



photos by RYAN BERGERON
Tony Olson attempts to run a half on Frazee's Jake Nagel in the 106-pound match of the Section 8A Team Championship Dual. Olson won 7-0 to help the Gators to the 31-30 victory.



Zach Evans works on top of Frazee's Tony Malikowski during the heavyweight match of the Section 8A Team Championship Dual. Evans intentionally gave Malikowski an escape with five seconds left in the match, so he would lose 3-2 and his team would win the dual 31-30.

Gator Wrestling takes final loss to capture Section 8A crown

Ryan Bergeron

Gator heavyweight wrestler Zach Evans lost his match 3-2, but when the clock hit zero, he jumped up while raising both his arms in the air, and clapped his hands a couple times. His team had just won the dual 31-30 over the Frazee Hornets and captured the Section 8A Team Championship- the first section team title and state tournament team berth since 2012 and the seventh overall in program history.

Leading 2-1 in the closing seconds of his match versus the Hornets' Tony Malikowski, Evans would get called for clasping, temporarily stopping the action and tying things up at 2-2 with five seconds left. The Gators led in the dual by a 31-27 margin at that time.

Instead of watching Evans ride Malikowski out to send the match to overtime- where Evans would have a chance to get taken to his back and pinned- the Gator coaching staff told him to just give Malikowski the escape. Evans put both his hands up vertically to signal to the referee to give Malikowski the one-point escape.

Asked what he thought at first when the coaches said to let him go, Evans explained how he didn't give much thought not to do what the coaches told him to do.

"I looked at the score and I thought, 'Well, if I can lose by points, it will send the team to state,'" Evans said. "I simply did what the coaches told me because they knew what was right."

Evans trailed, but in five seconds pandemonium broke out amongst Gator Nation at the Ralph Engelstad Arena in Thief River Falls. Once the clock hit zero, the Gator bench jumped up and down, many hugging one another and others raising clenched fists above their heads. Gator fans in attendance- those same people who chanted

"Let's Go Zach" and Zach's nickname "Dozer" repeatedly during his match- screamed and clapped in the stands.

Asked about that moment in the heavyweight match, Coach Bergeron said via email, "It was a true definition of being a team player. It was the smartest thing he could have done. If it stays tied that means we have to wrestle another minute and you never know what can happen in that time. It is something I will remember forever."

Despite hearing the chants of his name throughout the match, Evans knew he had to stay focused.

"It was kind of cool," he said, "but I knew I just had to clear my head, not worry about it, (and) just go wrestle my match."

This dual may have come down to the final match, but it was a team effort, and a contest with many other tight affairs throughout.

The team achieved this together, a fact not lost on Evans.

"Just feeding off the energy of others that really helped us," Evans said.

To begin the dual, the Gators' Tony Olson (106) captured a 7-0 victory over a wrestler he lost to 6-0 earlier in the season in Jake Nagel. Olson led from start to finish, taking a 2-0 first-period lead and continuing to add on in every period.

At 113, the Gators' Jaxon Janousek would fall by pin with 47 seconds left in the first period to Christian Carlson. Brogen Beito (120) then fell by a 24-7 technical fall to the Hornets' Tyler Moe, but Gator teammates could be seen congratulating Beito as he went through the tunnel following the loss. The Gators trailed 11-3 in the dual.

Then Gator senior Avery Augustson (126) took to the mat versus the Hornets' Lukas Volstad. Having de-

feated Volstad earlier this season, Augustson remained on the offensive throughout.

Leading 17-10 late, Augustson scored a takedown in the closing seconds of his match to take a 19-10 lead. Right after scoring the takedown, Augustson let out a scream while riding out Volstad in those last seconds. He had earned a 19-10 major decision, giving his team an extra point. The Gators trailed in the dual 11-7.

The 132-pound match featured a tight affair between Gator senior Brandon Pries and the Hornets' Brock Barlund. Leading 5-4 after two periods, Pries would give up an escape, tying the match at 5-5. Then in the closing seconds, Pries allowed the takedown to fall 7-5.

Now seeing his team trailing 14-7 in the dual, Garrett Undeberg took to the mat at 138 versus Kaden Hiemenz, a returning section champion from last season. Leading 5-3 late in the third period, Undeberg would shoot in for a takedown attempt, but instead give up a takedown.

Then, as the seconds ticked down, Undeberg would score the escape with four seconds left. He celebrated before the clock even hit zero, circling the edge of the mat away from Hiemenz. Undeberg received a stall warning, but got his hand raised after a 6-5 win, as blood dripped down one side of his face. Then, before heading to his teammate tunnel, he pumped both his arms up and down three times to urge the crowd to celebrate. The Gators trailed 14-10 in the dual.

This would prove to spark a run for the Gators that included three straight pins. Gator senior Owen Novacek (145) earned a 57-second pin over Mason Newling. Andy Dostal (152) followed with a pin over the Hornets' Ricky Roforth with 36 seconds left in the second period. Caleb Vacura then earned his pin

over the Hornets' Joby Giefer with one minute remaining in the final period. The Gators led 28-14 in the dual.

Then the Hornets made a run. The Gators' Joe DeZelar (170) would get caught and pinned with 20 seconds left in the first period versus the Hornets' Brett Graham. The Gators' Ethan Waage (182) then fought off his back in the first period before eventually falling by a 14-5 major decision to the Hornets' Gabe Drewes.

Jacob Bergsnev (195) took a 2-0 lead in the first period of his match versus the Hornets' Coletan Borah. Soon after, Bergsnev would give up the reversal and had to also fight off his back. He gave up three nearfall points to trail 5-2 after one. Trailing 9-2 going into the third period, Bergsnev chose both up and later scored a takedown to prevent Borah from getting the major decision. Bergsnev fell 9-4, but the Gators led 28-27 in the dual.

