

SPORTS

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WRESTLING



MARTIN SCHLEGEL / O'ROURKE MEDIA GROUP PHOTOS

Lake City's Max Balow kneels on the mat shortly after losing his state title match in Class AA 285 pounds at the Xcel Energy Center on Saturday.

BALOW

comes close to dream scenario

His older brother was there with him

BY MARTIN SCHLEGEL
Sports Editor

The feeling of waiting for your turn, then emerging from the tunnel as thousands watch intently and the bright lights magnify the action. Max Balow wanted to take in that feeling.

He wanted nothing more than to get that experience and at the end of the night, hear his name announced and his hand raised.

He fell two points short of achieving that goal.

Balow came up short of a state title on Saturday at the Xcel Energy Center. The Lake City heavyweight lost in the Class AA 285-pound final to undefeated, St. Cloud State-commit Elijah Novak, 5-4.

Balow said after his finals match, he executed his game plan well but couldn't quite wear out Novak when he needed points in the final 45 seconds. Yet he still realized

his childhood dreams.

"Walking out of the tunnel for that first match I had all the nerves in the world," Balow said. "Then everything just disappears, and you're wrestling again. I'm glad I was able to get here my senior year and experience it."

Determined to beat anybody he faced, Balow won his first two matches with relative ease. He then won in overtime 6-4 in the semifinal round.

He competed all weekend

with his brother, Will, sitting in his corner.

The emotional connection the two share is strong. Will credited Max as having an even more dominant senior season than he ever had as a high school wrestler. Will has seen the progress Max has made from last year to this year.

Having Will in Max's corner meant more than words could explain. After all, Max has always looked up to Will.

"It's hard to put into words.

It really means a lot to me," Max said when asked what it meant to have his brother there. "Having him in my corner, seeing all the huge crowd of people, family, friends in the stands, it means a lot. Gives me a lot of pride and a lot of gratitude. Just really thankful for the people around me, Will especially. He's been a role model for me. To see him over there in my corner is just special."

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Max (left) and Will Balow (right) stand together ahead of the Class AA 285-pound state title match at the Xcel Energy Center on Saturday.

WRESTLING

'Did it for him, too'

Bortz brothers finish in top 3 at state

BY MARTIN SCHLEGEL
Sports Editor

Making the commitment to wrestle at 113 pounds, Goodhue's Ryan Bortz was determined to make that choice worth it.

After winning a close match to win the Section 1A title at 113, Bortz won his first match at state by an 11-1 major decision. He then won two low-scoring matches, 2-0 in the quarterfinal and 1-0 in the semifinal to reach the state championship match on Saturday at the Xcel Energy Center.

In his freshman year, there was some initial concern about whether he'd stick with wrestling and give the effort needed to drastically improve.

"It was rough," head coach Josh Grant said. "They ran into other guys that were young and experienced and did all the youth wrestling at



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Ryan Bortz of Goodhue (left) wrestles for the Class A 113-pound state title at the Xcel Energy Center on Saturday.

a much higher level."

Bortz lost to Nolan Ambrose by a 6-3 decision, who finished undefeated and was ranked No. 1 at 113.

On the way to the final, Bortz, unranked, beat Zack Remer in the quarterfinals and Donovan Schmid. The two

were ranked second and third respectively. Each made the podium last year at 106 pounds with Remer finishing second.

Bortz last year came in fourth at the Section 1A tournament at 120 pounds.

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WRESTLING



MARTIN SCHLEGEL / O'ROURKE MEDIA GROUP

Gabe Tupper of Zumbrota-Mazeppa (right) wrestles in a fifth-place match at Class AA 182 pounds at the Xcel Energy Center on Saturday.

Feeling accomplished

Tupper earns fifth place at state wrestling

BY MARTIN SCHLEGEL
Sports Editor

In the massive crowd of wrestlers underneath the arena stands, in the tunnel and surrounding locker rooms, many wrestlers find many ways to calm themselves. Reaching the state tournament and getting out in front of more than 10,000 fans can be daunting and nerve wracking.

Not for Gabe Tupper.

The Zumbrota-Mazeppa senior seamlessly blends in with the cluster of activity and heightened energy.

"I really enjoy people watching," Tupper said on Saturday at the State Meet at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul. "When we're in these big (crowds), I just love watching people.

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JOHNSON PAGE B2

remains the only four-time team MVP and three-time All-MIAC player.

With all the accolades, Johnson plans to take many of her experiences, good and bad, to use as helpful ways to build the player's skills.

