

Prairie wrestlers eye 2 trophies at state

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kane Thompson proved you can win two state wrestling titles in one week when he led Alburnett to the state dual meet title and the state individual meet title in 2013 when he was coaching at Alburnett.

"It can be done," Thompson said Monday. "Our community at Alburnett was super-proud of that."

Now he'd like to collect high finishes in both tournaments this week with the Prairie Hawks. He's not predicting state titles, but he does think top-3 finishes in both events - or higher - are possible.

"We have a great opportunity," said Thompson, in his first season at Prairie. "I know the traditional tournament means a lot to the individuals, but I think you can be ready for both."

The Hawks (19-3) will face Johnston (21-2) in the opening round of the state dual meet tournament on Wednesday at 9 a.m. at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines. It's a one-day tournament, with the semifinals at 1 p.m. and the finals at 6:30 p.m.

The other first-round matches are Southeast Polk (16-0) against Clinton (16-2), West Des Moines Valley (21-1) against Waverly-Shell Rock (23-4), and Hempstead (27-0) against Indianola (18-2).

Some coaches put less emphasis on the dual meet tournament and rest top wrestlers for the individual tournament that runs this Thursday through Saturday in Des Moines, but Thompson plans to put his best team on the mat for as long as the Hawks are in the winner's bracket.

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He might rest a few regulars if the Hawks have already clinched a particular meet and are assured of advancing, but otherwise he plans to chase as much hardware as possible.

"You can win down there and be smart about it," said Thompson, who also led Alburnett to the individual state title in 2015. "I told our guys, either way you have to get a hard workout that day because you have to make weight for the next day, so your match can be part of that process.

"A goal of ours has been to bring home two trophies," he said. "You're going to bring one home for state duals because they give one to the top-8, but if you want two trophies, you have to be in the top-3 in the individual tournament.

"That's where they want to finish," he continued. "I don't think we're on a lot of radars right now for that happening with some of the powerhouses that are there, but when that tournament starts it's an even playing field. We have as good a shot as anybody else."

Prairie qualified eight wrestlers for the individual state tournament when it captured the district title in Waverly on Saturday. The Hawks feature Conrad Braswell at 106 pounds, Marcus England at 113, Trenten Wennermark at 126, Sam Uthoff at 132, Morgan Hood at 152, Taylor Mehmen at 195, Tyler Pasker at 220 and Alex Heisdorffer at 285.

Thompson thinks eight wrestlers are enough to do some serious damage in Des Moines.

"We have some kids with super-high goals," he said. "We have kids who want to be place-winners and state champs. And if that's the case and they accomplish their goals, we should score plenty of team points."

Lewis Central qualified 11 wrestlers for the state meet. Fort Dodge and Southeast Polk have nine qualifiers. Prairie, West Des Moines Valley, Clinton and Johnston have eight qualifiers. Hempstead, Waverly-Shell Rock, Council Bluffs Jefferson, Western Dubuque, North Scott and Ottumwa are taking seven grapplers to state.

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Thompson declined to pick a favorite. "I think it's up in the air," he remarked.

A total of 25 wrestlers from Metro schools will be competing at the state individual tournament.

Kennedy features Nolan Hromidko at 126, Logen Rodriguez at 152, Ben Sarasin at 160, Garrett Kubovec at 170 and Dalles Jacobus at 220 for a five-man team.

Linn-Mar qualified four wrestlers for state with Alex Streicher at 138, Johnny Clymer at 145, Shea Hartzler at 160 and Brayden Schultz at 195.

Jefferson also qualified four wrestlers for state with Joseph Siboma at 113, Brenden Baker at 120, Kyle Briggs at 152 and Nick Dreckman at 182.

Xavier qualified three wrestlers with Keegan Schultschik at 120, Clint Lembeck at 138 and Josh Gerke at 145.

Will Foreman will represent Washington at 126.

This will be the 96th state individual tournament, including 91 under the auspices of the Iowa High School Athletic Association since 1926. The IHSA expects 75,000 fans to attend the three-day tournament, capped by the 29th straight sellout for the finals Saturday night.