

Gould lifts No. 4 Hawks by No. 6 Lions, 26-24

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 20 January 2012 00:26 -

Austin Gould has the early stages of cauliflower ear, so he wrapped tape around his head and over his ears Thursday night to protect them before tugging on his headgear.

"It makes him look tough, I guess," said Cedar Rapids Prairie wrestling coach Blake Williams, who was all smiles when he said it.

With all that tape, Gould was able to block out the fans who were yelling and screaming during his pivotal 182-pound match against Linn-Mar senior Mark Atwater.

Gould blanked Atwater, 3-0, in the final bout to give Prairie a 26-24 comeback victory over the Lions in a premier Mississippi Valley Conference meet at the Prairie gym.

The fourth-ranked Hawks trailed after 10 matches, 24-13, but they came roaring back and won the last four bouts to trim the No. 6 Lions at the wire.

"We fought our hearts out. A team effort, and I'm proud of everyone for putting it all out there on the mat," said Gould. "Even though we were down, we tightened up our bootstraps and came out fighting."

Gould ripped the tape off his head after the meet, revealing his cauliflower ear and the slight disfigurement that comes with wrestling due to all the irritation the ears absorb. Gould said his headgear doesn't fit properly.

"The ear is too big for it," he said. "It folds over and it hurts."

Gould wasn't feeling too much pain as a steady stream of Prairie wrestling fans stopped by after the meet to pat him on the back.

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Peyton Wagner, who hadn't wrestled since Dec. 10 for Prairie due to an arm injury, returned to the lineup Thursday and got the comeback started with a 7-0 victory over Josh Pederson at 152 pounds to pull the Hawks within 24-16. Ironically, Wagner hurt his arm when he wrestled against Pederson six weeks ago.

"He wasn't 100 percent, but you know what? He showed some guts and wanted to wrestle," said Williams.

Zach Witte jumped from 152 pounds to 160 and posted a 13-3 major decision over John Conner, lifting the Hawks within 24-20 with two matches left on the card at 170 pounds and 182.

The last two bouts featured ranked grapplers for both teams, and fifth-ranked Cameron Rathje pulled Prairie within 24-23 when he clipped second-ranked Mitch Wantock, 4-3, on a takedown with 18 seconds left in the contest.

They left it all to the 182 pounders, with Gould ranked fifth in the state and Atwater ranked seventh. Neither man scored in the first two periods, then Gould took a 1-0 lead when Atwater let him have an escape point to start the final period.

They both came close to getting takedowns in the third stanza, but it stayed 1-0 until Gould used a "funky" move to get a takedown with 12 seconds left and clinch his 3-0 victory and the meet.

Atwater shook hands with Gould, then ran to the locker room to deal with his disappointment in private. That left Gould as the man of the hour.

"I came into this match so nervous," said Gould, now 27-3 for the season. "I almost got myself out of it mentally. I had to calm down and realize that if I give my best, people will appreciate that, win or lose."

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Gould spent most of his time with the junior varsity last season, but he wrestled on an all-star team that toured Russia and Eastern Europe last summer and came home a new man.

"From jayvee to what he's doing now," mused Williams. "Man, he doesn't let things get to him and he just stays in position and does what he needs to do. I can't be more pleased with him. He should have some high goals for himself in the next month or so."

Williams figured the matches at 170 and 182 were "toss-ups" that could have gone either way. "What Rathje and Gould did against two very tough wrestlers shows something about their character and their fight," he said.

Linn-Mar won four of the first five matches and grabbed a 16-3 lead with A.J. Garcia (220), Justin Green (285), Matt Wempen (106) and Alijah Jeffery (113) leading the way. Wempen, a freshman, raised his record to 30-1 with a pin in 3:17.

Ross Lembeck gave the Lions their 24-13 lead with a 12-3 major decision at 145 pounds, but the Hawks came storming back with fans for both schools shouting for their favorite guys.

This was a single dual - just Linn-Mar and Prairie - so the spotlight was squarely on them. They wrestled the junior varsity and exhibition bouts earlier in the night, so there was only one mat when the varsity guys tangled.

"It was a great high school wrestling meet," said Williams. "No matter who won or lost, it was nice to see these type of meets. It was a great atmosphere."

Prairie won eight of 14 bouts in a battle of evenly matched clubs.

"We wrestled tight in a couple of matches and it cost us," said Linn-Mar Coach Doug Streicher.

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"We didn't score enough points, didn't get after it."

Streicher praised both teams and looked ahead.

"Pretty even," he said. "We'll battle at conference and see who has a better tournament team."

The Mississippi Valley Conference meet will be held at Iowa City West on Saturday, Jan. 28 and it could be a doozy with No. 3 Iowa City West, No. 4 Prairie and No. 6 Linn-Mar in the hunt.

"It's great to get a win tonight, but you know what? There's bigger things than this dual, that's for sure, and we want to be there at the end," said Williams.

"I have a feeling both teams will have a good shot to get down to the state duals (Feb. 15 in Des Moines). They're tough and they're balanced and they're a great team, so I'm sure we'll probably be seeing them again somewhere down the line."

Prairie and Linn-Mar have wrestled three times this season, with the Hawks holding a 2-1 edge.

PRAIRIE 26, LINN-MAR 24

195 - Trent Schulte (P) dec. Ryley Stancel, 5-3 (ot)
220 - A.J. Garcia (LM) dec. Andrew Netolicky, 4-2 (ot)
285 - Justin Green (LM) dec. Tony Kavanagh, 3-2
106 - Matt Wempen (LM) pinned Zack Fiser, 3:17
113 - Alijah Jeffery (LM) major dec. Josh Wenger, 10-2
120 - Chris Walters (P) dec. Damon Griffin, 9-8
126 - Trey Blaha (P) major dec. Trevor Berry, 11-3
132 - Joel Northrup (LM) major dec. Zach Becicka, 16-6
138 - Skyler St. John (P) dec. Spencer Clabough, 6-3
145 - Ross Lembeck (LM) major dec. River Whitters, 12-3

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152 - Peyton Wagner (P) dec. Josh Pederson, 7-0
160 - Zach Witte (P) major dec. John Conner, 13-3
170 - Cameron Rathje (P) dec. Mitch Wantock, 4-3
182 - Austin Gould (P) dec. Mark Atwater, 3-0