was definitely tough, especially seeing all the kids who placed at state that I’d beaten earlier in the season,” he said. “It was kind of tough, but I’m hoping for a good year this year.

“I definitely want to get back at it and get another shot at it,” he said. “I have my heart set really high — very high — and I’m hoping to achieve my goals this year.”

Witte remembers how thrilled he was to reach the state finals as a freshman in 2009.

“It was a big shock, especially going out there in that grand march and all that (before the finals),” he said. “That was quite the experience and I hope to do it again this year.”

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Peyton Wagner placed seventh in the state meet at 152 pounds last year and is a two-time state qualifier.

“It was a good year,” he said. “I had higher goals in mind, but it was still good to place at the state tournament.”

He'd like to move up this season.

“You always want to do better when you're not at the top,” he said.

Witte likes what he sees in the Prairie wrestling room this season.

“I think it's going to be a very strong team this year,” he said. “I think we have a lot of potential to do well. So I'm hoping for a good season.”

“Our school is closer,” Wagner said. “We're coming back a lot stronger.”

Williams believes the Hawks can finish in the top-10 at state this year.

“I think so,” he said. “I think we just have to perform when we get there.”

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SCHEDULE

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Saturday, 27 November 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 30 December 2010 12:13

Thursday, Dec. 2 — Kennedy, Waterloo East at Prairie, 5:30 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 4 — Independence Invitational, 10 a.m.

Thursday, Dec. 9 — Prairie, Hempstead at Wahlert, 5:30 p.m.

Thursday, Dec. 16 — Prairie, Iowa City High at Xavier, 5:30 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 18 — Prairie Invitational, 10 a.m.

Thursday, Jan. 6 — Cedar Falls, Dubuque Senior at Prairie, 5:30 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 8 — Marshalltown Invitational, 10 a.m.

Thursday, Jan. 13 — Prairie, Washington at Iowa City West, 5:30 p.m.

Friday, Jan. 14 — Geneseo Invitational, 4 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 15 — Geneseo Invitational, 9 a.m.

Thursday, Jan. 20 — at Linn-Mar, 6 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 22 — Pleasant Valley Invitational, 9 a.m.

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Saturday, Jan. 29 — MVC Tournament, at Xavier, 10 a.m.

Thursday, Feb. 3 — Prairie, Waterloo West at Jefferson, 5:30 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 12 — District Meet

Feb. 16-19 — State Meet, Des Moines

Tuesday, Feb. 22 — Substate (State Duals)

Saturday, Feb. 26 — State Duals, Cedar Rapids