

Baker, May, Allen help J-Hawks win title

Written by Jim Ecker

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Brenden Baker got serious about wrestling when he was in the second grade. In fact, he learned an important lesson that year about the value of making weight.

"I was supposed to wrestle at 46 (pounds), but I weighed 46.2 my first year at peewee state, so I had to bump up to 48," he said Saturday, laughing at the memory. "I didn't cut weight at all, so I wrestled 48 and I ended up getting fifth that year."

Even at a tender age, Baker did not like finishing fifth. He prefers being No.1, and that's his goal this season as a sophomore at Cedar Rapids Jefferson.

Nothing less than a state title will be satisfactory.

Baker is ranked No.1 at 106 pounds in Class 3A and raised his record to 26-0 Saturday with a strong performance at the J-Hawk Invitational.

Baker, Kelly May (152) and Josh Allen (195) won individual titles as the J-Hawks captured their own tournament for the first time since 1993.

Baker collected two pins and a major decision, giving him 18 pins this season with impressive titles at the Keith Young Invitational, the West Des Moines Valley tournament, the Pleasant

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Valley tournament, the Benton Community tournament and now the Jefferson tournament.

"He's such an incredibly good athlete," said Jefferson Coach Dick Briggs, almost whistling in admiration. "And he's so fast, strong and explosive. He's a special athlete."

Baker's father, Eric, was a two-time medalist at state meets for Briggs and the J-Hawks and is a wrestling coach himself, helping his son's development in the sport.



Baker did not qualify for the state tournament in Des Moines last year as a freshman, which is one reason he's done so well this year.

"I couldn't stand going down and watching, being in the stands where some of the kids that were at the state tournament I beat all year. I just hated it," he said. "It sucked watching that whole meet."

He vowed it would not happen again.

Baker feels he did not work hard enough during the summer of 2012 prior to his freshman year, so he dedicated himself to training and competing as hard as possible during the past off-season.

"I've been putting in a lot of work this year," he said. "Last year wasn't so good for me, so I knew I had to work all off-season and push it as hard as I could every day this year. It's been paying off for me."

A breakthrough came at the Keith Young Invitational in Cedar Falls when Baker, ranked No.2 at the time, defeated top-ranked Jack Wagner of Bettendorf in the finals.

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"He was No.1 and I was No.2, so that was a big win for me," he said. "After I beat him I was like, 'All right, I'm going all out for it now.'"

Baker has been the top star for the ninth-ranked J-Hawks this season, but there's a strong supporting cast. May and Allen also climbed to the top of their weight classes Saturday, but all 14 of Jefferson's wrestlers scored points and 12 of them placed 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th or 6th in the 16-team tournament.

Jefferson has knocked off No.4 Linn-Mar and No.6 Iowa City West this season in dual meets, in addition to making its mark in big tournaments. Briggs thought the J-Hawks might have a strong team this year and he's been right so far.

"We kind of knew it had a chance to be kind of a fun, special year for us," he said. "Hopefully we're not done.

"Everybody is kind of contributing in their own little way," he said. "We've kind of talked about the chance to walk away from the season and have something special in the trophy case before we're done."

Jefferson ran away with the team championship Saturday with 241 points. West Delaware finished second with 172, followed by Clinton (166.5), Alburnett (159.5) and Dubuque Hempstead (135).

Kyle Briggs (120) and Luke Sedlacek (160) placed second for the J-Hawks. Michael Moncivais (132), Tavian Rashed (145) and Dalton Kuehl (220) finished third. Patrick Rashed (126), Matt Culver (138) and Joseph Sibomana (113) were fifth and Eric Hovey (170) finished sixth.

Baker said all the J-Hawks have been training hard and pulling for each other.

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"That's why I love it," he said. "It's fun to be a part of."

J-HAWK INVITATIONAL

TEAM STANDINGS

1. Jefferson 241, 2. West Delaware 172, 3. Clinton 166.5, 4. Alburnett 159.5, 5. Dubuque Hempstead 135, 6. Fort Madison 127, 7. Boone 105, 8. Fort Dodge 102.5, 9. Johnston 92, 10. Oskaloosa 86.5, 11. Marshalltown 50, 12. Benton Community 42, 13. Council Bluffs Jefferson 37, 14. Muscatine 30, 15. Waterloo East 17, 16. Lake Forest (Ill.) 0.

CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND

106 - Baker (CRJeff) major dec. Lara (FtDodge), 14-4.
113 - Woods (WDel) dec. Fowler (Alb), 6-5.
120 - Pohlmeier (Johnston) dec. Briggs (CRJeff), 7-0.
126 - Genco (Clinton) dec. Meyer (FtMad), 1-0.
132 - Washburn (Alb) dec. Seaney (FtMad), 3-0.
138 - Duccini (Hemp) dec. Vaske (WDel), 5-2.
145 - Paul (Alb) dec. A.Caldwell (Clinton), 8-3.
152 - May (CRJeff) pinned D.Caldwell (Clinton), 5:41.
160 - Voss (WDel) dec. Sedlacek (CRJeff), 7-3.
170 - Windfield (Alb) major dec. Lammers (WDel), 10-0.
182 - Wisse (Oskey) pinned Chase (Clinton), 4:54.
195 - Allen (CRJeff) dec. Prescott (FtDodge), 4-3.
220 - Gremmel (Hemp) dec. Frost (Boone), 6-1.
285 - Springs (Boone) pinned Taylor (Benton), 3:52.

OUTSTANDING WRESTLER - Genco (Clinton)

JEFFERSON PLACEWINNERS

1st - Brenden Baker (106)
1st - Kelly May (152)
1st - Josh Allen (195)
2nd - Kyle Briggs (120)
2nd - Luke Sedlacek (160)
3rd - Michael Moncivais (132)
3rd - Tavian Rashed (145)
3rd - Dalton Kuehl (220)
4th - Patrick Rashed (126)
4th - Matt Culver (138)
5th - Joseph Sibomana (113)
6th - Erik Hovey (170)