

Handevidt repeats as state champion

by DAN CONDON
Sports Editor

Payton Handevidt knew winning a second straight state championship would be no easy task, despite entering Saturday's Class A state tournament with an unblemished record and being ranked No. 1 all winter.

Last season, Handevidt won the 145-pound title as a bit of an underdog. There would be no flying under the radar this season.

But the Jackson County Central junior got the job done, winning the 152-pound state title to become the 12th wrestler from Jackson County to win multiple state championships.

"The second one was tougher," Handevidt said following a pair of narrow wins in the semifinals and finals. "The pressure, the target on your back."

JCC head coach Nate Hanson, who won a state title his senior year, said he's sure the second one is the bigger challenge.

"The second one is probably the hardest," he said. "It's got to be a big deal. Everyone's expecting you to win it because you won it last year. But it's a different bracket, it's different guys, anything can happen. A lot of times guys don't repeat. Something happens and they get fifth the next year or something. It's tough to do with the expectations and to manage that and still be able to wrestle well is pretty hard."

After beating Landon Gode of Long Prairie-Grey Eagle/Browerville in the finals, Handevidt flexed his muscles toward the JCC crowd — almost an exact repeat of his celebration after winning his first title — and said mixed in with the thrill of victory was a little bit of relief.

"It's just letting everything go and showing my excitement," he said. "It doesn't feel real, but it is."

Rally to repeat
Midway through the second period of the state championship, Handevidt



Payton Handevidt flexes toward the Jackson County Central crowd after winning his second straight Class A state championship. Handevidt won the 152-pound title this year after winning at 145 pounds last year. He's the 12th wrestler in the county's history to win multiple titles.

PHOTOS BY DAN CONDON

found himself in a 3-0 hole to second-ranked Gode, who got an escape and takedown in the second period for his lead.

But that wasn't unfamiliar territory for Handevidt, who trailed 2-0 in last year's state finals.

"That kind of got me fired up and got me going," Handevidt said of the deficit in this year's championship bout. "That happened last time at state, too. I got taken down right away in the first period. You just have to stay calm and trust your stuff."

Handevidt worked a

quick escape from Gode on Saturday, then got a takedown with 10 seconds left in the second period to tie the match.

"It was important to get that takedown and it was right at the end of the period so he didn't get the escape," Handevidt said. "That's what ended up winning me the match."

Handevidt opened the third period with an escape for a 4-3 lead and neither wrestler scored the rest of the match.

"I knew he was going to try to start coming hard," Handevidt said. "I knew he was a great wrestler and wrestles hard, but I just fought through it."

"I knew Gode would be tough," Hanson said. "His brother has won it a couple

times and he was a finalist last year and a really good wrestler, so I knew it was going to be a really tough match. We had to wrestle well. That was a good match."

Tough road to title

Handevidt opened the 152-pound tournament with a pin in 63 seconds, but then the road got much more difficult.

Handevidt faced fourth-ranked Rece Voigt of Grand Meadow-Leroy-Ostrander/Southland in the semifinals and expected a close match after Handevidt won 5-3 when the two met at last year's state tournament.

Handevidt got a takedown in the first period and an escape in the second to win a 3-1 decision.

"I knew what he was going to do and he kind of knew what I was going to do," Handevidt said. "I think we both knew it was going to be a close match."

But Handevidt said he knew the initial takedown was important.

"As soon as I got that takedown, I knew I secured the match," he said.

Hanson said Voigt's mistake-free style provided a challenge.

"It was close the last time we wrestled him at the last state tournament," he said. "That guy stays in good position, so style-wise, it makes it a tough win for us."

Elite company

Jackson County wrestlers have won 43 indi-

vidual state championships and Handevidt is now one of a dozen wrestlers to win at least two titles.

Chad Kraft, Nate Baker, Bronson Steuber and Keegan Moore each have three state titles to lead the county. Tim Jansma, Marc Harwood, Torey Stewart, Cole VonOhlen, Travis Rutt, Cooper Moore, Darick Vancura and Handevidt each have two individual state championships.

Handevidt will have a chance to join those with three titles next year and Nolan Ambrose, who won the 106-pound championship to become the county's first freshman state champ, has a chance to be the first Jackson County wrestler to win four state titles.



Payton Handevidt gets a hug from head coach Nate Hanson after winning his second straight state title.



Payton Handevidt tries to turn Rece Voigt of Grand Meadow-Leroy-Ostrander/Southland in the state semifinals Saturday. Handevidt won 3-1, then won a 4-3 decision in the finals to win his second state championship.

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