"I want to teach them to get through hard situations," Johnson said. "Hopefully, I'll be able to teach them to show some resilience. When you're having a great round, it's a great feeling. It can make you want to come back and play

even better next time."

Johnson said she's grateful to have competed with and against so many women that she has made connections with. That feeling of competing and having a bond with the competitors around her is one of many things she reflected on in her playing career.

Now, a new challenge. Johnson has never coached before. Often seen volunteering her time in the Red Wing community, especially with the high school, Johnson saw a perfectly timed opportunity to give some more back.

"It seemed right to challenge myself in a new way," she said.

Werner, the new assistant, currently teaches at Sunnyside Elementary and is a recent graduate of University of Wisconsin-River Falls. She was a top golfer in high school and has collegiate golf experience.

"My goal is to create a good experience and possibly grow the program that kids want to be involved with," Johnson said. "Ashlyn and I hope to foster a positive, supportive and motivating environment that will help the girls find their success."

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BASKETBALL PAGE B2

away to start the second and made an effort to beat her defender one-on-one to get to the basket.

Mya Shones scored 11 in the first half on three 3-pointers. The Tigers offense, while heavily relying on Bremer and Shones, seemed to be on pace.

The Tigers had a bucket and a 3-point shot from Ella Matzke in the second along with a couple putbacks by Shones, but the Tigers couldn't climb back to even. Lourdes led 53-50, then 53-52 with 3 minutes, 49 seconds to go.

The Tigers had a knack for

turning negatives into positives. In the second half, they just didn't get as many positives.

LOURDES 62, LAKE CITY 57

L 24 38 — 62

LC 30 27 — 57

Lourdes 62

CJ Adamson 22, 2 3-pt; Ella Hopkins 17, 1 3-pt; Emily Brown 11, 2 3-pt; Vivica Bretton 8; Allison Restovich 4.

LC 57

Natalie Bremer 25, 3 3-pt; Mya Shones 17, 3 3-pt; Ella Matzke 6, 1 3-pt; Paige West 3; Macey Beltz 2; Jacey Majerus 2; Hailey Reckmann 2.

Free throws: L 21-29, LC 6-10.

Three-point goals: L 5, LC 7.

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ALEC HAMILTON / O'ROURKE MEDIA GROUP

Zumbrotta-Mazeppa's Jack Krier (top) wrestles in the first round of the Class AA state tournament at 120 pounds.

WRESTLING PAGE B1

It's really fun for me. Sit back and observe."

The two-time state entrant, won his first match by a 6-4 decision. He lost a quarterfinal but won his next two matches in the consolation bracket before losing by a 7-0 decision. Tupper then wrestled Kole Guth of St. Peter for fifth place and was in complete control. He beat Guth by major decision, 12-4, to earn fifth place at Class AA 182 pounds.

Head coach Link Steffen said Tupper has had a much more mature approach this season. It helped Tupper reach the podium, which he hadn't done in his first trip to state.

"If we had to pick one thing, his focus and how he went about his business every day in the practice room and morning workouts, and at the tournaments," Steffen said when asked what was different for Tupper this time at state besides earning a medal. "There was more of a seriousness to him."

No matter what place he finished in, Tupper wanted to end his career having reached his goals.

"Last year and the year before, I was gunning to get up here," he said. "This year I made it my goal to get my 100th win and then get on that podium and not be on the bottom side of the podium."

Tupper was one of four senior varsity starters for the Cougars and has become one of its best leaders as well. He always strives to have his teammates and himself look and feel their best.

"Keep your head high no matter what you are doing," Tupper said. "If you have your head down, your shoulders shrugged. Look the part of a champion and you'll become that."

Even after losing to Kasson-Mantorville and finishing runner-up at the team Section 1AA tournament, Tupper said beating former Class AAA Albert Lea felt great. The team should feel satisfied with how everything ended. Whatever it is, Tupper said he's grateful for every opportunity.

"I feel good going to bed tonight and from now on knowing I accomplished something," Tupper said about earning fifth place. "Whether it be third, first, whatever. I accomplished something. I got here. I made it to the second day. That's good enough for me."

"Enjoy the ability to compete," Steffen said. "There's a lot of people that never get that ability. You get the ability a few times a week, enjoy it and have fun while you're out there. That's when you'll reach the top."

Fellow Cougar wrestler Jack Krier made the podium at 120 pounds, finishing in sixth place. The sophomore lost his semifinal match 6-0. He was unable to wrestle on Saturday and conceded his two matches by medical forfeit. It was the second straight season on the podium for Krier. Last season, he placed fifth at 106 pounds in Class A.

