

Mental toughness paves way for state medals

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Jesus Hermosillo is state runner-up at 195 lbs; Dylan Kotch 3rd at 220 lbs.

Mental toughness is the focus of the Dragon wrestling room, and state placewinners Jesus Hermosillo and Dylan Kotch agree it paved the way for their trip to the state podium.

Both entered the Colorado 2A State Wrestling Championships as regional champs, and they wrestled extremely well at state.

Hermosillo, a senior, made it to the state championship at 195 lbs., where he fell to Johnny Loflin of Baca County in a 4-8 decision.

Having wrestled 2-2 at state last year as a junior, Hermosillo was just one round from placing. When he watched teammates Mark Edmonds and Broc Pelle in the 2012 Parade of Champs, he told his coaches he'd be there this year.

For someone who only wrestled a little bit as an eighth grader and didn't go out for high school wrestling until he was a sophomore, Hermosillo has come a long ways.

When the 2013 Parade of Champs marched the perimeter at the Pepsi Center, Hermosillo was there. Earning the runner-up spot on the 195-lb. 2A podium was a great accomplishment.



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Dragon wrestler Jesus Hermosillo and coach Jack Garrison, pictured in center, meet opponent Johnny

Loflin of Baca County and his coach in the Parade of Champs just prior to the state championship

matches last Saturday. —Enterprise photo

Kotch, a sophomore, was also experiencing his second trip to state, competing at 220 lbs. He gained good mat experience at state as a freshman but said this year he knew what he wanted to do at state.

“I practiced for it; I worked for it,” said Kotch. And he performed well, placing third and losing only in the semifinals for a 4-1 run at state.

Sophomore Nick Ortnier was only one round from placing at 138 lbs. as he went 2-2 on the state mats.

Seniors Spencer Kotch and Astolfo Rojo each got a match win at state and performed well for the Dragons at 170 and 182 lbs., respectively.

HHS finished 11th as a team, just a half point out of the top 10.

Green hair streak marks the Dragons

Following a tradition started by 2012 senior and three-time state champion Edmonds, the Dragon wrestlers all sported a classy green streak in their hair on the right side.

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Team members wore their green streaks with pride, starting at regional tournament action.

Coach Jack Garrison was quick to praise the entire Dragon team. He emphasized that it's the JV wrestlers and other kids in the room who make each other better.

When asked for comments about his successful season, Hermosillo immediately acknowledged the great coaching from Jack Garrison and Cutter Garrison. "It wasn't just with me but with others too. They took us a long ways," said the state runner-up.

"Wrestling made me tougher, taught me good life lessons," said Hermosillo. "Nothing is given to you—you have to work for it."



Jesus Hermosillo puts Fowler's Blaine Larson's shoulders to the mat for a pin early in the second period of the 195-lb. quarterfinal match. —Photo by Kendra Monasmith

Coaches Jack and Cutter Garrison built the team's mental toughness, according to the senior placer. And he appreciates that.

At some point this season, the coaches gave team members a copy of a piece called "Mental Toughness." Hermosillo hung it in his locker and focused on it every day. It looks, in part, like this:

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“Nobody ever said it would be easy, so don’t expect it to be. No one is immune from everyday problems.

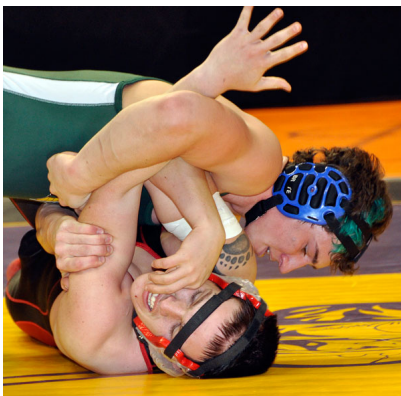
“Sometimes, you have to perform at your best when you’re feeling your worst. Block the hurt, the pain, the sickness out of your head for the short time you must perform. Shape up, get it together because excuses don’t count. Nobody cares if you are hurt or sick; you either do the job or you don’t.

“There are times when you might rather be elsewhere, but face up to the challenge at hand. No matter what had happened, you must win the mental battle. You must force yourself to remain confident, enthusiastic and positive. You must force yourself to work harder even when you are sick, hurt, sad or troubled. That is mental toughness.

“Life is easy when the going is good.

“One of the oldest and most common locker room signs is this: ‘When the going gets tough, the tough get going.’

“Believe it.”



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Spencer Kotch manages a first-period pin over Justin Wilson of Mountain Valley in opening-round action of the 170-lb. weight class. —Photo by Duncan Brandt

Hermosillo was praised by coach Jack Garrison as a key leader on this year's team. "He has stepped up and did it all for us this year," said the coach.

The Dragon 195-lb. wrestler won his first match with a 3:48 pin over Drew Collins of Rangely. He took the quarterfinals with a 2:16 pin over Blaine Larson of Fowler.

Hermosillo felt especially good after his 10-5 semifinal win over Tyler Kendall of Paonia. "When I won that one, it felt really good," he said. Because of good coaching, Hermosillo said he wrestled smart.

In the championship with Baca County's Johnny Loflin, Hermosillo was behind 1-4 after one period. He added one in the second period to make it a 2-4 match. Loflin came on strong in the third to take the 8-4 match.

