

Kennedy's Sheldon is symbol of perseverance

Written by Jim Ecker

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DES MOINES - Kennedy senior Ryan Sheldon has a tattoo on the upper-left side of his back, just under his muscular shoulder, adorned with Asian letters.

"I think Chinese," he said Thursday with a smile, perhaps a little sheepish that he didn't know for sure what language was represented.

The language doesn't matter to him, but the translation does.

"Perseverance," he said.

The word is appropriate, because it sums up Sheldon's wrestling career at Kennedy. He qualified for the state tournament as a freshman and sophomore, but did not place either time. He came back last year and finished eighth at 152 pounds, now he's back for a final try this season with bigger goals in mind.

Sheldon cruised to an 11-2 victory over Mike Freeman of Des Moines Roosevelt in the opening round of the Class 3A state tournament Thursday morning at Wells Fargo Arena. That raised his record this season to a sparkling 39-1, with the only loss coming to a nationally ranked wrestler from Minnesota.

Perseverance, in any language.

"I know I'm not the best natural athlete," he said. "But I figure as long as I work hard and keep going and keep thinking positive that good things will happen for me."

Sheldon had a good start in Des Moines, but Metro wrestlers struggled overall with a 10-18 record in opening-round bouts. They redeemed themselves somewhat with a 10-8 mark in the wrestlebacks, making Metro grapplers 20-26 for the day.

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Prairie has all seven of its wrestlers alive and sat in ninth place in the team standings after Day 1 with 14 points, within striking distance of moving up. The Hawks have four wrestlers in the championship bracket and three in the consolation bracket.

Linn-Mar struggled and went 2-6 in the opening round. Joel Northrup forfeited his historic match to Cassy Herkelman in the first round, not wanting to wrestle a girl, but he came back with a 9-0 victory in the wrestlebacks to stay alive.

The biggest shocker for Linn-Mar came at 215 pounds, where third-ranked A.J. Garcia lost in the first round, 1-0, and got pinned in 13 seconds by a wrestler from Fort Madison in the wrestlebacks. Garcia was eliminated without scoring a single point for the Lions in the standings.

Alijah Jeffery (103) and Mitch Wantock (171) won their first-round matches for Linn-Mar and will wrestle in the quarterfinals today. Northrup (112), Ross Lembeck (135), Josh Pederson (140) and Tanner Regenwether (145) are alive in the wrestlebacks for the Lions.

Prairie had the best day of all the Metro teams with Chris Walters (119), Zach Witte (145), Cameron Rathje (152) and Andrew Netolicky (189) capturing their opening-round bouts. Jayden Flege (112), Zach Becicka (125) and Peyton Wagner (152) are alive in the consolation bracket and could finish as high as third.

Washington went 0-for-4 in the first round with Trey Schuler (103), Jordin Eicher (125), Kaiser Herz (140) and Tyler Burrell (285) all falling. Herz and Burrell rebounded in the wrestlebacks to stay alive.

Braxton Chicchelly squeezed out a 4-3 victory for Xavier in the opening round at 130 pounds to reach the quarterfinals.

Conner Herman (215) won his opener for Jefferson, but Blake Carson (135) and Riley Welsh

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(189) were defeated. Carson won his wrestleback, but Welsh was eliminated.

Kennedy went 2-2 in the opening round. Luke Kremer got a pin at 135 pounds, joining Sheldon in the quarterfinals on Friday. Ryan Rodriguez (140) and Jordan Baskerville (160) lost twice and were ousted from the tournament.

Alex Hunter of Marion lost twice at 119 pounds and was eliminated.

Nobody had more fun on Day 1 at the state tournament than Sheldon. He loves competing in Des Moines.

"It's awesome," he said. "Especially when you first walk in there to go warm up, you can just feel it. There aren't any people in the stands, but you can feel the tension and the energy in the air."

Wrestlers are not seeded for the state tournament. Sheldon is ranked fourth in the state at 171 pounds by The Predicament, but said he hasn't studied the brackets to see how it shapes up.

"I don't really pay much attention to it anymore," he said, then added with a smile, "but my dad said it's looking pretty good for me."