

Sports

Illinois Valley News, Cave Junction, Ore.

Wednesday, Mar. 2, 2011

State Champion!



(Courtesy photo for the, *Illinois Valley News*)

Senior Matt Coultas during his final state wrestling match. Coultas took home the top honor for the Illinois Valley Cougar Grapplers in Portland Saturday, Feb. 26.

Cougar wrestlers earn top positions, 11th as a team

By Darcy Wallace
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The four Cougars who made it to State wrestling finals represented Illinois Valley well with three placing in their respective weight classes last weekend.

On Friday and Saturday, Feb. 25 and 26, Illinois Valley High School grapplers traveled to Memorial Coliseum in Portland for the season's final competition.

Matt Coultas, Zach Anderson, Gabe Miller and T.J. Huey were the four Cougars representing their school over the weekend. Huey, a first-year member of the team, got his first taste of State competition while Coultas, Anderson and Miller all placed.

Coultas worked his way up through the rounds to eventually defeat the first-seeded Jay Masterson from Burns High School in the 145-pound weight class, earning first place.

"It was a great win for Matt and a great way for him to finish his senior career," said wrestling coach Jay Miller.

One of the most exciting matches, according to Miller, was the

final round between Gabe Miller and the top-ranked Johnny Campbell of Myrtle Point. After four overtimes, Miller finally lost 2-1 in the end and took second overall in the 125-pound weight class.

"It was ranked right up there as one of the best finals of the tournament," Coach Miller said. "It was an exciting match with two really good wrestlers. But one was going to be a winner and one had to lose."

One low point of the match was a scheduling change that led Huey to miss one of his matches, leading to a disqualification. But he had a difficult match against Santiam Christian student Mike Fanno in the 130-pound weight class.

Senior Zach Anderson made the second round, but lost in a 2-3 decision to a Burns wrestler who ended up in the final



(Courtesy photo for the, *Illinois Valley News*)

Gabe Miller is in control during a match at state. Miller took second in the 125lb class

round of the 135-pound weight class. In his other match, Miller said Anderson pinned a wrestler who had beaten him earlier in the season, good

for a third-place award for Anderson. According to Miller, the Cougars placed 11th as a team, just missing their goal of making the top ten.

"They handled it very well," Miller said. "For three kids scoring to finish 11th it was a pretty good showing. We're up against schools with nine or ten kids [competing]. We didn't have the numbers, but we had the quality."

Though the season is over for Illinois Valley wrestlers, Miller credited coaching assistant Eric Unger for his constant help during the season.

"He's really our technician and he knows much more about wrestling than the rest of us," Miller said. "When he's at matside everybody seems to wrestle better...we wouldn't be where we are without him, that's for sure."

Miller said Unger is "all East Coast?" and that he wrestled at Penn State. But he ended up settling down in the Valley and started helping the wrestling team in 1998.

"He's improved our teams every year," Miller said. "He never asks for any credit. He always comes in, does his work and disappears."

(Courtesy photo for the, *Illinois Valley News*)



Zach Anderson (left) works over his opponent during state. Anderson took 3rd at state