

Lion matmen rally for win (barely)

Written by Jim Ecker

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If you want to stumble across unusual stories, just spend a few days with the Linn-Mar wrestling team.

The Lions seem to attract them.

Just last week, a Linn-Mar wrestler forfeited his match at the state tournament to a girl, sparking a national debate about gender equity, religion and the American Way.

Just when that simmered down, the Lions competed in an important dual meet Tuesday night at Linn-Mar and when it ended, nobody knew who won. Really. Nobody knew.

As it turned out, Linn-Mar won the meet on an obscure tiebreaker and earned a date in the state dual meet tournament this Saturday against Waverly-Shell Rock, the powerful team that just won its fourth straight title at the traditional state wrestling tournament in Des Moines.

Strange, indeed.

Linn-Mar's meet against North Scott in the regional tournament Tuesday night finished in a 29-29 tie when the Lions rallied from a 29-9 deficit in the last four matches, snatching a dramatic deadlock from the jaws of defeat.

Somebody had to be declared the winner, because somebody had to advance to the state dual meet tournament this Saturday at the U.S. Cellular Center in downtown Cedar Rapids. But which team?

The coaches didn't know. The two mat officials didn't know. The wrestlers didn't know. The fans didn't know.

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The officials grabbed a rulebook and started reading. And shaking their heads. And reading some more. They found the right page, but they couldn't find the right answer.

This went on for about 10 minutes, until they finally decided that item (h) under "Tie-Breaker System for Dual Meets" was the right answer. That's right, item (h), because items (a) through (g) were no help whatsoever.

Item (h) declares "The team having the greater number (total match points) of first point(s) shall be declared the winner."

That's not exactly clear, but here's what it means: Look at all 14 matches, see which team scored first in each match and add those initial points together, whether it was two points for a takedown, two points for a near-fall or one point for an escape.

Linn-Mar had the advantage in those points, 10-6, so the Lions won the criteria and won the match. They were awarded another point in the team standings, so the official score of their victory over North Scott was 30-29 (Criteria H).

The first seven criteria in the rulebook were no help.

"They were all ties," said Linn-Mar Coach Doug Streicher, who won his 200th dual meet at the school. "They were most wins, most pins, most technical falls, most majors. I forget what was after that. They went all the way down the line."

Streicher forgot the first three criteria, not the last three. The first had to do with penalty points, but there were none of them. Then came total wins in the meet (tied 7-7), total number of pins (tied 2-2), total number of technical falls (0-0) and total number of major decisions (2-2).

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Finally, they found the answer. Item (h).

None of this would have mattered if the Lions had rolled over and played dead after falling behind after 10 matches, 29-9. There were only four matches left and a giant problem.

Alijah Jeffery began the rally with a pin at 103 pounds, drawing the Lions within 29-15 in the 11th match of the night. Then Joel Northrup, the 112-pounder who forfeited his bout to the girl in Des Moines last week, followed with another pin and suddenly it was 29-21 with two matches left to wrestle.

Trevor Berry posted a major decision at 119 pounds, collecting four team points for the Lions and making it 29-25. That left it up to Dan Radig at 125 pounds.

If Radig could get a pin, he'd score six points for Linn-Mar and the Lions would win 31-29. If he'd get a technical fall, he'd score five points and the Lions would prevail 30-29. And if he lost, his team would lose. Simple as that.

Naturally, Radig posted a major decision to collect four points and tie the meet at 29-29. And that's when confusion broke loose.

"I knew I had to go out there and get points. I had to win that match," said Radig. "I was looking for a pin; I was disappointed I didn't get it. So I'm glad that we won the match. That's what's important."

Radig and his teammates waited anxiously while the officials sorted through the rulebook.

"I didn't have a clue," he said. "I don't know the criteria."

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Radig passed credit to the two lightweights at Linn-Mar, Jeffery at 103 and Northrup at 112.

"Joel and Alijah, they're two special kids," he said. "They're really good. And if we didn't have them, I don't know where we would be this season. It's a team effort, but those two, they stood out and they did their job."

Linn-Mar (28-6) drew the No.7 seed for the State Dual Team Wrestling Tournament Saturday and will face No.2 seed Waverly-Shell Rock (26-4) at noon at the U.S. Cellular Center in the quarterfinals.

Streicher will never forget how the Lions got there or how he notched his 200th victory at Linn-Mar.

"We just battled and gave ourselves a chance to win," said Streicher, who has been Linn-Mar's head coach since 1997.

LINN-MAR 30, NORTH SCOTT 29 (H)

103 -- Jeffery (LM) pinned Allchin, 1:43; 112 -- Northrup (LM) pinned Phipps, 1:50; 119 -- Berry (LM) major dec. Albers, 13-2; 125 -- Radig (LM) major dec. Nylin, 14-6; 130 -- Perrin (NS) pinned Severin, 2:59; 135 -- Lembeck (LM) dec. Feldpausch, 11-6; 140 -- Ramey (NS) dec. Pederson, 9-7; 145 -- Bowman (NS) major dec. Regenwether, 11-1; 152 -- Fleetwood (NS) major dec. Digmann, 13-3; 160 -- Holladay (LM) dec. Christoff, 7-5; 171 -- Wantock (LM) dec. Long, 5-4; 189 -- Sellers (NS) dec. Stancel, 8-3; 215 -- Nagle (NS) dec. Green, 8-3; 285 -- Arthur (NS) pinned Garcia, 5:46.