

PIRATES FINALLY SCUTTLE SKUTT

Jerry Keuhn
Reporter

It's just the situation every high school wrestler and wrestling fan dreams of: one of the tournament's top match-ups in the finals, the team title on the line and a captivated crowd on its feet roaring – and this movie moment happened Saturday afternoon in Platte City.

For the first time since 2002, the Platte County wrestling team won its own invitational and the Pirates did it in dramatic style, holding off a determined Omaha Skutt Catholic team that had won the tournament the past four years.

The Skyhawks, who have won the Class B Nebraska state wrestling championship for the past nine years, sent junior Jake Cardenas to the mat in the 152-pound weight class against Platte County's junior Tyler St. Louis. Before the match, the Pirates held a narrow five-point lead and a win by decision by Cardenas would have brought Omaha Skutt to within one point in the standings.

While the tournament championship wasn't determined until later in the first round, St. Louis provided the win in the match that broke the camel's back and Platte County cruised to the championship of the 35th annual Platte County Pirate Invitational, eventually outscoring Omaha Skutt 310.5 to 299. Rounding out the rest of the field was: third place — Kirksville, 211; fourth – Odessa, 199.5; fifth – Excelsior Springs, 183; sixth – Labette County, 171.5; seventh – Helias, 134; eighth – Harrisonville, 133; ninth – Neosho, 87; and 10th – San Marcos, 82.

Omaha Skutt started the final round down by a narrow margin, but with six wrestlers in the finals opposed to eight for Platte County, Skutt fought back by winning the first four title matches and five of the first six. In the first round, Cardenas threw St. Louis to the mat, who quickly was down 4-0. St. Louis fought back to force a tie at the end of regulation. With the gymnasium rocking with screaming fans, the first and second overtime periods ended with neither wrestler able to take an advantage. The third overtime ended as St. Louis escaped with seconds on the clock, drawing hisses and boo-birds from the Skutt faithful. And the fourth and final overtime period ended with St. Louis riding his opponent to a thrilling 10-10 victory, proving that the Pirates slogan printed on the 2006-07 team poster – “this ain't our first rodeo” – was good and true, with the postseason and a sixth state championship in eight years on the horizon.

“I beat him by two points in a tournament (the Brut National) over the summer, so I knew when I got down 4-0 in the first period that I couldn't freak out,” St. Louis said. “I kept my head in the match and was able to come back and win, but this individual win doesn't really mean much to me; it's more about the team and being able to beat Skutt for the first time in a long time.”

Platte County coach Phil Dorman was impressed with St. Louis's performance under pressure.

“He wrestled in what was probably the toughest weight class in the tournament, he didn't quit and he wrestled eight and a half minutes against a very good wrestler in the finals,” Dorman said. “I told him afterwards that it will help prepare him for anything he'll face at the state tournament and he'll be in position to win another state title.”

Other tournament highlights for the Pirates occurred in the semifinals, when Platte County's Collin Wittmeyer, wrestling at 160, won a 3-2 decision in the third overtime by riding Derek Vogel of Omaha Skutt to a standstill; and in the 215 finals, where Jerome Spearman picked up his third pin of the day with a fall over Odessa's Steele Shippy at the :58-second mark of the first period. All in all, it was a good day for the Pirates, who had all 14 wrestlers place in the top six in their respective brackets.

“I can't recall a time this season when we didn't wrestle well and we really stayed focused today,” Platte County coach Phil Dorman said. “Winning this tournament and beating Skutt was a big step for us and a real confidence-builder to help these guys understand where we are. We didn't win all the matches that we wanted to win, but we did what we did to win the tournament, finished ahead of two teams we'll see at state (Kirksville and Odessa) and put ourselves where we want to be for another title run.”

Wittmeyer went on to place second with a 4-2 loss in the finals to Joey Hambleton of Labette County (Kan.) after a call for a body slam that left many Platte County fans shaking their heads. Dorman said that while the timing of the call wasn't good for Wittmeyer, he didn't debate the call.

