

Turner caught on quickly in wrestling

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 21 December 2013 20:19 - Last Updated Saturday, 21 December 2013 20:49



Xavier High School senior Cole Turner is ranked No.7 at heavyweight in Class 3A with a sparkling 14-1 record this season, stamping him as somebody to watch at the state meet in February.

That's pretty lofty stuff for a guy who did not start wrestling until a year ago.

Turner was a mainstay on the offensive line for the Xavier football team the last two seasons as the Saints made two straight trips to the state finals, but he played basketball when he was younger and never donned a singlet until last year.

Xavier wrestling coach Ryan Chambers can only wonder how good Turner would be now if he had tried the sport as a freshman.

"He would be a force to be reckoned with," Chambers said Saturday. "I think he is now, but people would know who he is all over. Just look at how far he's come in a year-and-a-half."

Turner, 6-foot-4, 270 pounds, went 5-0 in the Doug Philipp Duals at Xavier Saturday with a pin, two decisions and two forfeits. His only loss this season was in a close match to Mario Pena of Hampton-Dumont, the top-ranked heavyweight in Class 2A.

Turner had a steep learning curve when he decided to join the Saints last year as a junior.

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"At the beginning, I had no idea what any of the terms were or any of that stuff," he said. "I didn't know what was going on. I DQ'd (disqualified) matches because I locked hands like four times because I didn't know what was going on."



Turner's teammates encouraged him to try the sport last year.

"Everyone was kind of talking to me about it: They said I should give it a shot," he remarked. "I really liked it, so I stuck with it."

Chambers had no idea what he was getting.

"I don't remember who it was, but somebody said, 'Hey, we've got a heavyweight who wants to come out, you might want to give him a call and a little incentive to come out,'" the coach said. "I called him, and I didn't realize when he came out that he was going to be a giant like he is."

It didn't take Turner long to climb aboard.

"Coach Chambers called me and it probably took about five minutes before I said, 'Yeah, I'll go out.'"

Turner plans to play football in college and currently has five offers - one from an FBS school and four from FCS schools. Football is his first love, but wrestling is not far behind now.

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"It's physical. Just like football," he said. "That's what I like about it."

Turner said there are similarities between wrestling and being an offensive lineman in terms of handwork, conditioning and balance. He feels his work in the wrestling room will make him an even better football player.

John Madden, a Hall of Fame coach in the NFL with the Oakland Raiders, loved to have wrestlers on his teams. "I have John Madden's quote," said Chambers. "He said, 'I wish every one of my offensive linemen would wrestle.'"

Turner got his feet wet on the wrestling mat last year, then made great strides this past summer. "I improved a lot," he said.

"Last year people would take a shot on him and he wouldn't know what to do and he'd turn away," said Chambers. "This summer when we went to summer camp in La Crosse (Wis.), he really stepped it up.

"The last dual meet for third place came down to the heavyweight match and Cole was out there ready to go, and the other coach pointed to his heavyweight and the kid said, 'I'm not wrestling, he's too big,'" Chambers said, laughing. "And so they forfeited at heavyweight because he was too big."

Turner played 14 football games with the Saints this season en route to the state finals Nov. 15 in the UNI-Dome. A few days later, he reported to wrestling practice, eager to get in the room and mix it up.

"That's dedication," said Chambers. "And I want to tell you, he was probably one of the first football players ready to be back in the wrestling room.

"Fourteen games is a long tear on your body. I expected him to take a week off, and he was

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talking about being ready to come back and ready to wrestle. It's shown.

"His confidence is going through the roof," said Chambers. "It's amazing how far he's come in two years."

Turner has become a leader on the wrestling team, despite his late start in the sport.

"A silent leader," said Chambers. "He knows conditioning is going to play a huge factor. He's just like a giant out there, and he's really a model for these kids.

"And he's one of the nicest kids. He's like a big teddy bear. He's like a big brother to all these guys."

Turner wishes he had tried the sport earlier in his career. "Oh, definitely," he said. "Just for the enjoyment level. I love it a lot. I wish I would have gone out sooner."

It's not too late to make his mark. He did not qualify for the state tournament last year, but he's set his sights on reaching Des Moines this time around.

"That's my goal this year. That's definitely my goal," he said. "I want to place."

Turner said he might pick a college fairly soon for football, but preferred not to mention any of the schools by name. "Any coach would be foolish not to have him on their team," offered Chambers.

The Mediapolis Bulldogs, the top-ranked team in Class 2A, breezed through their five matches in the Doug Philipp Duals and claimed the championship. Dubuque Hempstead placed second with a 4-1 record. The Saints were third at 3-2. The Marion Indians finished fifth with a 1-4

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record.

Jeff Vipond won all five of his matches for Xavier, raising his record to 12-2 at 106 pounds. Clint Lembeck also went 5-0 for the Saints, raising his mark to 13-1.

Lembeck is ranked No.4 at 132 pounds, but he dropped to 126 Saturday for four of his bouts.

Standings

1. Mediapolis 5-0, 2. Hempstead 4-1, 3. Xavier 3-2, 4. West Liberty 2-3, 5. Marion 1-4, 6. Anamosa 0-5.

Round 1

Xavier 66, Anamosa 18

Mediapolis 72, West Liberty 9

Hempstead 68, Marion 3

Round 2

Xavier 68, Marion 12

West Liberty 51, Anamosa 16

Mediapolis 49, Hempstead 15

Round 3

Xavier 52, West Liberty 12

Hempstead 75, Anamosa 6

Mediapolis 78, Marion 4

Round 4

Hempstead 45, Xavier 27

Mediapolis 78, Anamosa 6

West Liberty 46, Marion 36

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Round 5

Mediapolis 60, Xavier 9

Hempstead 59, West Liberty 16

Marion 43, Anamosa 18