

# Thompson caps off record-setting season with state medal

Travis Rosenau

SLEEPY EYE - New Ulm Area junior wrestler Evan Thompson's season didn't end with the win he was hoping for this past Saturday at Xcel Energy Center.

If Thompson had it his way, he wouldn't have dropped to the consolation bracket at this year's state tournament in the first place.

But that didn't mean the heavyweight's season was a failure.

Far from it.

The fact that this was Thompson's first full year as a varsity starter, it could arguably be considered the most successful rookie varsity season any wrestler has ever had for the Eagles.

That's not all hype and fanfare, the Sleepy Eye High School junior has the accolades to back a statement like that up.

To name a few, Thompson became the Big South Conference heavyweight champion on Jan. 14, took home a medal from the state tournament on March 4 and also ended the year with NUA single-season records for most wins (46) and pins (31).

Not that being named the 2022-23 All-Journal Wrestler of the Year was on Thompson's list of goals this year, but he can still add that to his list of accomplishments after Thursday.

"It means a lot," Thompson said of his successes this year. "I've spent hours upon hours doing this sport, working hard and it's just amazing to see it paying off."

Thompson finished his first appearance at the State Individual Wrestling Tournament this year with a sixth-place medal. He had an uphill battle from the start of the tournament March 3 by being matched up with No. 1-ranked Soren Herzog of Simley in the first round.

Herzog ended up going on to win the Class AA state title with a pin in 1:08 over Mound Westonka's Sam Dioszeghy.

After being pinned in the first round by Herzog, Thompson refocused and stayed alive with a wrestleback match later on in the day. There, he pinned Becker's Dylan Kolby in 2:48 to move on in the consolation bracket the next day.

That win over Kolby gave Thompson the school record for most wins and pins in a single season.

"I was practicing at the Rolling Thunder facility and they have a big sign in there that shows the record holder for the pins," Thompson said. "So I saw that and thought, 'I wonder where I'm at, I've got be close, right?' Then looked into it more and realized I was right there. I didn't want to focus on it too much, I just wanted to keep going out there and winning matches."

On Day 2 of the state individuals, Thompson continued his winning ways with a pin over Milaca/Faith Christian's Logan Ash in 4:07 to guarantee himself a state medal.

"It's always just been a dream to even go to the state tournament, and then winning that second match to lock me in a medal is just crazy," Thompson said. "So many emotions, I was so excited."

Thompson then dropped a close 3-0 decision to Byron's Carter Geerts in the consolation semifinals before falling to Detroit Lakes' Jeffrey Moen in the fifth-place match by a 6-1 decision.

While Thompson attends Sleepy Eye High School, he's had plenty of history wrestling in New Ulm, starting out with Rolling Thunder Wrestling in first grade.

"I wrestled for River Valley, Sleepy Eye, when I was in Kindergarten ... but I knew right away I loved wrestling, I wanted to take it more seriously," Thompson said. "And my parents had heard that Rolling Thunder was a good program, so we started going over there the next year, and I wrestled there until fourth grade. Then I went and wrestled for Southern Minnesota Wrestling Club for Dan Kurth out of New Ulm. I learned a lot with Dan, he was a great coach."

And despite taking the football field for Sleepy Eye in the fall, Thompson said he feels right at home putting on the purple for the Eagles in the winter.

"I love the atmosphere, I love all the guys in the room," Thompson said of his NUA teammates. "We're all real close in age, we're all good friends, we hang out outside of wrestling, too."

One year after Thompson's former teammate and training partner Jaden Drill ended his prep wrestling career with a fifth-place state medal at heavyweight, Thompson ended his junior season with a sixth-place medal. Drill's junior year of wrestling saw him finish in the final eight heavyweights at the state tournament, meaning Thompson's climb on the state ladder next year is promising if he can stay healthy.

While Thompson is obviously looking to get back to state, his first goal for next season involves being looked to as a team leader.

"Next year one of my biggest goals is to get a captain spot," Thompson said. "I didn't get a spot as a captain this year, and I really want to get it next year. And I feel that I proved to my coaches and teammates that I earned it."

