

4 Metro grapplers eye state titles

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 19 February 2016 22:16 - Last Updated Friday, 19 February 2016 22:20



DES MOINES - The emotions will be churning for four Metro wrestlers Saturday night when they join the Parade of Champions at Wells Fargo Arena prior to the final round of the Class 3A state tournament in Des Moines.

But first, they needed to calm their nerves and try to get a good night's sleep Friday after winning in the semifinals.

"Some nights I don't sleep at all and some other nights I'll sleep like a baby," said Taylor Mehmen of Prairie, who will be gunning for the 195-pound crown. "I guess we'll see when I get back to the hotel."

Clint Lembeck of Xavier (138), Logan Rodriguez of Kennedy (152) and Shea Hartzler of Linn-Mar (160) also will be battling for state crowns Saturday night.

And in a surprising development, the Kennedy Cougars jumped into fifth place in the team standings with all five of their grapplers still alive in the tournament. The Cougars have 54 points and Prairie is sixth with 53.

Lembeck qualified for the state meet as a freshman, placed fourth as a sophomore and finished third as a junior. He had to battle his nerves Friday night when his semifinal match against Jackson Gallagher went into overtime before winning 3-1.

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"The nerves are real," he said after he pulled on his sweat clothes. "I'm sure it was tossing and turning (in overtime), but I can't pay attention to that or otherwise I get distracted. The nerves were definitely there.

"I never like to keep it that close. Too close for comfort, basically, but that's the way it turned out."



Hartzler was sitting on a 3-0 lead in the final minute of his semifinal bout against Seth Walker of Waverly-Shell Rock, but that was the problem.

Hartzler was not being aggressive and Linn-Mar coach Doug Streicher let him know all about it while Walker was tending to a bloody nose.

"He was getting a little mad," Hartzler said with a smile, sweating dripping off his head. "I was making the one cardinal sin: Looking at the clock, seeing how much time had gone off, how much time was left. I don't know why I did it.

Hartzler attacked again and got another takedown for a 5-0 victory.

Rodriguez dominated Christian Foote of Pleasant Valley, 12-2, for a major decision in the semifinals at 152. Now he'll join the Parade of Champions and try to wrestle for a gold medal.

"Crazy. Crazy," he said. "I've been up in the stands the past three years and (before then) when my brother wrestled. I always wanted to be on that

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floor on Saturday night.

"It feels awesome, especially beating a tough opponent like Foote."

Rodriguez will be a heavy underdog in the finals against Colton Clingenpeel of Council Bluffs Jefferson, an undefeated behemoth who blanked Kyle Briggs of Jefferson, 3-0, in the quarterfinals, but anything can happen in the finals.

Lembeck will face Nelson Brands of Iowa City West in the finals at 138 pounds. Hartzler will meet Jacob Carlson of Mason City for the title at 160 pounds. Mehmen will face Sam Cook of Fort Dodge for top honors at 195.

"It's pretty wild," Mehmen said about going for the gold. "I've been working for it all year. It's finally paying off. It's a great feeling."

He's looking forward to the grand parade Saturday night, whether he gets much sleep or not.

"I've always watched it, but I've never been a part of it," he said. "It's going to be a great experience. I get to wrestle one more match this year and I'll give it my all."

Sam Uthoff of Prairie lost in the 132-pound semifinals to Grant Stotts of West Des Moines Valley, 10-5. Josh Gerke of Xavier lost to Colten Mertens of Mount Pleasant in the 145-pound semifinals, 5-3.

Eleven Metro wrestlers are still alive for third place heading into the final day of the tournament.

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Conrad Braswell of Prairie (106), Joseph Sibomana of Jefferson (113), Brenden Baker of Jefferson (120), Nolan Hromidko of Kennedy (126), Will Foreman of Washington (126), Uthoff of Prairie (132), Alex Streicher of Linn-Mar (138), Gerke of Xavier (145), Briggs of Jefferson (152), Ben Sarasin of Kennedy (160) and Garrett Kubovec of Kennedy (170) need to win two matches Saturday to claim a bronze medal.

Three Metro grapplers will be competing for seventh place Saturday with Marcus England of Prairie (113), Johnny Clymer of Linn-Mar (145) and Dalles Jacobus of Kennedy (220) trying to finish their campaigns with a victory.

Southeast Polk leads Fort Dodge, 112.5 to 106.5, in the race for the Class 3A title.

Linn-Mar is tied for 15th, Xavier is 18th, Jefferson 19th and Washington 36th.