

Gibney and Sprout compete at state wrestling tournament

By Rongi Yost
Correspondent

Senior Cheyenne Sprout and junior Mitch Gibney competed in state wrestling action at Memorial Coliseum in Portland, Friday and Saturday, February 27-28. Neither had ever competed in a tournament of this caliber.

Thousands of wrestling fans and families were in attendance to cheer for the 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A and 6A teams.

Coach John Downs told *The Nugget* that when they arrived Gibney was not only nervous, he was not feeling well. Downs had brought along Gibney's wrestling partner for the last two weeks, freshman Brady Wessel, to help wrestle with Gibney in warm-ups and help prepare him for his first match.

"As Gibney stepped out in the large arena the sound of wrestling shoes squeaking on the mats, whistles blowing, and the sounds of fans and coaches yelling seemed to flip a switch in Gibney's head," said Downs. "His persona changed and you could tell the illness and nervousness were not a concern anymore."

Mitch matched up against Trenten Shafer from La Grande and was in trouble from the beginning. Shafer got Gibney on his back, and with sheer strength, Mitch was able to twist off his back and get the reverse. Gibney worked on setting Shafer up for a stack, and was successful. He pulled Shafer's head under and placed his shoulders to the mat for the pin.

Gibney moved onto the quarterfinals and faced Trace Vega from Phoenix, the No. 5 state-medalist from last year.

Downs said, "Mitch took a short rest before the match, but was not feeling well and had thrown up twice. I told him the combination of nerves and illness was a tough combo to beat, but he was doing great. His name was called and he went to the floor."

Vega immediately locked him up, but Gibney was able to throw Vega in a head-and-arm and take him to the mat. Vega countered after a short struggle and reversed Gibney.

"The combination of Gibney's illness and the weight of Vega on his chest was just too much for Gibney to handle," said Downs. "He did his best to fight off his back, but to no avail, and was pinned."

With the loss, Gibney moved into the consolation round. Mitch's next match was against Chase Allen of Hidden Valley.

Downs told *The Nugget* that Gibney's previous loss sparked in him some extra energy. Mitch went right after Allen and pinned him in 19 seconds, one of his fastest pins of the year.

From there, Mitch went up against Mat Engholm of Elmira, who took second place at state last year. A win would put Mitch in the placing rounds.

"As the whistle blew, Gibney looked better than ever," stated Downs. "I think the better the competition, the harder he works, and he does not give up. He gets more energetic

when he is challenged."

The score was close at the beginning of the third and final round with Engholm up 5-2. Although tired and weak, Gibney gave it everything he had, but was just worn down. On his last stand-up to get away, Mitch was pulled down to his hip, and Engholm used momentum to get Mitch on his back and proceeded to get the pin.

"It was hard to see Mitch lose this way, but I was so impressed with his determination to do his best and fight as hard as he did where most would have quit," said Downs. "These qualities are the reason Mitch made it to the tournament in the first place. I look forward to coaching him next year."

Senior Cheyenne Sprout also had a great weekend. With her fourth-place finish at the Girls State Qualifier a few weeks ago she was able to wrestle at the Girls Wrestling State Championships.

Sprout faced Katherine Dennis of Cottage Grove in her first match. Dennis had taken first at the Oregon Wrestling Classic at the beginning of the year and was a state placer the year before. It was a tough match for Sprout, and for most of the three rounds all Sprout was able to do was counter every move that Dennis made. With just seconds left in the match Dennis was able to run Cheyenne over with a head-lever and pin her in the last second.

"I was impressed that Cheyenne was not intimidated by Dennis," said Downs. "She

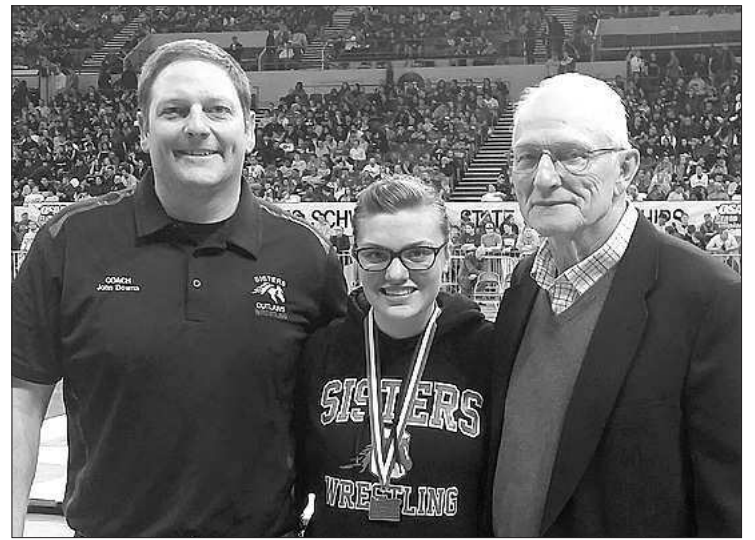


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John and Ray Downs enjoyed the Parade of Champions with Sisters Outlaws wrestler Cheyenne Sprout.

wrestled very hard against the experienced wrestler."

Sprout wrestled well enough to qualify for the third-and-fourth place final on Saturday.

Cheyenne faced undefeated Ashley Santmyer from Roosevelt High in the third-fourth final match.

Sprout came out very aggressive at the start of the match. The two wrestlers locked up and stepped around a couple of times.

Downs said, "Cheyenne felt the pressure she needed from Santmyer and quickly threw her in a head-and-arm throw. Coach Frye said it was the best one she'd thrown all year."

Cheyenne tried locking the head-and-arm down to keep Santmyer on her back to earn the pin, but Santmyer was very flexible and was able to slip out of the move and counter Sprout to her back. With the tight hold it was tough

going for Sprout. She fought and rolled back-and-forth to get off her back, and as she fought the referee slapped the mat to signal she was pinned.

"Cheyenne was disappointed, but both Coach (Chris) Frye and I told her how proud we were of her," said Downs. "I reminded her that at the girls championships she had to compete against girls from all divisions, 1A through 6A, while the boys only compete against those in their division. I told her that meant she was the fourth-best 152-pound girl wrestler in the whole state of Oregon."

With her fourth-place finish, Sprout walked in the Parade of Champions inside the coliseum with all the other medal winners. Sprout's grandpa, Wrestling Hall of Famer Coach Ray Downs, also walked in the parade.

"It was a memory that Cheyenne, her grandpa, and I will never forget."

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