

Prairie claims 3rd MVC title in row

Written by Jim Ecker

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DUBUQUE - There's nothing flashy about the Cedar Rapids Prairie wrestling team, but the program has been built on bed-rock principles that stands the test of time.

The Hawks captured the Mississippi Valley Conference tournament for the third straight year Saturday with another workmanlike performance at Dubuque Wahlert.

Prairie won back-to-back MVC crowns in 1994 and 1995, but this is the first time in school history the Hawks have claimed three MVC titles in a row.

"It's really cool to be part of that," said Marcus England, who took top honors at 106 pounds. "We've got a strong team, we work together well. I'm proud to get another victory."

Prairie nudged Jefferson for the championship, 217.5 to 208.5, in a battle of rivals from southwest Cedar Rapids.

Prairie keeps graduating good wrestlers and replacing them with new stalwarts. Josh Wenger won his second straight MVC crown to lead the Hawks at 138 pounds, but they would not have prevailed without talent from top to bottom.

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"It really shows that with the depth of the lineup we have at Prairie, each guy steps in and keeps it going," said Wenger. "It really feels good.

It's a good accomplishment for the team. It continues the cycle. Good talent keeps coming."

Prairie Coach Blake Williams was justifiably proud of the three-peat in a strong field that featured dozens of ranked wrestlers.

"It's a great, great accomplishment for the kids," he said. "It's one of the goals at the beginning of the season, but not a goal that we dwelt on or anything.



"Each year you wonder - and I think sometimes people wonder - how are you going to replace so-and-so and how are you going to replace the seniors.

And we've done a nice job of it the last few years. People have stepped up and done their part."

Metro grapplers claimed eight of the 14 individual titles with Prairie, Jefferson and Linn-Mar collecting two apiece. Kennedy and Xavier also earned crowns.

Brenden Baker (113) and Dalton Kuehl (285) won titles for Jefferson. Toby Northrup (152) and Shea Hartzler (160) climbed to the top of the winner's stand for Linn-Mar. Clint Lembeck (132) brought home a gold medal for Xavier and Logen Rodriguez (145) won a championship for Kennedy.

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Prairie had a bittersweet round in the finals, dropping five of seven matches, but Williams was proud of having seven of his people vying for crowns.

"You'd like to get a couple more titles, but those guys had to fight just to get to that point and get those team points," he said. "It IS a team effort."

There were four different all-Metro championship matches. England topped Jeff Vipond of Xavier at 106, Lembeck defeated Kyle Briggs of Jefferson at 132, Wenger pinned Ben Sarasin of Kennedy at 138, and Northrup defeated Tavian Rashed of Jefferson at 152.

Matt Wempen of Linn-Mar was hoping to become only the ninth four-time champion at the MVC meet, but he was unable to compete due to an injury. Coach Doug Streicher said he expects Wempen to return next week.

Wenger was looking forward to a battle with top-ranked Dan Kelly of Cedar Falls Saturday, but Kelly did not compete due to a back injury. Wenger is ranked No. 2 at 138.

Kennedy finished sixth out of 14 teams in the standings. Linn-Mar placed seventh, Xavier was eighth and Washington finished last.

TEAM STANDINGS

1. Prairie 217.5, 2. Jefferson 208.5, 3. Iowa City West 183, 4. Hempstead 166, 5. Wahlert 130.5, 6. Kennedy 115, 7. Linn-Mar 111, 8. Xavier 92, 9. Cedar Falls 90, 10. Iowa City High 84.5, 11. Waterloo East 51, 12. Waterloo West 34, 13. Dubuque Senior 25, 14. Washington 17.

CHAMPIONSHIP MATCHES

106 - Marcus England (CRP) dec. Jeff Vipond (CRX), 3-0
113 - Brenden Baker (CRJ) dec. Tristan Birt (DW), 8-6
120 - Tanner Rohweder (ICW) dec. Nolan Hromidko (CRK), 6-4
126 - Nelson Brands (ICW) dec. Sam Uthoff (CRP), 12-7
132 - Clint Lembeck (CRX) dec. Kyle Briggs (CRJ), 10-7
138 - Josh Wenger (CRP) pinned Ben Sarasin (CRK), 3:54
145 - Logen Rodriguez (CRK) dec. Ali Al-mabuk (CF), 4-3
152 - Toby Northrup (LM) dec. Tavian Rashed (CRJ), 11-9
160 - Shea Hartzler (LM) dec. Andrew Turner (DW), 7-5
170 - John Milani (ICW) dec. Brandon Haas (DH), 4-2 (ot)
182 - Riley Hasken (DW) dec. Jarod Cadena (CRP), 3-1
195 - Donovan Doyle (ICW) dec. Taylor Mehmen (CRP), 4-2
220 - Gannon Gremmel (DH) pinned Jonah Manson (CRP), 1:45
285 - Dalton Kuehl (CRJ) dec. Jackson Hesseltine (CRP), 3-0