Results

Class AA

120: Round 1 - Jack Krier (Zumbrotta-Mazeppa) won by major decision over Sean O'Brien (Totino-Grace) (MD 11-1); Quarterfinal - Krier won by decision over Asher Hedblom (Rock Ridge) (Dec 6-1); Semifinal - Matt Randolph (Scott-West) won by decision over Krier (Dec 6-0); Cons. Semi - Peyton Spychalla (Simley) won by medical forfeit over Krier (M. For.); Fifth-Place Match - Asher Hedblom (Rock Ridge) won by medical forfeit over Krier (M. For.).

126: Round 1 - Zach Tracy (Scott-West) won by decision over Lucas Schiell (Zumbrotta-Mazeppa) (Dec 6-2).

145: Round 1 - Kaleb Lochner (Zumbrotta-Mazeppa) won by decision over Cole Rudnitski (Foley) (Dec 7-4); Quarterfinal - Maxwell Petersen (Byron) 48-0 won by fall over Lochner (Fall 1:21); Cons. Round 1 - Lochner won by decision over Evan McGuire (Mahto-medi) (Dec 6-0); Cons. Round 2 - Kain Sanders (Fairmont/Martin County West) won by decision over Lochner (Dec 6-2).

182: Round 1 - Gabe Tupper (Zumbrotta-Mazeppa) won by decision over Hunter Tate (Albany) (Dec 6-4); Quarterfinal - Joey Novak (New Prague) won by fall over Tupper (Fall 3:50); Cons. Round 1 - Tupper won by medical forfeit over Cole Ackerman (Sauk Rapids-Rice) (M. For.); Cons. Round 2 - Tupper won by decision over Zach Willke (Grand Rapids) (Dec 7-0); Cons. Semi - Kail Wynia (Kasson-Mantorville) won by major decision over Tupper (MD 19-7); Fifth-Place Match - Tupper won by major decision over Kole Guth (St. Peter) (MD 12-4).

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BALOW PAGE B1

Will said he doesn't take any credit for Max's success. He's simply a fan of his brother.

"It's a little different being on this side of things," Will said. "Kind of come full circle, him being my biggest fan and now flipping the tables."

Max next competes in baseball for the Tigers in the spring. He plans to keep training and wrestling in the summer leading up to the fall when he goes to Augustana to wrestle.

The weekend has brought out many emotions for Max and Will, yet they won't replace the feeling of seeing the other in the midst of achieving a



MARTIN SCHLEGEL / O'ROURKE MEDIA GROUP

Max Balow of Lake City (left) wrestles for a Class AA 285-pound state title at the Xcel Energy Center on Saturday.

goal with such a deep connection.

Results

Class AA

160: Round 1 - Jon Harvey (Lake City) won by major decision over Avery Wittnebel (Dawson-Boyd-Lac Qui Par-

le-Montevideo United) (MD 9-1); Quarterfinal - Travis Smith (Simley) won by decision over Jon Harvey (Dec 9-2); Cons. Round 1 - Harvey won by decision over Brogan Hanson (St. Peter) (Dec 6-2); Cons. Round 2 - Harvey won

by decision over Cody Wiene (Thief River Falls) (Dec 4-1); Cons. Semi - Bryce Burkett (Watertown-Mayer) won by decision over Harvey (Dec 3-2); Fifth-Place Match - Harvey won by decision over Cade Jackson (Detroit Lakes) (Dec 4-0).

285: Round 1 - Max Balow (Lake City) 44-1 won by decision over Jaden Drill (New Ulm Area) (Dec 4-0); Quarterfinal - Balow won by major decision over Jacob Adrian (Albany) (MD 10-0); Semifinal - Balow won in sudden victory - 1 over Gannon Rosenfeld (Mankato-West) (SV-1 6-4); First-Place Match - Elijah Novak (Foley) won by decision over Balow (Dec 5-4).

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STATE PAGE B1

To come in, down a weight class as a senior, Bortz said it was all worth it.

"Going to 113, I saw the most success (I have had). Brother got third. I did it for him, too," he said.

His twin brother, Lucas, placed third at 120 pounds in Class A. Grant saw the two do all the things that have made current and past Wildcat wrestlers medal winners at state. Making sure to control whether they got to the weight room or practices in the morning. Controlling their eating and getting proper sleep. Going to camps in the summer as well. All have benefited others. The Bortz brothers benefited, too.

"I think they bought into that," Grant said. "I'd like to believe, from my observations, it has given them peace of mind and calm."

Ryan and Lucas previously wrestled at state when the Wildcats made it as a team in 2019. Ryan didn't win a single match that tournament at 106 pounds as a freshman. This year, he said after his finals match that all tournament he felt much more at ease.

