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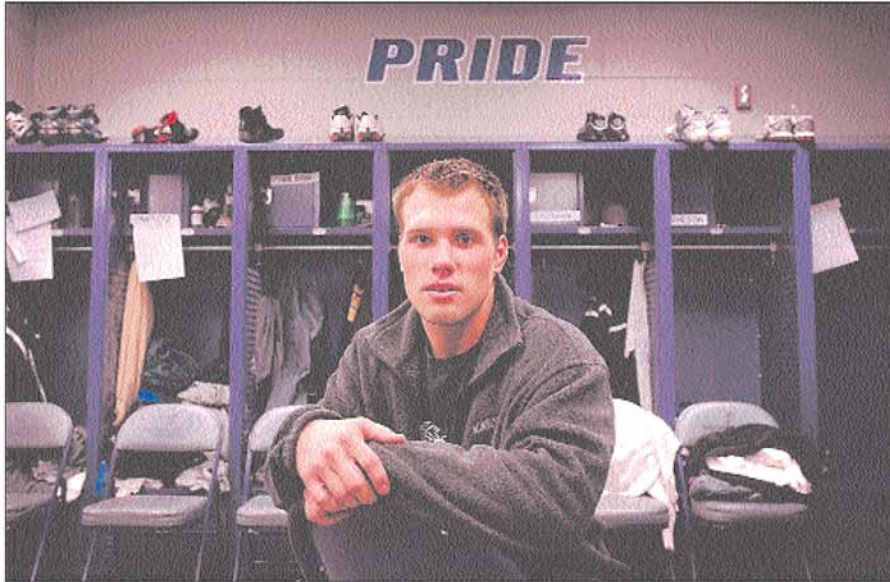
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THURSDAY

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## National runner-up has sights set high



John Cross

Returning NCAA Division II national runner-up Andy Pickar is expected to be among the leaders on this year's Minnesota State University wrestling team that opens the season Saturday.

# The Pickar to click

## Senior accepts a more vocal role on MSU wrestling squad

By Jim Rueda  
Free Press Sports Editor

**MANKATO** — Ask Andy Pickar what part of his wrestling repertoire needed the most work during the offseason and you're not going to get the expected answer.

The senior on the Minnesota State University wrestling team, who finished second in the NCAA Division II National Championships last season, did more than his share of workouts to strengthen all phases of his game. But, he says it wasn't the takedowns, or conditioning, or pinning moves or riding technique that needed the most attention.

"It was leadership," he said. "I've been an example kind of guy my whole life and I still am for the most part. But I've had to become more vocal this year. If something needs to be said, I'm one of the guys that needs to say it."

So far, MSU head coach Jim Makovsky likes what he sees of the more outspoken, take-charge Pickar. It's been a big boost in the wrestling room and should translate into success on the mat for everybody.

"Andy came back to practice in great shape and so have the rest of our seniors," he said. "They're all three steps ahead of where they were last year. That's the kind of leadership I expect from our upperclassmen and those guys are delivering."

The Mavs have graduate four All-Americans from last year in Jeff Pfaffinger (133 pounds), Brandon Girtz (157), Travis Krinkie (184) and Ben Janike (197). That's a lot of talent but Makovsky doesn't see that as a negative.

"For the last three years we've been graduating three or four All-Americans every year," he said. "I see that as the sign of a healthy pro-

gram. It shows that when guys leave, there are other guys who step up."

Pickar couldn't agree more: "We have guys on this team who are second or third string who would be starters almost everywhere else. When the guy in front of them graduates, they have to move in and continue wrestling at a high level. Everybody's goal on this team should be to win a national championship every season."

The other top returnees joining Pickar (165 pounds) this season are All-American Nick Smith (125), three-time All-American Jason Rhoten (149), All-American Brady Wilson (285), national qualifier Travis Elg (141) and national qualifier Tim Matheson (174).

The four spots where MSU has no starters coming back are 133 pounds, 149 (Rhoten is moving up to 157), 184 and 197. Among the top contenders for the 133-pound spot are junior college transfer John Putman and three-time state high school champion freshman Cody Adams of Mankato East.

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## WRESTLING: MSU ranked 3rd

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Freshman Tommy Abbott of Wilmington, Del., is among the front-runners at 149 pounds, while sophomore Ben Becker is a candidate at 189. Waseca native Tom Block, who has wrestled at both heavyweight and 197 for the Mavericks, is the leading contender for the 197-pound position.

"They all have great credentials and some of them, like Block, have gotten some experience at the college level," Makovsky said. "We're going to take them to some open meets and see what falls into place."

The Mavericks are ranked third in Division II heading

into the season. Central Oklahoma and Nebraska-Omaha are tied at No. 1.

Individually, MSU's ranked wrestlers include Smith (7th, 125), Rhoten (2nd, 149), Pickar (2nd, 165), Matheson (4th, 174) and Wilson (3rd, 285).

Minnesota State opens the season Saturday at the Wisconsin-Stevens Point Open. Highlighting this year's home schedule are duals with 19th-ranked Northern State (Dec. 5), eighth-ranked Western State (Jan. 9), 15th-ranked MSU-Moorhead (Feb. 15) and 20th-ranked Truman State (Feb. 23).

In addition, MSU will host the North Central Regional on Sunday, March 2.