“I told my guys that regardless of an official's call, you shouldn't put yourself in position to have to worry about things like that,” Dorman said.

Dorman said he thought all his wrestlers had a good tournament, most notably Spearman, whose championship performance ended with a win over a top-ranked wrestler “should open some eyes of some people out there who didn’t know about him before;” second place finisher Chris McKenney, who won four matches before being pinned in the 119 final; and Joe Pace, whose only loss came in the finals to Matt Taylor of Excelsior Springs.

The other results for Platte County wrestlers included Jared Burns, second at 103; Joey McLain, sixth at 112; Kendall Burns, fifth at 125; Chris Evans, fifth at 130; Eric Barmann, second at 135; Ethan McLean, sixth at 140; Dakota Fowler, third at 145; Jake Guthier, second at 189; and Vashon Moore, third at 285. This year’s tournament featured the return of Neosho, which wasn’t in last year’s tournament, and two new teams in Labette County (located in southeast Kansas) and San Marcos, a high school in Santa Barbara, Calif.

The San Marcos team — which has a family connection in Platte County — struggled at the tournament, placing 10th, and lost 73-6 to Oak Park in a dual Thursday night, with its only points coming by way of a forfeit when an Oak Park wrestler didn’t make weight. However, the San Marcos team did see something they don’t normally get to see in California without going to the mountains — a snowfall which blanketed Platte City with a couple of inches of snow before the tournament ended Saturday night. The average annual temperature in Santa Barbara is 70 degrees.

“Labette County was a good addition to the tournament and we were glad to have Neosho back,” Dorman said. “As far as the team from Santa Barbara, it was probably a better experience for their team than it was for the tournament, but we were glad to have them.”

The Pirates will host Savannah Jan. 25 before heading to Blue Springs South for a tournament Jan. 26-27. Districts will be in Excelsior Springs Feb. 9-10 and the state tournament is scheduled for Feb. 15-17 in Columbia.

Lady Panthers get first loss

Citizen Staff Report

The North Platte girls basketball team saw its impressive winning streak to open the season come to an end last week, as the Lady Panthers lost to East Buchanan 56-50 Jan. 17 in the rescheduled title game of the Lathrop Tournament. The loss didn’t slow down the Lady Panthers much, however, as they bounced back to win their next two games to finish the week with an overall record of 12-1.

North Platte trounced a physical Trenton team Jan. 19 by the score of 61-44, as the Lady Panthers led 30-17 at halftime and had great balanced scoring throughout, with three players scoring in double figures (Bailee Testorff, 17 points, Jessica James, 14 and Addie Buckler, 13) and Dakota Hellyer and Cheyenne Martin adding eight and seven points, respectively.

“I was really worried about our legs being tired from three games in three days, but this team is very competitive,” North Platte coach Roger Giger said.

Buckler also had five assists, seven rebounds, three steals and a block for North Platte, which outshot the Lady Bulldogs 43-30 percent and outrebounded them 34-23.

Sandwiched in between the win over Trenton and the loss to East Buchanan was a 56-39 win at home over Maryville. Buckler had 16 points, while Testorff, James and Hellyer had 11 points apiece.

“Although we didn’t shoot for a very high percentage, our overall effort on defense was much better than Wednesday night,” Giger said. “Our press forced several turnovers and we were able to capitalize on those turnovers.”

The Lady Panthers lost their first game of the season to an East Buchanan team they had already beaten twice this season, as the Lady Bulldogs were sent to the line 24 times and made 17 of those free throw attempts. Meanwhile, the Lady Panthers were only 6-of-12 from the free throw line and had trouble finding an offensive rhythm.

“We seemed very flat and just couldn’t get going,” Giger said.

Buckler had 15 points and Testorff added 15 points and 11 boards. James added 12 points, seven rebounds and seven assists.