"One thing I got from team (state) was being nervous," he said. "This year I really worked on that, of not being scared going into my matches."

He began winning closer matches by attacking earlier in the match, not being hesitant to be aggressive.

Despite not winning his final high school match, Ryan was content with the result.

"Feels amazing," he said. "I walked into this tournament not even knowing what would happen. I'm satisfied."

Maddox O'Reilly was the third Wildcat to reach the podium. Last season he earned third place at 138. This year at the state



MARTIN SCHLEGEL / O'ROURKE MEDIA GROUP PHOTOS

Lucas Bortz of Goodhue (left) wrestles in the Class A 120-pound third-place match at the Xcel Energy Center on Saturday.

meet O'Reilly lost his consolation semifinal, then beat Lucas Jurek of Kimball 1-0 to earn fifth place in his senior season.

O'Reilly ended his high school career with 178 wins, tied for fourth-most in program history with his brother Kelby.

The Wildcats had six individuals at the state meet, tying the record for most to compete in a state tournament set in 1996.

Seniors Cody Lohman and Makae O'Reilly and freshman Caleb Kurti wrestled Friday, but none reached the podium.

Lohman, a senior, has been a "linchpin in the upper weights" for the Wildcats.

Five of the six that wrestled at state for the Wildcats are seniors. Grant said they took what the senior group of 2019 did and continued to raise the expectation level.

"It's the end of an era," Grant said. "We had 10 seniors out this year. Five of them made it to the state tournament. There's going to be a generation change going into next season. We're going to miss all of these seniors. I think they want to achieve what they've achieved. We have a 3.84 team GPA, so the expectations are high."

Results

Class A

113: Round 1 - Ryan Bortz (Goodhue) won by major decision over Issac Guzman (Canby) (MD 11-1); Quarterfinal - Bortz (Goodhue) 35-5 won by decision over Zach Remer (Mille Lacs Raiders) (Dec 2-0); Semifinal - Bortz won by decision over Donovan Schmid (Blackduck/Cass Lake-Bena/Kelliher Bears) (Dec 1-0); First-Place Match - Nolan Ambrose (Jackson County Central) won by decision over Bortz (Dec 6-3).

120: Round 1 - Lucas Bortz (Goodhue) won by decision over Zack Chen (Trinity School At Rivers Ridge) (Dec 5-1); Quarterfinal - Devin Carter (Tracy-Milroy-BalatonWestbrook-Walnut Grove) won by major decision over Bortz (MD 9-1); Cons. Round 1 - Bortz won by fall over Zach Hendrickson (United North Central Warriors) (Fall 3:36); Cons. Round 2 - Bortz won by decision over Gavin Albers (LPGE-Brower-ville Wolves) (Dec 5-3); Cons. Semi - Bortz won by decision over Teagyn Ludwig (Eden Valley-Watkins) (Dec 4-2); Third-Place Match - Bortz won by decision over Masyn Patrick (Holdingford) (Dec 7-5).

138: Champ. Round 1 - Maddox O'Reilly (Goodhue) won by decision over Zach Thompson (Fosston/Bagley) (Dec 7-1); Quarterfinal

- O'Reilly won by fall over Lucas Jurek (Kimball Area) (Fall 3:05); Semifinal - Christian Pater (Blackduck/Cass Lake-Bena/Kelliher Bears) won by decision over O'Reilly (Dec 9-3); Cons. Semi - Thomas Freking (Jackson County Central) won by decision over O'Reilly (Dec 5-1); Fifth-Place Match - O'Reilly won by decision over Lucas Jurek (Kimball Area) (Dec 1-0).

160: Round 1 - Makae O'Reilly (Goodhue) won by fall over Ashton Daner (West Central Area/Ashby/Brandon-Evanville) (Fall 1:26); Quarterfinal - Coy Gundersen (Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg) won by major decision over O'Reilly (MD 13-3); Cons. Round 1 - O'Reilly won by decision over Rhett Hudoba (Ogilvie) (Dec 3-2); Cons. Round 2 - Eion Ness (United North Central Warriors) won by decision over O'Reilly (Dec 3-1).

220: Round 1 - Jaxon Behm (Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City) won by decision over Cody Lohman (Goodhue) (Dec 4-2); Cons. Round 1 - Cameron Wieneke (Adrian Area) 30-11 won by fall over Lohman (Fall 4:47).

285: Champ. Round 1 - Keegan Kubal (WEM/JWP) won by fall over Caleb Kurti (Goodhue) (Fall 4:48).

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