

## Stroh is HHS' first two-time state champ

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

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When Chad Stroh steps on to the wrestling mat, he has champion written all over him.

He is focused, confident, aggressive, fearsome and skillful. And he is a champion—Holyoke's first two-time state champion.

An HHS junior, Stroh made HHS history when he won his second straight championship on the 2A state mats this past weekend.

This year, he earned the gold in the 125-lb. class, while last year, it was at 119 lbs.

At least he was healthy for this year's state tournament. Last year was a different story, and Stroh was grateful to be feeling good this year.

Stroh kicked off the tournament with a 55-second pin over Aaron Hernandez of Rocky Ford, then pinned A.J. Silva of West Grand in 1:15. Semis were a little tougher, as Stroh worked his way to a 10-3 decision over Bon Kinder of Burlington before winning an 11-2 victory in the finals over league foe Buddy Watson of Wiggins.

"I'm trying hard not to cry," said Duane Stroh, a proud coach and dad, after Chad's championship match. He lifted his son off the ground in a bearhug squeeze, and did the same for others offering congratulations for the Dragon victory.

Stroh's match with Watson in the state championship was a fourth-time rematch for the season. Stroh had defeated Watson 6-3 on Dec. 20 at Wray, 16-1 on Jan. 8 at the league tourney and 13-2 in the regional championship.

But both Strohs were careful not to write the win until it happened. Chad completely dominated, in what was a great match to win his second state championship.

In his typical style, Stroh entered the championship match with an immediate attack. He took Watson down and cut him, took him down and cut him a second time and took him down again for a 6-2 first-period lead.

"Chad's position on his feet was very good," said coach Stroh. He added Watson was very well-coached and was extremely tough on bottom. "Chad had to earn every point," he added.

Watson chose neutral to start the second period, and Stroh took him down and rode him the whole period for an 8-2 lead. Watson worked hard to avoid the pin, but it gassed him, according to coach Stroh.

Starting on bottom the third period, Stroh got a reversal for two points. He tried tilts, arm bars and more, but "Buddy is stubborn and just wouldn't go," said coach Stroh.

Watson was dinged a point for stalling, and the match ended 11-2.

Chad admits he was most nervous for his semifinal match with Bon Kinder of Burlington, in which he earned a 10-3 win.

Coach Stroh said Chad looked good off the whizzer, took Kinder down and led 4-2 after the first two minutes. "But Chad struggled with Bon," said coach Stroh, adding, "He wrestled tough and stayed in good position, but it wasn't his best match of the tournament.

He earned two second-period points and added four more in the third while Kinder scored one more at the end of the 10-3 match.

To open the state tournament, Stroh went out and attacked, taking his Rocky Ford opponent right to his back. He led 5-0 before winning the pin in :55.

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It was another first-period pin that won Stroh's match in the quarterfinals with Silva of West Grand.

Once again, he immediately attacked and put Silva on his back, then chose to let him back up, explained the coach.

"He then hit a difficult take-down—what we call a roller-me-on-over," said coach Stroh, noting Chad ran around Silva's head, cinched it up and pinned him.

"Chad did a real nice job of attacking—a great example of relentless pressure," said Duane of the quarterfinal win.

### Stroh finishes season 42-1

Stroh finishes his third high school season with a phenomenal 42-1 record. Even in his one loss at the Lexington, Neb. Invite, Chad admits it's good to have tough competition during the season.

Chad thanked his coaches and teammates for a great year.

So with a 110-8 career record and still a year to go in high school wrestling, Chad can look forward to making more marks in the HHS recordbooks.

And what does he do in the off-season to prepare? Chad said he follows his (and his dad's) motto—"The season is never over."