Jays dominate Mules

Citizen Staff Report

The West Platte boys basketball team put on a show for the hometown fans Friday night, defeating the Lathrop Mules 68-38.

Junior Erick Roe made his first three-pointer in the opening minutes of the contest, scored the first seven West Platte points and helped the Jays to an early 11-0 lead. West Platte led 13-4 at the end of the first quarter and controlled the game the rest of the way as Roe finished with 24 points.

“We held Lathrop to four points in the first quarter, but I felt we got a little lazy in the second quarter and let them back in the game,” West Platte coach Zane Tanner said. “Overall, I was pleased with our performance, especially due to some injuries and problems with the weather.”

Ben Schlick and Clayton Coulson also finished in double figures with 10 points apiece.

The Jays had a tougher time against Lawson Jan. 20 in the rescheduled game of the Lawson Tournament, eventually falling to the Cardinals 55-39. West Platte had three players battling injuries, including Ben VanAmburg, who suffered a concussion in the Richmond game the week before and was sick; Coulson, who also had a concussion against Richmond; and Tyler Grindstaff, who had a back injury.

The Jays made only 11-of-22 free throws, Roe had 17 points and Matt Parker added eight points.

“Just a few nights earlier, our entire team played with so much energy,” Tanner said. “We have to find that energy every night.”

Benton ends Pirates’ run

Lee Stubbs

Editor

Despite the way it ended, Platte County boys basketball coach Rick Hodge didn’t hesitate when describing his team’s second-place showing at the Basehor-Linwood (Kan.) Tournament last week.

“Overall the tournament was a positive step for us,” Hodge said. “We were happy with the way we performed, especially as an eight seed playing in the finals.”

Platte County defeated top-seeded Pembroke Hill in the first round and fourth-seeded Fort Scott (Kan.) in the semifinals. But Platte County was knocked out early in the final versus Midland Empire Conference rival St. Joseph Benton. The Cardinals led 23-10 after one period and 42-23 at halftime on their way to a 75-46 victory.

The loss dropped Platte County to 5-11 on the season. The Pirates were set to play at Harrisonville Monday (Jan. 22) in their only action of the week.

Hodge said the lopsided loss could be beneficial in the long run.

“We are not satisfied, especially after the way Benton handled us,” he said. “They exposed a lot of our weaknesses, which is a good thing because it gives us a lot of feedback on what our areas of concern need to be.”

Platte County’s main problems came in its inability to handle Benton’s full-court pressure. The Pirates turned the ball over in its own end five times in the first period alone, leading to easy Benton buckets. The Pirates were also shoved around on the boards as Benton converted numerous offensive rebounds into points.

“I was disappointed in how we handled their run and jump and I thought we should have played them more physical,” Hodge said. “Hopefully we learn and can play them more competitively later on in the year.”

When the two teams meet in the MEC regular-season finale Feb. 16 in St. Joseph, Platte County will no doubt pay close attention to Benton junior John Coy. The 6-foot, 7-inch forward — who is reportedly drawing interest from such Division I college programs as Missouri, Kansas State and Iowa State — scored 33 points versus Platte County, including 19 in the first half.

Senior center Bryant Holl, who along with Garrett Beeson was voted to the all-tournament team, finished with 23 points. Kyle Knox hit two three-pointers and scored eight points.

Pirates 67, Fort Scott 54

In 2005, Platte County topped Fort Scott for the tournament title. Last year, the Tigers got even by knocking off the Pirates in the semifinals. In last week's semifinal action, Platte County regained the advantage in the series with a convincing 67-54 victory.

Platte County broke open a tight game with a 24-point fourth quarter, fueled in large part by the shooting of Beeson. Beeson nailed four three-pointers in the game and finished with 25 points.

Platte County, which led 33-31 after three quarters, got 10 points apiece from Knox, Ryan Barkley and Holl.

Zach Quick led Fort Scott with 27 points.