

## Blaha win sparks Prairie

Written by Jim Ecker

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Trey Blaha never beat Alijah Jeffery in AAU youth wrestling tournaments, but they're freshmen in high school now and Blaha has fired the first shot.

Blaha defeated Jeffery in a battle of ranked 103-pounders Thursday night to help Prairie trim Linn-Mar, 30-27, in a Mississippi Valley Conference dual meet at Linn-Mar.

Jeffery won both times they meet on the AAU circuit, but Blaha prevailed Thursday with a solid 9-4 victory.

"The team needed me. I had to pull through," he said.

Jeffery was ranked No. 5 in the state by The Predicament with a 26-2 record heading into Thursday's showdown, while Blaha was ranked No. 9 with a 26-4 mark.

"Trey showed some guts and determination. It was good to see," Prairie Coach Blake Williams said. "It's going to help his confidence a lot heading into the postseason, knowing he can go with an extremely tough 103 pounder."

Blaha said he learned a few lessons from his two losses to Jeffery.

"I knew he was long and was going to try and scoot around for an easy two points," he said. "I had to keep moving and go hard for six minutes."

Linn-Mar Coach Doug Streicher steered away from calling the 103-pound match an upset.

"Two freshmen. They hadn't met yet," he said. "I wouldn't put too much stock in the rankings or

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where anyone is right now. We'll see when it shakes out at the conference meet and districts. That's when it matters."

The MVC conference tournament is Saturday, Jan. 29 at Xavier High School and the Class 3A district meet is Saturday, Feb. 12.

"Trey is going to see him a couple more times down the road, that's for sure," Williams said. "We can't be content with this."

Prairie jumped to a 23-0 lead, but Linn-Mar pulled within 30-24 and had a chance to tie the meet when Josh Pederson faced Casey Becker at 140 pounds in the final match. Pederson needed a pin, but had to settle for an 8-3 victory for the Lions.

The meet was extremely even between the Metro's top two teams. The Prairie Hawks won seven matches and had two pins and so did Linn-Mar.

The difference came in bonus points. Prairie won three major decisions to collect three extra points and the victory.

"It was a fun dual," Williams said. "Going in, I'm sure both coaches probably knew it was going to be a tight meet, there's no doubt about that.

"Both teams really fought hard and it was just exciting," he said. "It was good for the sport of wrestling when fans can watch duals like this."

Zach Witte (145), Alex Steenblock (171) and Chris Walters (119) collected major decisions for Prairie. Witte, ranked fourth at 145, raised his record to 23-0.

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Andrew Netolicky (189) and Cameron Rathje (152) collected pins for Prairie. Joel Northrup (112) and Ross Lembeck (135) had sticks for Linn-Mar.

The Lions wrestled without three injured starters, Riley Neil (152), Mitch Wantock (171) and Mark Atwater (189). Their replacements all lost. Streicher said he hopes to have all three back in the lineup at some point.

Prairie raised its dual meet records to 20-3 overall and 10-1 in the conference. Linn-Mar dropped to 25-6 overall and 9-2 in the MVC.

PRAIRIE 30, LINN-MAR 27

103 -- Blaha (P) dec. Jeffery, 9-4; 112 -- Northrup (LM) pinned Flege, 4:48; 119 -- Walters (P) major dec. Berry, 15-5; 125 -- Radig (LM) dec. Becker, 4-2; 130 -- Severin (LM) dec. Whitters, 4-3; 135 -- Lembeck (LM) pinned Day, 1:13; 140 -- Pederson (LM) dec. Becker, 8-3; 145 -- Witte (P) major dec. Regenwether, 12-1; 152 -- Rathje (P) pinned Digmann, 2:51; 160 -- Wagner (P) dec. Holladay, 6-0; 171 -- Steenblock (P) major dec. Gansen, 8-0; 189 -- Netolicky (P) pinned Fitch, 2:38; 215 -- Smith (LM) dec. Zacek, 10-6; 285 -- Garcia (LM) dec. Brunscheen, 2-1.