

Wempen storms back for Linn-Mar matmen

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 10 January 2015 18:08 - Last Updated Sunday, 11 January 2015 10:30



Linn-Mar senior Matt Wempen knows the clock is ticking on his high school wrestling career.

He won a state title as a freshman in 2012, but he suffered a tough 3-2 loss in the finals in 2013 and had to settle for fifth place last year when he wrestled at the state meet with a broken thumb.

He broke his left thumb again in practice this season and had to sit - impatiently - and watch the first six weeks of the season before returning with a flourish at the 49th Annual Linn-Mar Invitational Saturday.

Wempen collected four quick pins at 145 pounds in 3:15, 1:25, 1:12 and 28 seconds. He also received a forfeit, giving him a 5-0 record after just 6 minutes, 20 seconds of wrestling.

Wempen has always been an aggressive wrestler, but he looked super-aggressive Saturday.

"It's just that I haven't been on the mat in awhile, so I was ready to be out there," he said. "I wanted to be out there at the beginning of the year, but unfortunately I couldn't."

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"It was just all the pumped-up energy. I was just taking it out today."

Wempen loves to wrestle, so sitting idly by for the first six weeks of the season was rough.

"It was terrible. Terrible," he remarked. "Especially in some of those duals when your team needs you and you know you could have helped them out, it really sucks. But at that point I was in a cast. There was nothing I could do."



Linn-Mar is ranked No. 5 in Class 3A by The Predicament, based on what their top wrestlers like Wempen, Noah Ajram, Toby Northrup and Shea Hartzler might do at the state meet in February. All four of them are ranked in the top-four of their weight class and could contend for individual titles.

The Lions have not been a strong dual-meet team this season, however, and they finished fourth with a 3-2 record in their own dual-meet tournament Saturday even with Wempen in the lineup.

Mediapolis, which is ranked No. 2 in Class 2A, whipped the Lions 43-22 in pool competition. Linn-Mar also lost to Ankeny Centennial in the consolation match for third place, 40-38.

Mediapolis defeated Mount Vernon, 50-24, in the championship bout.

Wempen has wrestled with injuries his entire career, even before he got to high school. "I think I've broken seven of my fingers since kindergarten,

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or something like that," he said.

One of the broken fingers happened in soccer, but most of the mishaps have occurred in wrestling. In addition to all the damaged digits, he had arthroscopic knee surgery as a junior before breaking his thumb later in the season.

Wempen competed with that broken thumb at the 2014 state tournament.

"It wasn't comfortable, but I had to do it," he said. "Toughen up a little bit.

"I've had something every year. The thing is, when you're down there (at state), I don't think you can use it as an excuse. There's not one guy at the state tournament that is feeling 100 percent healthy."

Wempen won his state title at 106 pounds as a freshman in 2012. He wrestled at 132 pounds as a sophomore and junior, but has grown a few weight classes this season.

"I feel good," he said. "As of right now I'm planning on staying at 145. I feel like it's a good weight for me.

"I'm maybe a little bit on the smaller side of it, but I'm not worried about my weight as much and I'm just worrying about getting better in practice. And I feel good."

Linn-Mar Coach Doug Streicher welcomed Wempen back to the mat.

"He was ready to go," said Streicher. "You're not beat up from the first half of the season. He

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looked good to start out. It helps us out a lot."

Northrup enjoyed a perfect day for the Lions with a 5-0 record at 152 pounds with two pins, a technical fall and two major decisions.

Clint Lembeck had another strong day for the Xavier Saints at 138 pounds with three pins and two decisions. The Saints finished with a 1-4 record and placed eighth out of 10 teams.

The Marion Indians went 0-5 and finished 10th.

ROUND 1

Linn-Mar 75, Marion 12
Mount Vernon 43, Ankeny Centennial 18
Mediapolis 52, Keokuk 22
Western Dubuque 71, Linn-Mar JV 9

ROUND 2

Linn-Mar 45, Xavier 33
Mediapolis 63, Marion 15
Clinton 33, Western Dubuque 31
Ankeny Centennial 51, Linn-Mar JV 24

ROUND 3

Mount Vernon 66, Linn-Mar JV 4

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Keokuk 60, Marion 24
Mediapolis 58, Xavier 21
Ankeny Centennial 39, Clinton 33

ROUND 4

Mediapolis 43, Linn-Mar 22
Western Dubuque 32, Ankeny Centennial 30
Mount Vernon 35, Clinton 28
Keokuk 55, Xavier 13

ROUND 5

Linn-Mar 43, Keokuk 28
Mount Vernon 37, Western Dubuque 21
Xavier 48, Marion 27
Clinton 68, Linn-Mar JV 9

PLAYOFFS

1st - Mediapolis 50, Mount Vernon 24
3rd - Ankeny Centennial 40, Linn-Mar 38
5th - Clinton 57, Keokuk 17
7th - Western Dubuque 63, Xavier 18
9th - Linn-Mar JV 42, Marion 38