



MSU wrestling team developing into national powerhouse

With little publicity or fanfare, Minnesota State University's Jim Makovsky has built the Mavericks wrestling program into one of the top Division II squads in the country. MSU finished third in the country last year and is now ranked second in Division II.

The Mavericks' status as a premier program was solidified last Sunday when they reached the finals of the NWCA National Duals before falling to top-ranked Nebraska-Omaha 20-10. The effort came despite the absence of,

arguably, MSU's top two wrestlers in Jason Rhoten and Travis Krinke from the lineup.



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Free Press

Rhoten, a two-time All-American, broke his femur last spring and it was hoped he would be back sometime this winter but the rehabilitation is taking longer than expected. The decision was made recently to seek a medical redshirt for the 149-pound Rhoten who should have two years of eligibility left beginning next fall.

Krinke, another two-time All-American at 174 pounds, has been



Newcomers Andy Pickar (left) and Jeff Pfaffinger are a combined 35-11 for the MSU wrestling team this season.

battling shoulder problems but Makovsky says the Blue Earth Area graduate should return to the

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lineup this weekend at the East Coast Duals in Shippensburg, Pa.

"I think it shows we're a pretty good team," Makovsky said. "We have a little more depth than we had in the past."

Brandon Girtz has been starting for MSU at Rhoten's spot and has compiled a 17-6 record. Tim Matheson from Centennial was going to take a redshirt year but, when Krinke got hurt, stepped in to the lineup at 174.

Up until a few years ago, when the wrestling team's roster had to be capped at 22 competitors for gender-equity purposes, that kind of depth would have been hard to find on the MSU squad. Now that the roster limit is up to 26, Makovsky has a bit more breathing room.

"(Athletic director) Kevin Buisman deserves a lot of credit for the support he's given us," Makovsky said. "He's relaxed the roster cap and he's found more funding for us for better equipment and for travel. He's making wrestling a much more enjoyable experience for the wrestlers."

Although a roster size of 26 is still small, Makovsky says it's livable. Given the university's constant struggle to meet gender equity guidelines, he

understands that's the way it has to be. Still, he can't help but scratch his head when he looks at the Ashland University (Ohio) roster, as he did over the weekend, and sees 37 freshmen alone listed.

Two newcomers who have been big difference-makers for MSU this season are Andy Pickar at 165 pounds and Jeff Pfaffinger at 133. Pickar has put together at 17-5 season while Pfaffinger sits at 18-6.

Pickar transferred in from North Dakota State and Pfaffinger is a transfer from the University of Iowa. Pickar beat out last year's starter, Jeremiah Nowak, in a wrestle-off and Pfaffinger cracked the lineup when sophomore Efrain Ayala suffered a season-ending knee injury.

"Nebraska-Omaha is still definitely No. 1," Makovsky said. "If we're going to have a shot at overtaking them we're going to have to get a lot of guys in the finals at the national tournament."

"UNO has three defending champions and that's a lot of points right there. We could end up with 10 All-Americans and still not win the national title. That just blows my mind."

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