



Sports

NCAA DIVISION II NATIONAL WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIPS



Pat Christman

Junior Andy Pickar (dark uniform) is one of two No. 1-ranked wrestlers Minnesota State University will be taking to the Division II national championships this weekend. The other is junior Jason Rhoten.

Going for the gold

Mavericks have great shot at winning their first national title since 1965

By Jim Rueda
Free Press Sports Editor

MANKATO — Back in 1965, the Mankato State wrestling team scored enough points in the national tournament to win a Division II championship.

After more than a 40-year drought, there are some who believe the Mavericks are poised to win another one.

Minnesota State begins competition in the 2007 NCAA Division II National Wrestling Championships on Friday. The Mavericks will be armed with a competitor in every weight class, five returning All-Americans and two No. 1-ranked wrestlers.

"I hope we're in the same company (with the 1965 team)," MSU coach Jim Makovsky said Tuesday. "They won it all and I'd like to think we have a chance to do the same this weekend."

"You're goal is always to be a national champion. We have 10 guys going, we have a pretty balanced team, I think it's something we can get accomplished."

The reason for Makovsky's optimism is obvious. The Mavericks are rated No. 2 in the nation, behind only national tournament host Nebraska-Kearney. The two teams are separated by two points — 154-152 — in the most recent

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national poll. Central Oklahoma is third (150).

"The top three teams are all right there and I still think Nebraska-Omaha's a big threat, too," he said. "Omaha (130) has a lot of point scorers on their team. If they don't win it, they'll probably have a say in who does."

The Mavericks (14-3 in dual meets) are led by juniors Jason Rhoten and Andy Pickar. Both are ranked No. 1 in their respective weight classes. Rhoten is 32-8 at 149 pounds and Pickar is 20-1 at 165 pounds.

Instrumental in MSU's success this season has been the arrival of two freshmen. Travis Elg at 141 pounds and Brady Wilson at heavy-weight have put together excellent campaigns in Year 1.

Elg, ranked second, is 24-7 and is second on the team with 10 pins. Wilson, rated third, is 38-8 and leads the team with 11 falls.

NCAA Division II National Wrestling Championships

When

11 a.m. Friday
and 11 a.m. Saturday

Where

Health and Sports Center,
Kearney, Neb.

The Blue Earth Area duo of seniors Travis Krinkie and Jeff Pfaffinger have also continued their winning ways in 2006-07. Krinkie is ranked eighth at 184 pounds with a 22-9 record while Pfaffinger is rated third at 133 with a 33-9 mark.

MSU's other ranked wrestlers are junior Nick Smith (third, 15-7, 125 pounds), senior Brandon Girtz (fourth, 35-7, 157) and senior Ben Janike (eighth, 23-10, 197). Rounding out the MSU contingent at nationals will be sophomore Tim Matheson (25-17, 174 pounds).

"Now's the time when you have to get rid of all the external stuff," Makovsky said. "Where you're ranked and which guy you beat before doesn't matter anymore."

"Now it's just a question of proper preparation, getting yourself in position and scoring your points. Everything else will take care of itself."

MSU begins wrestling at 11 a.m. Friday in the Health and Sports Center at UNK. Wrestling resumes at 11 a.m. Saturday and expected to conclude the same day at approximately 9:30 p.m. For ticket information call (308) 865-1563.