

Northrup forfeits historic match

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 17 February 2011 09:31 - Last Updated Friday, 18 February 2011 22:28

DES MOINES -- Joel Northrup of Linn-Mar put his principles above his individual goals Thursday morning.

Northrup forfeited his opening-round match in the Class 3A state wrestling tournament to Cassy Herkelman of Cedar Falls because he did not think it would be proper for him to compete against a girl, based on his religious beliefs.

Herkelman and Megan Black of Ottumwa, both freshmen, became the first girls in state history to qualify for the state tournament this year, both of them in the same weight class with Northrup at 112 pounds.

"I have a tremendous amount of respect for Cassy and Megan and their accomplishments," Northrup said in a statement given to the media after the forfeit. "However, wrestling is a combat sport and it can get violent at times.

"As a matter of conscience and faith, I do not believe that it is appropriate for a boy to engage a girl in this manner. It is unfortunate that I have been placed in a situation not seen in most other high school sports in Iowa."

The forfeit dropped Northrup into the losers bracket of the 112-pound bracket and means he can finish no higher than third in the state tournament at Wells Fargo Arena. Northrup placed third at 103 pounds at state last year as a freshman and was considered a candidate to win the 112-pound title this year as a sophomore.

Northrup won his consolation round match with a major decision over Sam Jameson of Glenwood, 9-0. He lost a triple overtime decision to Tyler Willers of Pleasant Valley Friday morning and was knocked out of the tournament. Herkelman lost in the quarterfinals and consolations and also was eliminated.

Technically, what Northrup did was considered a "default" and means he can compete in the

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rest of the tournament in the wrestlebacks. If he had not reported for the match, he would have been eliminated from competition.

Northrup and Herkelman were called for their match on Mat 5. Northrup reported to the scorer's table but did not take the mat. Linn-Mar Coach Doug Streicher walked on the mat and informed the mat official that Northrup would not compete.

The mat official summoned Herkelman and raised her arm in victory, a gesture greeted by cheers from the crowd. It was the first victory by a girl in the history of the state wrestling tournament.

Black was pinned by Logan Ryan of Bettendorf in 52 seconds in the first round Thursday. She also got pinned in her consolation round match by Andres Gonzalez of Mason City, eliminating her from the tournament.

Girls have been allowed to compete on boys wrestling teams in Iowa for more than 20 years, but this is the first time any girl made it to Des Moines for the championships. Girls are allowed to compete on boys teams if their school does not offer a comparable sport for girls, but boys are not allowed to compete on girls teams.

Northrup, who is home-schooled, did not wrestle against Herkelman when Linn-Mar and Cedar Falls met in a Mississippi Valley Conference meet this season.

Scott Mahmens, Linn-Mar's director of athletics, said Northrup would be unavailable for comment Thursday. "Please honor him from not chasing him around to get a comment from him, because he's not going to talk to you," Mahmens told reporters.

Mahmens said Northrup's family met with Linn-Mar school officials earlier this week to discuss the situation. Northrup's mother is pregnant and his parents were not in Des Moines Thursday morning.

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Mahmens said the school supports Northrup.

"It's a family decision. We're going to back our student-athletes, no matter what it is," he said.

"I'm not disappointed at all," said Mahmens. "It's a family decision, based on their beliefs and faith. We move on from there.

"He's a Linn-Mar Lion. He's a wrestler for Linn-Mar. And we're going to support what he's doing. We're not going to step in and tell families what they need to do."

Northrup's decision may hurt Linn-Mar in the team standings, but Mahmens said that issue was not discussed with the family.

"We never even brought up the fact that it was going to hurt the team. Never once," he said.

Northrup showed no emotion as he left the wrestling mat Thursday morning and headed to the locker room.

"I'm sure it was hard for him, like it would be hard for anybody," said Mahmens. "It's a decision that his family made. And that's what it is."

Northrup forfeited a chance to win a state championship by electing not to compete against Herkelman.

"Obviously his beliefs are more important to him," said Mahmens.

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Herkelman and Black were unavailable for comment.

Northrup's record fell to 36-5 with the default and consolation round win. He is scheduled to compete again Friday in the wrestlebacks. Herkelman advanced to the second round on Friday with a 21-13 mark.