

J-Hawks' Herman trims Nagle for state title

Written by Jim Ecker

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DES MOINES -- Conner Herman waddled around Wells Fargo Arena at the state wrestling tournament last year as a 250-pound heavyweight. Or maybe it was 260.

"I was pretty big," he said Saturday night. "I was not the healthiest person ever."

Now he's the picture of good health, and the trimmer Cedar Rapids Jefferson senior has the Class 3A 215-pound state title as a satisfying reward.

Herman beat Ben Nagle of North Scott, 5-3 in overtime, Saturday at Wells Fargo Arena to claim Jefferson's first title since Tim Ironside won a championship for the J-Hawks in 1998.

Herman thanked Jefferson assistant coach Matt Orton, a former J-Hawk state champion himself in 1989, for "beating on me" in practice and giving him dietary advice.

Orton's advice?

"Eat stuff that spoils," Herman said. "Don't eat anything that doesn't spoil."

Nagle, ranked second in the state, tried to spoil Herman's goal of winning Jefferson's first state title in 13 years by taking a 2-0 lead with a reversal in the second period, but Herman fought back.

Herman got an escape and a takedown for a 3-2 lead with 30 seconds left in the third period, but Herman locked his hands while trying to protect the lead and was called for a penalty point to tie the match 3-3 with 11 seconds to go.

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"It was a dumb move on my part," he said.

Overtime began with both wrestlers on their feet and ended 46 seconds later when Herman scored a takedown. Herman leaped into Orton's arms, then turned and raised his arms in a victory salute to Jefferson fans in the stands.

Orton joined Jefferson's staff this season after working at Iowa City West the previous five years. "It feels great to be back home and help them rebuild," Orton said.

"He has been a great addition to the staff," said Herman. "He has been so great."

Herman weighed 210.5 pounds at the weigh-ins Saturday morning for the finals, a good 40 pounds (and maybe 50) lighter than he weighed at this time a year ago. He dedicated himself to winning the 215-pound title this year and got it done.

"I feel way better, I look way better," he said.

Herman placed sixth at heavyweight last year. He shed 40 or 50 pounds and climbed five steps on the awards stand.

"I'm so proud of him. I'm kind of speechless right now," said Jefferson Coach Dick Briggs. "I'm so happy for him."