

## Prairie matmen dump No. 2 Linn-Mar, 35-22

Written by Jim Ecker  
Thursday, 06 December 2012 23:50 -

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The Cedar Rapids Prairie wrestling team huddled around Coach Blake Williams for a few minutes Thursday night after whipping second-ranked Linn-Mar and finished the meeting with a quietly confident two-word chant.

"State champs," they said in unison, announcing this year's goal for everyone to hear.

Based on what happened Thursday, they could be headed in that direction.

The fifth-ranked Hawks won nine of 14 matches and dumped the highly regarded Lions, 35-22, with a convincing performance at the Linn-Mar gym.

"State champs," repeated 170 pounder Cam Rathje. "We say it after every practice, we said it now. We all believe in that and we're going to make it happen."

The state meet is more than two months away, but it looked like the rankings will need to be revised after what happened in this early test of state powers. Prairie and Linn-Mar could meet again in the Five Seasons Duals this Saturday and have a different outcome, so time will tell.

Coach Williams is not ready to start talking about being "state champs" in December.

"That's their thing," he remarked. "I said, if you're going to be saying that, you better be doing what it takes to hopefully be in a position to do that.

"It's a long journey to then. We have a lot of work to do before then, that's for sure."

Rathje clinched the victory when he pinned Luke Wempen at 170 pounds in 1:37 to give Prairie

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a 32-22 advantage in the next-to-last bout of the night. Austin Gould followed with a 12-8 victory over Andrew Holladay at 182 to finish the contest.

One of the turning points for Prairie came at 126 pounds where third-ranked Josh Wenger blanked No. 4 Damon Griffin, 8-0. Wenger's major decision gave the Hawks a 17-15 lead and they never trailed again.

"I don't really pay much attention to the rankings, because I know there are a lot of guys out there that are coming after me," said Wenger. "I have to keep my head on a swivel and keep going after everything."

Wenger embraces the "State Champs" motto along with his teammates.

"I don't know if it's confidence, but we know with these 14 guys, they are 14 of the most competitive guys in the state," he said. "We're going to go for it."

"We're going to go all out. We're never going to let up. That's the type of mentality you've got to have."

Andrew Netolicky collected a pin in 58 seconds for Prairie at 285 pounds and the Hawks finished with two pins, two major decisions and five regular verdicts.

"We're just a tough team. That's No. 1," said the clean-shaven Netolicky, who had a full beard during the football season. "I think we have a good, solid team. We can beat anyone if we go out there and wrestle tough."

Sam Uthoff, ranked No. 8 at 106 pounds, defeated No. 9 Noah Ajram at 106 pounds for another key win for the Hawks. Dylan Becker (132), Trey Blaha (138), River Whitters (160), Gould (182) and Casey Becker (195) won decisions for Prairie.

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Linn-Mar has five wrestlers who are ranked either No. 1, No. 2 or No. 3 in the state and they all won their matches, but those were the only victories they got. Matt Wempen (113) and Alijah Jeffery (120) had pins. Joel Northrup (145) won a major decision. Ross Lembeck (152) and Justin Green (220) won regular decisions.

Linn-Mar's three other ranked grapplers -- Ajram, Griffin and Holladay -- all lost their matches to ranked opponents.

"It's not the end of the world at this point," said Linn-Mar Coach Doug Streicher. "Obviously, I didn't expect to go out and get beat like that.

"A lot of mistakes. Let's put it that way."

PRAIRIE 35, LINN-MAR 22

195 - Casey Becker (P) dec. Sam Nowak, 9-4.  
220 - Justin Green (LM) dec. Jesse Hynek, 3-2.  
285 - Andrew Netolicky (P) pinned Ben Overdyk, :58.  
106 - Sam Uthoff (P) major dec. Noah Ajram, 8-0.  
113 - Matt Wempen (LM) pinned Jonah Nassif, 4:37.  
120 - Alijah Jeffery (LM) pinned Zack Fiser, 1:33.  
126 - Josh Wenger (P) major dec. Damon Griffin, 8-0.  
132 - Dylan Becker (P) dec. Manny Jeffery, 9-3.  
138 - Trey Blaha (P) dec. Shea Hartzler, 5-2.  
145 - Joel Northrup (LM) major dec. Jamie Day, 15-7.  
152 - Ross Lembeck (LM) dec. Skyler St. John, 5-1.  
160 - River Whitters (P) dec. Dakota Digmann, 10-7.  
170 - Cam Rathje (P) pinned Luke Wempen, 1:37.  
182 - Austin Gould (P) dec. Andrew Holladay, 12-8.