

Wrestling *from B1*

Trace Nelson (second at 220) — will all be headed to the Feb. 28-29 OSAA state wrestling tournament to be held at the Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Portland.

Naturally, the highlight of Saturday's finals were the three Lions district championships: Dunn, Swenson and Simpson. Dunn and Swenson entered the tournament as the number-one seeds in their respective weight classes, with a combined 52-6 record in the 2019-20 season, and didn't disappoint, winning all of their matches by fall or technical fall.

The fourth-seeded Simpson winning the 195-pound bracket, on the other hand, was something of a surprise.

"To say it was unexpected is an understatement," said assistant coach Christina Kent.

Taking nothing away from Simpson's wrestling talent, he simply hadn't wrestled for years until coming back to the sport in his senior year. By the end of the day on Saturday, he had defeated the top two seeds in his bracket and was named district champion.

"Cobie showed up to wrestle," Herzog said. "He's had his challenges and he had to have a quick learning season, having taken so many years off. It was just sheer determination. He refused to lose."

Not only did Simpson surprise the

field with his win, but he impressed with the fashion in which he won, earning victory in each match by fall, the longest of which — the championship round against Henley's Matthew McCoy — took all of one minute and 12 seconds.

"He was not gonna get beat at that tournament and when he stepped on the mat, he showed it. He got after those guys," Herzog said. "In the finals, I got pretty nervous because you could see some of the green coming out of him, but he was determined that he was gonna pin that guy and he did. He's probably the strongest one on the team."

In spite of the individual accomplishments of last week, Herzog insists on running his wrestling squad as a team sport and, even though not every wrestler earned a spot at state, it will be all hands on deck in helping the 'staters' get prepared.

"Even now, not all the boys are going to state, but their job now is to get the 'staters' ready to go, get them in peak performance,"

Herzog said.

As of this time next week, the wrestling season will have concluded after the state tournament wraps up. But, with matches still left to wrestle, Herzog and his coaching staff have already keyed in on the successes of their team's 2019-20 season, both on the mat and beyond.

"The growth of all the kids - not just the 'staters' - from the start of the season to where they're at now, they'll remember this season their whole lives," Herzog said. "What they went through to get where they are, no other sport goes through that grind like we do. The challenges, the bumps, the bruises, the sore, the tired, then you gotta pick yourself up and go do it some more."



PHOTO BY NICK SNYDER/CG SENTINEL

Trace Nelson (220-pound) attempts to pin his opponent in a preliminary round at last weekend's Special District 3 district tournament.

Warriors *from B1*

Cyr said. "We were like, 'This is neat, but this is just a step on the journey of the goal we had. End of story. We're going back to work.'"

The Warriors wrapped up regular season league games on Feb. 14 before heading to Sutherlin last weekend for the Skyline District playoffs. They were given a run for their money by both Days Creek

and an Elkton team that is also looking to earn a spot in the state tournament. North Douglas came away with two wins, a district title and plenty to work on as they await their first playoff opponent.

"Everyone in the world is looking for tape on you right now," Cyr said. "So, you'd be kind of a fool to keep running the same stuff you've run all year."

Nonetheless, Cyr is confident in his team of fierce competitors and experi-

enced upperclassmen. At this point in the season, all remaining teams are talented and the margins between a first round exit and a state championship can be razor thin.

"I think our kids have a very good understanding of what level they need to be at right now," Cyr said. "We've played three very quality [non-league] teams. I think we're right on that edge of being very dangerous on any given night. I call them 'any-giv-

en-night teams'. You could beat them any given night and you could lose to them any given night and, at this point, there are no easy games."

The Warriors are set to host a round of 16 playoff game in the North Douglas gym on Friday, Feb. 28 though the start time is still yet to be determined. To check playoff scores, standings and the OSAA 1A playoff bracket, visit <http://www.osaa.org/activities/gbx/brackets>.

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