

Wrestling duo puts coaches in an enviable position

By Erick Studenicka
Emerald Sports Reporter

Even though Oregon's top 118-pound wrestler, Chris Jensen, was in the final of the Oregon Classic wrestling tournament last month, the Oregon coaching staff was indifferent to the outcome of the match.

The staff didn't care about the final result because Jensen's opponent was Duck teammate Kevin Roberts, who had also won his bracket of the tournament and had advanced to the final.

"What happened was that the coaches just sat back, watched, and then told us what we did wrong after the match," Roberts said. "Neither of us had a coach; we just coached ourselves."

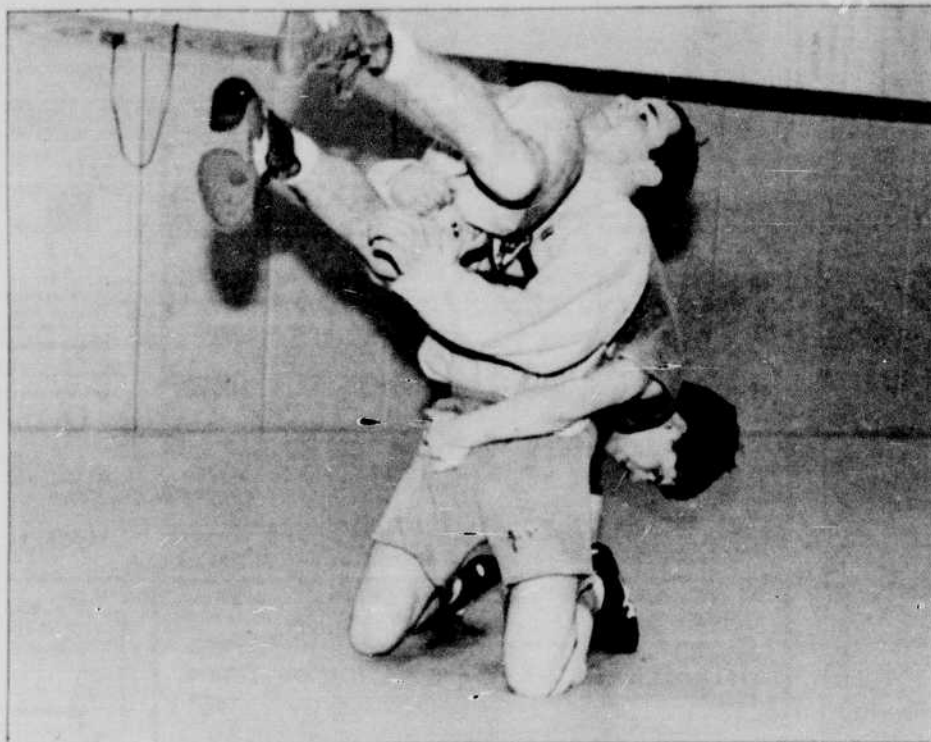
Coach Ron Finley said that the situation where two teammates both make the final is rare in large tournaments.

"I've seen it happen before, but I couldn't tell you where or when the last time that situation occurred," said Finley, now in his 23rd year as the Oregon head coach.

Although Jensen won the title at the Oregon Classic and upped his season record to 13-5, Roberts is nearly as impressive with his 8-5 record. Having two capable wrestlers in one weight division is a dilemma Finley doesn't mind.

"I wish I had the same situation in every weight class," Finley said. "We'll do everything possible to give both as many matches as possible."

Finley said the starting dual meet



Oregon wrestlers Chris Jensen (light shirt) and Kevin Roberts have been jostling all season for the top position in the 118-pound class.

wrestler at 118 pounds would be determined through challenge matches and tournament results. A team may enter only one wrestler in a dual meet or the Pacific-10 Conference, but it may enter more than one in an open tournament.

The two have split their challenge matches, so Jensen, for the time being, remains the starter on the strength of his tournament victory.

Both wrestlers agree that the format for determining the dual meet starter is fair.

"Even if I were the starter for every dual meet but lost out on a spot in the Pac-10 tournament, it would be fair because it would mean that Kevin peaked at the right time," Jensen said.

For Roberts, the format keeps him involved even when he isn't a starter.

"I could sit on the bench all season, then beat Chris twice and be in the Pac-10 tournament and then have a chance at the NCAA tournament," Roberts said. "Until then, I'll be in some open tournaments involving other smaller schools."

Roberts, a redshirt freshman from Spokane, said some of his success could be attributed to what he learned from former 118-pound Oregon teammate Dan Vidlak, a three-time All-American. Vidlak is now an assistant coach at Pacific University.

"Vidlak helped me make the transition from high school to college," Roberts said. "He was pretty helpful at teaching me some moves and techniques."

Jensen is a junior who transferred to Oregon after his former school, Notre Dame, dropped wrestling from its interscholastic athletic program. Jensen, who is from Hoquiam, Wash., was a heavily recruited high school senior after capturing three state titles and finishing his high school career with a 126-1 record.

Roberts admits a bit of a rivalry exists between the two wrestlers.

"It can be pretty intense at times," Roberts said, "but for the most part we get along."

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EMU Maple Rm.
"Teaching in Sierra Leone," Wed., Jan. 20,
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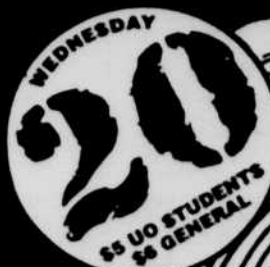


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