

Wantock gives Linn-Mar a healthy boost

Written by Jim Ecker

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Linn-Mar senior Mitch Wantock knew his right ankle was broken as soon as it happened.

"I heard it snap," he said Saturday.

Wantock got hurt Oct. 21 during a football game against Xavier and his absence at tailback may have cost Linn-Mar a shot at the Class 4A state title.

He missed the football playoffs and also missed the first part of the wrestling season, but he's back now and making up for lost time on the mat.

Wantock went undefeated at 170 pounds Saturday and helped the Lions win the Linn-Mar Invitational with five straight victories in the dual meet event.

Linn-Mar topped Mediapolis, 57-20, in the championship round after going 4-0 in pool competition with lopsided wins over Mount Pleasant (66-3), Xavier (80-0), Western Dubuque (55-15) and Marion (72-6).

Wantock returned to the lineup this past week and said his ankle feels great. "I haven't had any problems with it so far," he said Saturday after snaring two pins, two decisions and a forfeit.

Wantock rushed for 1,109 yards, scored nine touchdowns and was a key member of the

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football team, averaging 9.1 yards per carry. The Lions won their playoff opener without him, but lost to Cedar Rapids Washington, 28-26, in the second round with Wantock on crutches.

It killed him to watch from the sidelines. "It really did," he said. "You wish you could take it back, but you can't."

The Lions felt they had an excellent shot of making the state finals with quarterback Mark Atwater, receiver Andy Henry and Wantock leading a high-powered attack.

"We were definitely thinking that all the way," he said. "That was our big goal the whole year."

Wantock knew his season was over as soon as he got hurt in a pileup against Xavier.

"I got hit. The pile came down one way and my ankle stayed in the same place," he said. "It just got twisted."

He'll never get another shot at a state football title, but he's determined to help Linn-Mar make a strong showing at the state wrestling tournament this year. The Lions are ranked eighth in Class 3A, but they're almost fully healthy now with Wantock and Atwater (182) wearing singlets again.

Atwater missed the first month of the wrestling season after having a hernia operation, but he's back and wrestling well. He went 4-0 Saturday with two pins and two decisions.

Linn-Mar Coach Doug Streicher likes the way the season is developing for his team. The Lions limped to the finish line last year, but they appear to be gaining strength at the right time this year.

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"We're starting to come together as a group right now," he said. "We're on the right track. We're on the path we need to be on at this point."

A.J. Garcia (285), Justin Green (220), Ross Lembeck (145), Matt Wempen (106), Alijah Jeffery (113), Joel Northrup (132), Josh Pederson (152), Wantock (170) and Atwater (182/195) all had impressive showings on Saturday.

Garcia collected five straight pins, including an eight-second job in the finals against Mediapolis. The total elapsed time for his five pins was 5:50, less than one regulation match.

Green and Lembeck had four pins, Wempen and Jeffery had three pins, while Northrup, Pederson, Wantock and Atwater all had two sticks.

Streicher thinks the Lions could finish in the top-5 at the state tournament if they enter February at full strength.

"Oh, no doubt about it," he said. "I think I have multiple guys who have a chance to win a state title. When you say that, you better be top-5."

Wantock would love to see Linn-Mar make a strong run, especially after what happened in football, but this could be his final year in organized sports.

"I'll probably just be going to Northwestern for academics and not playing any sports," he said. "With all my injuries and stuff, I think I'll focus on my studies in college."

Wantock broke his arm as a sophomore, tore cartilage in his knee as a junior and broke his ankle as a senior. He also wore a bandage around his head Saturday to cover a cut near his right eye that required stitches.

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"He's had everything," said Streicher.

Wantock has a metal plate and six screws in his right ankle, perhaps permanently, to hold everything together. He also has a screw in his left arm.

Wantock wants to study engineering in college and has the grades to do it, with a 4.1 GPA and a 30 on the ACT college entrance exam. He expects to hear in February if he's been accepted by Northwestern. He's also thinking about Iowa State.

Wantock undoubtedly could play sports in college, but nothing enticing has come his way. "I haven't had too many real good offers," he said.

The Xavier Saints went 1-4 in the Linn-Mar Invitational and finished in eighth place. The Marion Indians went 0-5 and placed 10th.

Round 1

Linn-Mar 66, Mount Pleasant 3

Mediapolis 52, Keokuk 30

Western Dubuque 62, Marion 11

Mount Vernon 57, Dubuque Hempstead 12

Round 2

Linn-Mar 80, Xavier 0

Western Dubuque 48, Mount Pleasant 21

Keokuk 44, Dubuque Hempstead 27

Clinton 36, Mount Vernon 18

Round 3

Clinton 42, Keokuk 36

Mediapolis 57, Dubuque Hempstead 22

Western Dubuque 52, Xavier 22

Mount Pleasant 60, Marion 19

Round 4

Linn-Mar 55, Western Dubuque 15

Xavier 49, Marion 24

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Mount Vernon 53, Keokuk 22

Mediapolis 42, Clinton 33

Round 5

Linn-Mar 72, Marion 6

Mount Vernon 36, Mediapolis 33

Mount Pleasant 36, Xavier 33

Clinton 52, Dubuque Hempstead 28

Playoffs

1st - Linn-Mar 57, Mediapolis 20

3rd - Western Dubuque 41, Clinton 31

5th - Mount Pleasant 34, Mount Vernon 33

7th - Keokuk 48, Xavier 30

9th - Dubuque Hempstead 42, Marion 33

LINN-MAR 57, MEDIAPOLIS 20

106 - Wempen (LM) pinned McNeil, 1:28.

113 - Jeffery (LM) pinned Andrews, :38.

120 - Erickson (M) dec. Griffin, 12-11.

126 - Foster (M) tech fall Berry, 5:38.

132 - Northrup (LM) pinned Conley, 1:28.

138 - Buster (M) pinned Oberbrockling, :30.

145 - Lembeck (LM) pinned Fenton, 2:10.

152 - Pederson (LM) pinned Eberhardt, 1:22.

160 - Drain (M) pinned Conner, :30.

170 - Wantock (LM) dec. Beckman, 5-3.

182 - Holladay (LM) pinned Strawhacker, 1:31.

195 - Atwater (LM) pinned Lamm, 1:58.

220 - Green (LM) pinned Jamison, 1:38.

285 - Garcia (LM) pinned Wagner, :08.