

Kennedy wrestlers looking to move up

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 24 November 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 28 December 2010 14:54

Kennedy was not happy when it tied for 38th at the Class 3A state wrestling tournament last year. Not happy at all.

“Of course we’re disappointed with that,” Coach Brent Paulson said. “It’s not that long ago that we were getting third place, top 15, top 20.”

The Cougars finished third at the state tournament in 2004 and were 13th in 2005. They placed 22nd in 2006 and 2007, but slipped to 52nd, 39th and 38th the last three seasons.

Paulson figures it’s time to go back to the future, and he thinks he has the wrestlers to do it.

“I think a realistic goal for this team is to be top 15,” he said.

He’s optimistic, with five state qualifiers and two place-winners in the lineup.

“Very optimistic. And cautiously optimistic,” he said. “A lot of those guys are jumping up a weight a little bit. They started out as lightweights and they’re coming up. But individually I’m very excited about the team.”

Luke Kremer, a two-time state qualifier, went 38-8 and finished sixth at 125 pounds last season as a sophomore. Ryan Sheldon, a three-time qualifier, went 34-13 and placed eighth in the state at 152 pounds as a junior.

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Shane Williams, another two-time state qualifier who was 28-16 last year, also returns. So do Ryan Rodriguez (27-17) and Taylor Moss (17-17), a pair of one-time qualifiers.

Jordan Baskerville (26-15), Ben Feuerhelm (26-17) and Logan Kubovec (22-16) also return after posting winning marks a year ago.

"I think we're going to be decent this year," said Kremer, who was a conference champion in 2010. "We have five returning qualifiers and two place-winners, so I think we'll be pretty good. I'm excited for this year."

Kremer has mixed emotions about finishing sixth at state last February.

"It was good to place, since I didn't place my freshman year, but I was a little disappointed, actually," he said. "I could have gotten a little bit higher."

"I want to place above sixth," he said. "I want to be in the top three."

Kremer had shoulder surgery this summer and missed about six weeks of wrestling, putting his conditioning behind schedule. "I'm not quite there, but in a couple of weeks I should be," he said.

Kremer cut all the way from 148 pounds to wrestle at 125 last season, and he plans to finish cutting from 158 this year so he can compete at 135. He weighed 141 last week and is confident he'll make it.

Cutting weight is hard, he acknowledged.

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“At the beginning it is,” he said, “but toward the middle and the end of the season it gets a lot easier.”

Sheldon wrestled at 152 last year, but he’s aiming for 171 this season.

“I’m not cutting very much,” he said. “I just want to stay healthy and have energy and get better throughout the season.”

Sheldon hopes to become a rare four-time state qualifier this season.

“It’s a pretty select group that’s come through Kennedy High School and done that, so it’s good to be part of that,” he said.

Sheldon was happy to place eighth at state last year, but thinks he could have done better.

“My goal at the beginning of the season was to place, because I didn’t do it my freshman and sophomore year after qualifying. So that was the first goal,” he said.

“And of course when I got there and I knew I was going to place, I just wanted to keep getting higher and higher. So I wouldn’t say it was a disappointment, but I wish I could have finished higher.”

Paulson wants to make sure his wrestlers keep pushing to achieve their goals.

“Nothing is ever given,” he said. “You have to work hard. Even though you might have gone to the state tournament twice or three times and placed once, for me that’s out the door. You have to come every day and prepare and get better.”

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The Cougars had to forfeit matches at 215 pounds and heavyweight in recent years, but Paulson thinks he could have a full team this season. He hated giving away those 12 points in meets.

“Now we seem to have big guys in here who are working hard and that could fill out our team,” he said. “That makes a big difference.”

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SCHEDULE

Thursday, Dec. 2 — Kennedy, Waterloo East at Prairie, 5:30 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 4 — Keith Young Tournament, Cedar Falls, 10:30 a.m.

Thursday, Dec. 9 — Kennedy, Dubuque Senior at Washington, 5:30 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 11 — 5 Seasons Duals, at Kennedy & Washington, 9:30 a.m.

Thursday, Dec. 16 — Cedar Falls, Iowa City West at Kennedy, 5:30 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 18 — Fort Madison Tournament, 10 a.m.

Thursday, Jan. 6 — Kennedy, Waterloo West at Linn-Mar, 5:30 p.m.

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Saturday, Jan. 8 — Boone Invitational, 11 a.m.

Thursday, Jan. 13 — Jefferson at Kennedy, 6:45 p.m.

Tuesday, Jan. 18 — Geneseo Tournament, 7 p.m.

Thursday, Jan. 20 — Kennedy, Iowa City High at Dubuque Wahlert, 5:30 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 22 — Clinton Tournament, 9 a.m.

Saturday, Jan. 29 — MVC Tournament, at Xavier, 10 a.m.

Thursday, Feb. 3 — Hempstead, Xavier at Kennedy, 5:30 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 12 — Class 3A Districts

Feb. 16-19 — State Tournament, Des Moines

Tuesday, Feb. 22 — Class 3A Substates, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 26 — State Dual Tournament, Cedar Rapids, Noon