

Louisa-Muscatine claims Prairie bowling title

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Their school is near nowhere, surrounded by bean and corn fields on the Louisa and Muscatine county line.

Town kids among the 300-or-so high school students come from burgs like Letts, Grandview and Fruitland. The closest bowling alley is 17 miles away.

But the farm boys from Louisa-Muscatine High School showed the big-school city slickers a thing or two Saturday by rolling over the field for the title in the 12-team Prairie Invitational bowling tournament at Lancer Lanes.

To advance to the championship round the third-seeded Falcons from southeast Iowa topped Jefferson, Kennedy and top-seeded Prairie. And to claim the championship in the double-elimination tourney they had to pull out a comeback to defeat the host team for a second time in the afternoon.

"I've got a great bunch of kids," said veteran Louisa-Muscatine Coach Al Jordan. "And it was fun for them to come up here and win this thing."

Last year they finished near the bottom but then rebounded to just miss qualifying for the Class A state tournament. They're big, strapping lads who bowl with power.

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"We'll make it to state this year," predicted Falcon senior anchor Garrett Beaham, who sports a league average of 225. "And we plan on winning it. We haven't lost this year, and we bowled really good today."

In the end, though, they did have a stern test against the host Prairie boys. They had won their own tournament the past two years and came in with a team average of 199.6.

The Prairie Hawks on Saturday beat Xavier and Washington but then fell to Louisa-Muscatine the first time around to drop into the losers bracket. To climb back up the rung, they faced off with fifth-seeded Linn-Mar.

The Lions had opened with a win over Marion but lost in the second round to Cedar Rapids Washington. They followed with do-or-die victories over Iowa City West, Xavier, Kennedy and DeWitt Central.

"We bowled more games than anybody here today," said Linn-Mar Coach Andy Diercks. "Out of our seven matches, all but one went to three games."

The Lions topped Prairie 171-154 in their first game, then dropped the decisive last two by scores of 225-202 and 218-183.

"We kept it close," said Linn-Mar anchor Justin Wyant, who brought a 214 average into the competition.

Diercks said his junior linchpin "bowled like a champion" all day. "He only had one open 10th frame in 20 games," the coach said. In finishing third in the tournament, Linn-Mar averaged 204.

The finals, though, came down to Louisa-Muscatine and Prairie. With senior anchor Brogan Fiala throwing one strike after another, the Hawks prevailed in the first rematch, 193-168 and

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223-173. The initial game of the rubber match ended up 171-all.

The Falcons claimed the next game 218-199, despite three straight strikes at the close by Fiala. He finished off the following game the same way as the Hawks coasted, 223-173.

In the closer, however, Fiala's spare after a 10th-frame strike was not enough to close the gap in a 213-204 loss.

"Our team bowled awesome all day," Fiala said of the runnerup finish. "We just had a couple of bad breaks."

Prairie assistant coach Kevin Cline said little Louisa-Muscatine deserved all the credit for toppling a field of mostly bigger schools. "It was great competition," Cline said.

For their part, the Falcon bowlers seemed to take it all in stride. As they were given a trophy and ribbons in an awards ceremony, teammates Richie Rogers and Austin Raushenberger nudged each other as they watched the Lancer Lanes automated lane oiling machine operate behind them.

"They're never seen one of those," said Beaham, who works at PlaMor Lanes, the team's home base in Muscatine. But that's just the cornfield in 'em.