



SPORTS

WHS gymnasts clinch Big South, look forward to section

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WORTHINGTON — Confidence is high for the Worthington Trojans varsity gymnastics team, and it didn't hurt Friday night when the girls scored 144.025 points in Worthington to capture the Big South Conference championship outright.

Next Saturday, March 20, the team will compete in Section 3A competition at Jackson, and with a win there, WHS will qualify for the state team tournament for a seventh consecutive year. Nothing's certain, of course, but the Trojans like where they're at.

"I think we're right where we need to be. And with more practices this week, I think we'll be ready to go up for sections," said junior Mekyla Nystrom, who placed second on the uneven parallel bars (8.825) and tied for second on the vault (9.4) against New Ulm on Friday.

"I think we're ready," confirmed head coach Joni Reitmeier. "I think there's always things we can be doing to be more prepared. With gymnastics, it's about fixing all those little things. All those little tenths of a point can make a difference at a section meet.

"There's always another thing you can do to grow in gymnastics. If you get something right, there's always another thing you can learn," Reitmeier said.

Friday's Big South Crossover meet pitted the top teams in the two conference divisions. Worthington's score was in line with some of the best scores it has reached this winter. New Ulm posted a 138.725 to get league runner-up honors.

Though New Ulm didn't win the meet, the Eagles had the top all-around gymnast in junior Kayla Goblirsch, who totaled 36.575 points. She finished first in the vault with a 9.5 score and tied for first in the balance beam competition with a 9.25. She was second on floor exercise with 9.150.

The Trojans had three individual champions. Gracia Elias tied with Goblirsch for first on the balance beam (9.25), Hali Bullerman achieved a first on the uneven parallel bars with an 8.9, and Abby Bristow scored an outstanding 9.275 on the floor.

Bristow placed second on the beam with 9.125. Bullerman tied for second on vault (9.4), placed third on the beam (9.050) and was third on floor (9.075). She was second in the all-around with 36.425.

Elias got third on the vault (9.35), fourth on bars (8.4) and third in the all-around (35.625). Nystrom was fourth in the all-around (35.175).

Several other Trojans posted solid scores. Ivy Jensen was fourth in vault (9.050), Olivia Barber was fifth on

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Adrian/Ellsworth high school wrestler Preston Nelson poses with his head coach and father, Gregg, during practice. Preston is hoping to join his brother, Logan, on the AHS wrestling wall of fame by qualifying this year for the state individual tournament. Logan died last summer from a boating accident.

Photos by Doug Wolter / The Globe

PRESTON PRESSES ON

A/E wrestler Preston Nelson works toward a state tournament berth while coping with the death of his brother

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Adrian
Quiet by nature, Preston Nelson is the kind of teen-ager who prefers to keep his emotions under control. His father, Gregg, who coaches his son on the Adrian/Ellsworth high school wrestling team, describes him as solid and mature.

But something happened last June that devastated the Nelson family — and not just the Nelson family, but an entire town. Gregg and Denise's oldest child, Logan, age 22, died on June 13, 2020, as a result of a boating accident on Lake Shetek near Slayton. For the Nelsons: Gregg, Denise and their other two children, McKinley and Preston, everything changed.

On Wednesday, Preston went to wrestling practice like every other day this winter. He has locked onto three goals for the 2021 season, and two

of them have yet to be fulfilled. He has already achieved his first goal, securing his 100th career victory. He is also on target to achieve his second, which is to complete his senior season without getting pinned. His third goal, to qualify for the state individual tournament, would mean that his photo would join his brother's on the Adrian High School wall of wrestling fame.

At practice this week, Preston talked about his family's struggles since June. It's not an easy thing for him to do.

"I keep everything to myself. I kind of deal with it on my own. I don't really talk about it," he said.

He explained why. He said if he talks about it too much, he might end up crying. He said he wants to stay strong for the family.

A moment later, he tells the truth. "I probably look strong, but I'm really not," he says.



Logan Nelson's photo adorns a wall near the wrestling room at Adrian High School. He earned the spot during his senior year by qualifying for the state individual tournament.



Friends and supporters of the Adrian/Ellsworth wrestling team produced a poster this year honoring former team member Logan Nelson. Logan, who died tragically last summer, was a devoted hunter.

Day by day, plugging away

Last wrestling season as a junior, Preston Nelson narrowly missed qualifying for the state individual tournament. He lost in the section

semifinals 4-3 to an opponent who went on to compete in the big event.

