

Warriors might leave 5 Seasons Duals

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Washington Warriors are thinking about ending their association with the 5 Seasons Duals wrestling tournament in light of manpower issues with the Washington wrestling program.

The Warriors withdrew from Saturday's tournament due to a lack of wrestlers, even though Washington was the co-host with Kennedy High School. Washington fulfilled its role as co-host, but the team did not compete.

"To be honest, we've been trying to get out of that tournament for about five years now," Washington wrestling coach Matt Hatcher said. "It's never been beneficial for our program to be in that tournament."

The 5 Seasons Duals features some of the top wrestling programs in the state.

Washington ended the 2013-14 season with only 10 wrestlers on the team. They currently have 23 wrestlers on the squad thanks to an influx of freshmen, but most of them are not ready for varsity competition and the Warriors have been forfeiting about half of their 14 matches in dual meets this year.

The problem was even more severe heading into the 5 Seasons Duals on Saturday due to injuries, illness and eligibility issues.

"Yesterday we were down to three wrestlers because of all that, and it's better for us to pull out of a tournament now and pick one up later in the year when we can enter more kids," said Hatcher.

That left 15 teams in the 5 Seasons Duals instead of 16, resulting in Bettendorf drawing an opening-round bye.

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Paul James, the athletic director at Washington, said he plans to talk to Kennedy athletic director Aaron Stecker about the future of the tournament. James said there have been issues the past few years in trying to attract 16 teams, and this year there were two junior varsity teams in the tournament to help round out the bracket with Prairie and Iowa City West sending two squads.

James confirmed that Washington might withdraw from the tournament next year and might end its role as co-host. "That's a possibility that might happen," he said.

James said it might be better to have 12 teams in the tournament instead of seeking 16.

As far as the future of the Washington wrestling program, Hatcher said he was encouraged when 12 freshmen joined the club this year. Hatcher is now running the Performance P.E. program at Washington, which he thinks could result in more good athletes coming out for wrestling.

James, who is also the football coach, said he's been encouraging his players to participate in wrestling. "We need football players out for wrestling if they're not out for another winter sport," he said.

Hatcher said he typically begins a season with 20 to 25 wrestlers, but there's often a high attrition rate as the year goes along due to grades, health issues and eligibility issues.

"If you're counting on kids that can't pass classes or counting on kids that can't stay out of trouble, you're probably better off trying to find another group of kids to pick from anyway," he said.

"That's always been the issue with our program," said Hatcher, in his 13th year as head coach. "Kids come out and they end up going out for a year or two and then they quit."

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Washington has a youth wrestling programs for kids in kindergarten through 8th grade. Hatcher said there are typically 20 to 30 kids in the program, but there's a high turnover rate. "It seems like every year there's a different 20 or 30 kids," he said.

Hatcher said he could fill 13 of 14 weight classes if he put inexperienced wrestlers into the varsity lineup, but he said that would not be beneficial for the wrestlers or the program. He said eight or nine Warriors competed in a junior varsity tournament on Saturday instead of being force-fed into the varsity lineup for the 5 Seasons Duals.

Hatcher said Washington plans to wrestle against Kennedy Thursday night in a dual meet at Kennedy.