

Vidlak a 'Superman' on the Duck wrestling mats

By Jake Berg
Emerald Sports Reporter

Metropolis has Superman, and Oregon has Dan Vidlak.

When Vidlak removes his sweats before a Duck wrestling match, one expects to see a large red "S" emblazoned upon the 5-foot-2 grappler's chest.

Instead, one sees only concentration and preparation on the face of Vidlak; a man readying himself to win.

And Vidlak has done just that 15 times in 16 matches this year, helping the Ducks to a 10-1-1 record and a national ranking of 13th in the Jan. 24 NCAA Division I poll. The Superman himself currently stands as the country's second-ranked wrestler in the 118-pound category.

"On the whole, I try to look at it in the way that it's a compliment and I'm glad that people think I'm up there," Vidlak said of the rankings. "But leave it at that, just keep on working hard, and prove it on the mat."

The mat has been a proving ground for the Oregon junior since the age of seven. At that time, the 50-pound Vidlak's interest in wrestling was sparked by a family friend, who got him into a kid's wrestling program.

"It just took off from there," Vidlak said.

Faster than a speeding bullet.

Although he attended a high school reminiscent of a salad dressing's name, Vidlak's prep

wrestling feats are hardly a joke, rivaling those he has accomplished as a Duck.

While attending Hidden Valley High in Grants Pass, Vidlak claimed two Oregon state wrestling titles at 105 pounds in his junior and senior years, along with a pair of national prep championships.

When Vidlak decided to attend the University, both he and Oregon Coach Ron Finley were getting what they wanted. Vidlak would be a part of Oregon's tradition-rich wrestling program, and he figured the academics "could hang with anybody" in the way of his major, general science.

"I liked the fact that I didn't have to give up anything to stay in state," Vidlak said. "There was no reason for me to go 2,000 or 3,000 miles away when I can get everything I need right here."

"I'd like to find 10 more just like him," Finley said. "I'd take 10 more of him any day."

His great talent in the high school ranks carried over onto college wrestling mats. During his freshman season, he won the Pac-10 title at 118-pounds and was given the Outstanding Wrestler Award of the tournament.

He compiled a 24-8-1 record in his rookie season, and Vidlak earned a 28-9 mark last year and a berth to the NCAA Championships, where he earned all-American honors by placing eighth in the 118-

pound category. As the Ducks' lightest team member, Vidlak opens up the matches as Oregon's first wrestler. And with Vidlak's pristine 12-0 record in dual meets, Duck matches have always started off on the right webbed foot this season.

"He's the one that starts us up. When he beats the heck out of someone it really gets the team fired up," Finley said.

"I have really good confidence whenever I'm wrestling that my offense and my takedowns are going to work and score," Vidlak said.

Despite his muscular frame, Vidlak is not what one would consider a power wrestler; he has combined his slithery quickness and knowledge of the sport to gain the upper hand on opponents. He goes after points, not pins, and the end result often resembles the score of a football game with Vidlak in favor.

"When I go out there to wrestle, I just have a goal to wrestle my best," he said. "Basically, the way I go about that is in my mind, going through little things to score extra points and just beat somebody as bad as I can."

Which is something he'd like to be doing come the Pac-10 Conference Championships Feb. 23-24 in Stanford. Although he finished eighth at the NCAA's last year, Vidlak placed only third in the conference finals, and would like to



Photo by Andre Ranieri
Ranked second nationally at 118 pounds, Oregon's Dan Vidlak has been the leader of the Oregon wrestling team this season.

wrestle his way to the top later this month in Stanford.

"Obviously I'd like to win it, but if I wrestle well and do the things I should, I think I should win it," he said. "If I wrestle my best, and I have a good tournament then I'll be happy."

Thoughts of his chances at earning a spot on the United States' Olympic wrestling squad and of becoming the Ducks' first NCAA titleholder

since 1969 are not far from his mind. Vidlak plans on trying out for the Olympics in the spring of 1992 and will likely be found traveling the international wrestling circuit this spring.

"He's got his work cut out for him," Finley said of Vidlak's possibilities as an Olympian. "If he works hard at it, he's definitely got a chance."

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