Logan qualified for his first and only state individual tourney in

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Tim Middagh / The Globe

Worthington Trojans gymnast Abby Bristow strikes a pose before making a rotation on the beam Friday night in the Big South Conference Crossover meet.

WHS wrestlers forfeit section tourney; F/MCC, JCC teams advance to finals

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The second-ranked high school wrestling team in the southern half of the Section 3AA tournament didn't get a chance to compete Thursday night, and won't get a chance again this year.

The Worthington Trojans were scheduled to open their part in the section team tournament at 6 p.m. in Fairmont, but instead they forfeited due to a sudden skin outbreak among several

members of the squad.

From Monday through Wednesday, said head coach Kirk Feit, six Trojans succumbed to the skin ailment. And on Wednesday, Feit contacted meet officials and medically forfeited.

"I could not expose other teams to that," he said Thursday night. "We weren't going to be ready to go at that point."

All the infected wrestlers, said the coach, were sent to doctors. Feit said the Trojans hope to be "back to normal"

within days, which would allow them to compete in the Section 3AA individual tournament on Tuesday, March 16.

Meanwhile, in Thursday's Section 3AA and Section 3A quarterfinal and semifinal matches, the two top-ranked teams — Fairmont/Martin County West in 3AA South and Jackson County Central in 3A — won twice to advance to the championships in their respective tournaments.

Fairmont/MCW shut out Luverne 74-0 in the quar-

terfinals and defeated third-seeded New Ulm Area 53-18 in the semifinals. Fairmont/MCW will take on United in the finals on Saturday, at 1 p.m. in St. Peter.

United, the third-seeded team in the north, after dispatching second-seeded Marshall 39-28 in its first match on Thursday, defeated top-seeded New London-Spicer 43-33 in the semifinals.

In Section 3A, Jackson County Central easily defeated Wabasso 71-6 in its quar-

terfinal match before stopping fourth-seeded Tracy-Milroy-Balaton/Westbrook-Walnut Grove 40-30 in the semis. In the finals, the Huskies will grapple with second-seeded Minneota Saturday in St. James beginning at 1 p.m.

T-M-B/W-WG beat Pipestone Area 54-22 in its quarterfinal, as Canby beat Windom/Mountain Lake 45-28 and Minnesota blocked Adrian/Ellsworth 64-15. In the semifinals, Minneota eliminated Canby 56-17.

Trojan girls hold off JCC rally for 89-80 win

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WORTHINGTON —

The Jackson County Central Huskies practically willed themselves back to contention in their girls basketball game against Worthington Thursday night at the WHS gym, climbing back from a 50-32 halftime deficit to within one point with about eight minutes remaining in the second half. But the Trojans held firm, winning 89-80.

"We came out and played well," said JCC head coach Rafiel York. "I told 'em (at halftime)

I wanted to trim six (points) every six minutes ... and if we'd done that we would have won the game."

Junior Sadie Voss and sophomore Maci Farmer led a furious Huskies comeback and they combined for 54 points, with Voss scoring 32 and Farmer 22. Voss hit four 3-point shots and Farmer hit five.

"They're great players. Sadie's a great leader. She pretty much willed us. She was the one in the locker room saying, 'Hey, we can win this.' And Maci, she's such a good shooter," said York.

When Voss meshed a 3-pointer with 8:36 remaining in the second half, the Trojans' lead was cut to 69-66. Voss again, inside, made it 69-68.

But with three and half minutes to go, Worthington upped its lead to 80-73. A steal by Voss and a Georgianna Wenzel layup cut it to 82-78 with a minute and a half left, but the Trojans took over from there.

"They were just coming at us with two or three people, and at times we were taking too many early shots," explained WHS coach Eric Lindner, who said

his team attempted too many "catch-and-shoot" shots.

For the game, JCC converted 11 of 18 3-pointers. Worthington made 9 of 27.

"They're a lot like Windom. If you give 'em a chance to shoot the 3, they'll bury it," Lindner said.

But in the final six or seven minutes, said the veteran Worthington coach, the Trojans "finally realized we had the advantage inside."

Sophomore forward Tarren Spartz made several big inside shots for WHS in the second half, finishing with 19 points.

She scored 13 of those points in the second half, including a 3-pointer, and was 8-for-10 from 2-point range.

