

Lions not thrilled about state duals

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Linn-Mar Lions earned a spot in the state dual team wrestling tournament by whipping Pleasant Valley Wednesday night.

Darn it.

The Lions enjoyed their 48-11 conquest of the Spartans in the regional tournament, but they're not thrilled about wrestling three times in the state dual meet tournament next Wednesday at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines.

In fact, the Lions might use a bunch of junior varsity wrestlers in the Class 3A dual meet tournament and rest their top guys for the individual tournament that begins on Thursday.

"We're not stuck with any one lineup or any one scenario. Anything is possible on Wednesday," said Linn-Mar Coach Doug Streicher. "We'll do what's best for the individual to put them in a position to win a state title."

In other words, the traditional state tournament will take precedence over the dual meet tournament, even if that means jeopardizing the team's chances in the dual meets.

Linn-Mar is seeded fifth in the tournament and will face fourth-seeded West Des Moines Valley in the first round at 11 a.m. The Lions' next match would be against either No. 1 Southeast Polk or No. 8 Waverly-Shell Rock. The bottom of the bracket consists of No. 2 Bettendorf, No. 3 Iowa City West, No. 6 Cedar Rapids Prairie and No. 7 Ankeny.

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All eight of the teams that qualified for the state dual meet tournament will wrestle three times on Wednesday, beginning at 11 a.m. and ending as late as 9 p.m. Meanwhile, the wrestlers that compete for teams that did not make the dual meet tournament can rest for the individual tournament that begins at 9 a.m. on Thursday.

"I don't like it one bit," said Streicher. "Some of the kids are going to be at an unfair advantage because of what they might do on Wednesday the day before, making weight and wrestling matches.



"Someone can sit there and scout them and not make weight and not go through three matches and have to be in the arena all day. We're going to be in the arena for eight to 10 hours on Wednesday. It's just an unfair way to start an individual tournament."

The state dual meet tournament was held in Cedar Rapids a week after the individual state tournament last year, but the IHSAA changed the schedule this season and made them back-to-back events in Des Moines.

The dual meet tournament will be an all-day affair on Wednesday, followed by the individual tournament that will be held Thursday through Saturday. That will make four days of wrestling for some athletes, but only three days of wrestling for others.

"I don't really like it," said Linn-Mar junior Joel Northrup, who is ranked No. 4 at 132 pounds for the Lions. "No, because state is a big tournament, it's pretty hectic, a lot of matches, a lot of weigh-ins. To wrestle a match the day before doesn't help."

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Northrup became the focus of intense media scrutiny at the individual state tournament last year when he elected to default his first-round match rather than wrestle against a girl. That cost him a chance to win a state title, but he felt his religious beliefs prevented him from "engaging a girl" in that manner.

He hopes to qualify for the individual state tournament again this year when the Lions wrestle at a district tournament Saturday in Waverly. That's clearly his main focus, rather than the state dual meet tournament.

Northrup likes the concept of having a state dual meet tournament, but feels the timing is wrong. He feels it should have been held earlier in the season.

"Maybe a month ago," he suggested. "That might be a little early, but we'll see how it plays out."

Linn-Mar dominated its meet against Pleasant Valley. The fifth-ranked Lions (27-6) won 11 of 14 matches with four pins, one technical fall, one major decision and five regular decisions.

Northrup led the pin parade by sticking Matt Nowak in 55 seconds. Ross Lembeck decked his man in 3:33, Justin Green flattened his guy in 4:16 and Spencer Clabough got the call in 5:48. Alijah Jeffery collected a superior 18-3 decision in 5:18 and Damon Griffin upset third-ranked Tyler Willers at 120 pounds, 13-5.

Freshman Matt Wempen, ranked fourth at 106, trimmed third-ranked Travis Willers at the lightest weight. Trevor Berry, Mitch Wantock, Mark Atwater and A.J. Garcia also won decisions.

Northrup raised his record to 35-5 heading into Saturday's district meet in Waverly. He's looking forward to the district and state meets again, but said he won't wrestle any girls and would forfeit again if faced with the same situation as last year.

"Yup. Same thing," he said. "Of course."

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LINN-MAR 48, PLEASANT VALLEY 11

- 160 - Brady Letney (PV) dec. John Conner, 4-3.
- 170 - Mitch Wantock (LM) dec. Seth Skahill, 5-2.
- 182 - Mark Atwater (LM) dec. Cole Picchiotti, 6-5.
- 195 - Logan Carney (PV) dec. Ryley Stancel, 6-1.
- 220 - A.J. Garcia (LM) dec. Jake Melik, 5-2.
- 285 - Justin Green (LM) pinned Devin Allbee, 4:16.
- 106 - Matt Wempen (LM) dec. Travis Willers, 6-4.
- 113 - Alijah Jeffery (LM) tech fall Reed Brockhage, 18-3 (5:18).
- 120 - Damon Griffin (LM) major dec. Tyler Willers, 13-5.
- 126 - Trevor Berry (LM) dec. Levi Moser, 9-4.
- 132 - Joel Northrup (LM) pinned Matt Nowak, 0:55.
- 138 - Spencer Clabough (LM) pinned Zack Speidel, 5:48.
- 145 - Ross Lembeck (LM) pinned Evan Stimmel, 2:38.
- 152 - Blake Letney (PV) pinned Dakota Digmann, 3:43.

Pleasant Valley had one team point deducted for unsportsmanlike conduct.