Hermosillo said Loflin, a junior, is quick on his feet. The two actually met in the quarterfinals a year ago when Loflin won 15-6. He went on to the championship, where he earned runner-up on a 0-1 loss. The previous year, Loflin placed fifth at 189 lbs. as a freshman. So he was hungry for a state championship.

But Hermosillo gave him a good match and has much to be proud of. Coach Jack Garrison said for Hermosillo, in basically his third year of wrestling, to make it all the way to the state finals is awesome.

When young Dragon fans hugged Hermosillo after his championship match, he was touched. He made a point to make a statement of thanks for the support he received from the community.

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He's looking to the upcoming baseball season and hopes to carry on the success from wrestling into his last season as a Dragon.

Dylan Kotch has improved his skill level and performed extremely well to take third at state as a sophomore. Coach Jack Garrison praised his effort.

Kotch pinned Elliott Blessman of LaVeta in 1:36 to start his state tournament run Thursday. He then won an 8-2 decision over Lucas Frausto of Las Animas.



Dylan Kotch is in control and on his way to a win over Joel Simianer of Paonia to place third at the 2A state wrestling tournament. —Photo by Duncan Brandt

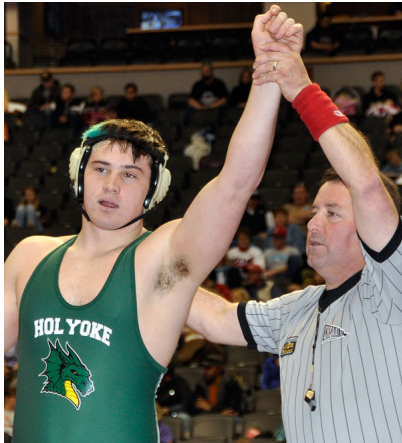
Kotch said he knew his semifinal match would be a tough one, where he met senior Truett Box of Cheyenne Wells, who was runner-up in the weight class last year.

The two met earlier in the season, where Box won 11-5. It was closer this time, but Box took the match win 9-4. Kotch was down by only two, 2-4 after two periods, but Box rallied in the third for the five-point win.

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Kotch wanted it bad from there, and he earned two wins by pins to put him on the third-place slot on the podium.



Dylan Kotch is declared the winner over Theodore Zimmer of Highland, boosting him to the match for third-fourth place at 220 lbs. —Photo by Duncan Brandt

He pinned Theodore Zimmer of Highland in 1:48, then pinned Joel Simianer of Paonia in 3:25 to finish out the tourney.

Just one match from placing, sophomore Nick Ortner made a grand showing in his first appearance at state.

“He wrestled a good tournament for us,” said Jack Garrison of the 138-lb. wrestler’s 2-2 showing.

Ortner dropped his first match 0-7 to eventual sixth-place finisher Gunner Chesnik of Paonia.

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But he came back strong to win two on Friday. He took Del Norte's Luke Haefeli straight to his back for a 42-second pin. Then he pinned Tryston Keefe of Wiggins in 3:32.

In what became his final match Saturday morning, Ortner met the second-seeded wrestler, Clay Seemann of Baca County, who had been upset in the quarterfinals.

Seemann dropped to the back door and ousted Ortner with a 17-4 decision. Seemann ended up fourth in the tourney.



Nicholas Ortner wastes no time Friday morning as he earns a 42-second pin over Luke Haefeli of Del Norte.

—Photo by Kendra Monasmith

Ortner knew Seemann was tough, as he placed third at 132 lbs. last year. He had met Holyoke's Edmonds in the quarterfinals in 2012, where Edmonds won a 1-0 decision.

Spencer Kotch really turned it on the last two weeks of his high school career, said coach Jack Garrison.

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The Dragon senior wrestled an awesome regional tourney and a good state tournament as well, said the coach. He added it was great to see Kotch end the season so well.

He kicked off his state tournament experience with a 1:54 pin over Justin Wilson of Mountain Valley. "It was awesome," he said.

Kotch said he got caught in his quarterfinal match and was pinned in :55 by the eventual third-place finisher William Austin of Paonia. He picked up his second loss to Aidan Osborn of Kiowa, who pinned him in :36.

Astolfo Rojo is another senior who only started wrestling as a sophomore. He was a light heavyweight for two years, as the 195 and 220 lb. classes were filled.

This year, he cut weight to 182s, and coach Jack Garrison said it was nice for him to be able to wrestle kids his own size.

Rojo suffered a loss in the opening round Thursday when Ryan Domson of Hayden pinned him in 1:23. Domson went on to place fourth.



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Astolfo Rojo puts the squeeze on Manny Pedigo of Custer County to win this 182-lb. consolation match Friday.

—Photo by Kendra Monasmith

Rojo felt good about the next match in which he pinned Manny Pedigo of Custer County in 2:10. He was caught in a cradle by Morgan Reider of Paonia, who pinned him in 2:40 and then went on to place fifth.

Overall, it was a great tournament according to coach Jack Garrison.

Paonia dominated the 2A tourney, winning with 205.5 points. Highland followed with 148, Baca County 130, Del Norte 87, Dove Creek 83.5, Rocky Ford 70, Sedgwick County-Fleming 60.5, Meeker 58.5, Swink 56, Wray 55.5 and Holyoke 55. Forty-nine schools were represented in the 2A brackets.

“We’ll lose some great kids this year,” said coach Garrison of the graduating seniors. But he optimistically looks for next year to be a great one.

He’s already looking to next month’s Rocky Mountain Nationals and three team camps this year to keep the team wrestling through the summer.

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