Olivia Hayenga led the Trojans with 25 points. Her smooth moves and twisting layups served her team well throughout. Trojan senior Sophie Wietzema, who had 18 rebounds and four assists in the game, scored 14 points. Stephanie Bauman and Laci Boomgarden both had 9 points, all on 3-pointers. Bauman also had 10 assists.

It was Senior Night in Worthington, and so Lindner put little-used

senior forward Karen Dykstra in the game to start. She scored a layup off the tip and had four of the team's first seven points.

Worthington, which improved its record to 13-4, beat Jackson County Central 80-57 earlier this season. With the loss in the much-closer rematch, the Huskies fell to 5-11.

JCC 32 80
Worthington 50 89
JACKSON COUNTY CENTRAL (3FG-2FG-FT-TP) — Farmer 5-3-1-22, Voss 4-9-2-32, Farmer 2-2-1-11, G.Brinkman 0-1-3-5, Wenzel 1-2-0-8, A.Brinkman 0-1-0-2, Cother 0-0-0-0. Totals 11-18-7-80.
WORTHINGTON (3FG-2FG-FT-TP) — Scheitel-Taylor 0-2-1-5, Bauman 3-0-0-9, Hayenga 1-7-8-25, Spartz 1-8-0-19, Wietzema 1-5-1-14, Boomgarden 3-0-0-9, Weg 0-2-0-4, Dykstra 0-2-0-4. Totals 9-26-10-89.

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his senior year at AHS. A 2016 graduate, he was a devoted outdoorsman and hunter and was engaged to be married. He was just putting the finishing touches on his bachelor's degree in agricultural science at SDSU in Brookings, S.D., when his life was taken. He'd been a volunteer wrestling coach at his high school and was planning to work personally with Preston during his younger brother's senior year.

Gregg describes Logan and Preston as typical brothers. "When he came back from college they'd wrestle around," he said.

"We loved to

wrestle together," Preston explained. "We always wrestled, all the time, in the living room or wherever. We always tried to be the best at everything. We always hunted together. He was better than me, for sure. He was the one who would always come back with the buck."

When Gregg talks about what life has been like since Logan's death, he speaks in earthy tones. He, along with the rest of the family, struggles daily with the enormity of it all. There are, he said, "no resources to draw on." It's a reality like nothing else he'd ever imagined.

"We're just trying to go day by day, and we're just kind of plugging away. I heard something the other day, 'Looking for a dream.' 'Cuz it's

a nightmare," he said.

"We just told the kids we were there for them. Just reminded them that family is important. Especially short-term. This is what Logan would want us to be doing, like going to work, going on with our lives."

Proud no matter what

In this COVID-19 wrestling year, fewer competitors than in normal seasons will be eligible to compete at the state individual tournament. Still, for Preston, as in other years, he can get his photo on the wall by finishing first or second at the Section 3A tourney.

To Gregg, whether or not Preston qualifies for the state tournament, he wants his son to know he's special to him. "I told him I'm proud of

him no matter what happens," Gregg said. "Wrestling is important, but we've learned there's a lot more to life than wrestling."

Gregg says that, as a wrestler, Preston is solid in all phases. He's good on his feet and good on the mat. He has good fundamentals, and he's strong physically.

"He's a hard worker and he's pretty coachable, despite having his Old Man as the coach. Sometimes that's not the easiest thing," said the veteran mentor, who added that he intends to protect Preston as much as he can.

"He's had enough disappointment for a lifetime. It's just the Papa Bear coming out, but I know I can't do that forever," said Gregg.

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bars (8.1) and Addison Gerber was fourth on beam (8.9).

No doubt, adding to the Trojans' confidence this time of year is the fact that midway through the regular season they achieved a No. 1 state Class A ranking. Since then they've dropped to No. 4, but even today there's not much separation from four from one in average scores.

"I think it's really cool," said Nystrom about the top ranking. "It's like, 'OK, we're good. We've shown it, and we don't have to be scared when we compete. It's just a confidence-booster."

Reitmeier agreed. "I think it just makes the girls believe they're good enough to be where they are," she said.

In Friday's crossover meet, the Worthington junior varsity team also prevailed, scoring 134.3 points to New Ulm's 129.050. Placing first for WHS were Bristow (vault), Cristy Banegas (bars), Kaitlyn Jueneman (floor) and Jordis Weber (tied with New Ulm's Kiah Helget on beam). Banegas won the all-around.

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