Then came the match-up of two familiar opponents in the Gators' Dominik Vacura (ranked #1 at 220) and the Hornets' Luke Tweeton (ranked #2 at 220). Both wrestlers each defeated one another earlier this season. In this match-up, Vacura would score the first period takedown. Leading 2-1 after one, Vacura gave up the one-point escape to Tweeton in the second, tying the match at 2-2 going into the third. Scoring the escape right away in the third, Vacura made it stick and held on for the 3-2 win, giving the Gators a 31-27 lead and setting up the dramatics of heavyweight.

"What a great day it was to be a Gator!!! I am so happy for the kids," Gator Head Coach Todd Bergeron said via email. "We have worked so hard to get to this point and they deserve this great opportunity."

Next Action: The Gators will head to Crookston High

School on Friday, February 22 and Saturday, February 23 for the Section 8A Individual Tournament. Then, the Gators will travel as a team down to the state tournament on Wednesday, February 27. Earning the fifth seed, the Gators open first round state Class A team action from the Xcel Energy Center on Thursday, February 28 versus the fourth seed and Section 4A Champion, Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City Falcons, at 11 am.

For Coach Bergeron, he hopes his team continues to achieve- to not feel content with just participating at state as a team.

"(I) hope we can go down and make some noise at the big show," Coach Bergeron said via email. "The kids need to stay focused and keep the momentum going and get a bunch of individuals (to state) as well."

Evans also echoed a similar message, one not of complacency.

"We already achieved the section goal," Evans said. "So why not go for the state championship goal? We have nothing to lose."

Other Section 8A Gator Dual Results:

- Quarterfinals: Badger/Greenbush-Middle River 54 Roseau 22**
- 106 - Tony Olson (Badger-GB-MR) over Evan Oswieler (Roseau) Fall 0:11
- 113 - Jaxon Janousek (Badger-GB-MR) over Bodee Hovda (Roseau) Fall 3:49
- 120 - Brogen Beito (Badger-GB-MR) over Unknown (Unattached) Forf
- 126 - Avery Augustson (Badger-GB-MR) over Unknown (Unattached) Forf
- 132 - Garrett Undeberg (Badger-GB-MR) over Joe Schneider (Roseau) Fall 1:59
- 138 - Race Knochenmus (Roseau) over Brandon Pries (Badger-GB-MR) Dec 11-4
- 145 - Owen Novacek (Badger-GB-MR) over Connor Eidsmoe (Roseau) Fall 1:59
- 152 - Chandler Mooney (Roseau) over Andy Dostal (Badger-GB-MR) Fall 3:42
- 160 - Ben Olson (Roseau) over Caleb Vacura (Badger-GB-MR)

- Fall 3:07
- 170 - Joe DeZelar (Badger-GB-MR) over Unknown (Unattached) Forf
- 182 - Dale Grindahl (Roseau) over Ethan Waage (Badger-GB-MR) Dec 8-3
- 195 - Sawyer Klatt (Roseau) over Jacob Bergsnev (Badger-GB-MR) Maj 12-4
- 220 - Dominik Vacura (Badger-GB-MR) over Kyle Bliss (Roseau) Fall 0:23
- 285 - Zach Evans (Badger-GB-MR) over Unknown (Unattached) Forf
- Semifinals: Badger/Greenbush-Middle River 55 United North Central Warriors 13**
- 106 - Ethan Hendrickson (United North Central Warriors) over Tony Olson (Badger-GB-MR) Dec 3-2
- 113 - TJ Jasicki (United North Central Warriors) over Jaxon Janousek (Badger-GB-MR) Maj 16-4
- 120 - Isaac Tellers (United North Central Warriors) over Brogen Beito (Badger-GB-MR) Fall 0:57
- 126 - Avery Augustson (Badger-GB-MR) over Dylan Rasmussen (United North Central Warriors) Fall 1:41
- 132 - Garrett Undeberg (Badger-GB-MR) over Hank Tellers (United North Central Warriors) Maj 12-2
- 138 - Brandon Pries (Badger-GB-MR) over Ethan Trout (United North Central Warriors) TF 16-1
- 145 - Owen Novacek (Badger-GB-MR) over Dominick Fuller (United North Central Warriors) Fall 0:26
- 152 - Andy Dostal (Badger-GB-MR) over Eion Ness (United North Central Warriors) Fall 2:56
- 160 - Caleb Vacura (Badger-GB-MR) over Torrey Carlson (United North Central Warriors) Maj 12-1
- 170 - Joe DeZelar (Badger-GB-MR) over Dakota Meech (United North Central Warriors) Fall 1:13
- 182 - Ethan Waage (Badger-GB-MR) over Gator Bettin (United North Central Warriors) Fall 3:16
- 195 - Jacob Bergsnev (Badger-GB-MR) over Brock Kako (United North Central Warriors) Dec 7-4
- 220 - Dominik Vacura (Badger-GB-MR) over Unknown (Unattached) Forf
- 285 - Zach Evans (Badger-GB-MR) over Jared Seibert (United North Central Warriors) SV-1 3-1



Avery Augustson reacts after scoring a takedown late in the third period to turn a 17-10 decision into a 19-10 major decision, giving his team an extra point, in his 126-pound match versus Frazee's Lukas Volstad- one of seven Gator victories in the dual. Augustson is one of three senior wrestlers on this season's Section 8A Champion team.



Andy Dostal and his dad Dan Dostal share a moment after Andy and his Gator teammates clinched the Section 8A team title over Frazee, the first section title since 2012 and the seventh in program history. Dostal would record one of three Gator pins in the dual. The Gators also defeated Roseau 54-22 and United North Central 55-13 en route to the title.