Del Norte Triplicate

SPORTS

Del Norte wrestlers poised for postseason run

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The Del Norte Warriors have been a force in H-DNL wrestling for several years now and that doesn't look like ending any time soon.

As they enjoy another dominating winter on the mats, the Del Norte boys are favorites to repeat as league champions at the upcoming H-DNL championships, which will be held at Eureka High School on Feb. 10.

This year's team, however, is hoping to be remembered for something else.

For the past four seasons, the Del Norte boys have placed second in the North Coast Section Dual Meet Championships — finishing runners-up to Ukiah all four times — and this year they're hoping to end that run with a section championship at the tournament, which will also be held at Eureka High on Feb. 3.

Under the guidance of longtime head coach Clinton Schaad, the Warriors have now not lost a league dual meet in seven years.

"The boys and girls are working hard," Schaad said. "And they make coaching easier when they show up with the right attitude day in and day out."

Last year’s boys team won four of the 14 individual league titles and had seven grapplers place second.

This year’s team has been equally impressive through the regular season with some outstanding individual performances.

Most notably, juniors Curtis Bartley and Colton Schaad and sophomore Chulhs Bates have been setting the tone for their teammates.

Bartley won a league title as a freshman and placed second to Arcata’s NCS champion Joshua Hannon last year.

But he appears ready to re-take the crown in 2024 and is the league favorite at 138 pounds.

“He’s really driven,” the head coach said of Bartley, who is ranked No. 23 in the state in his weight class. “And he’s got a good shot at being a state qualifier.”

Likewise with Colton Schaad, who is the defending league champion at 160 pounds and is looking as good as ever this winter with a couple of tournament wins under his belt.

Bates has been equally impressive at 113 and is also a returning league champion and a favorite to repeat in his weight class.

“He’s a hard-headed little guy with no quit in him,” Clinton Schaad said of the standout sophomore. “He’s got a lot of energy and he’s a very determined young man.”

Several other Del Norte grapplers should contend for a league title, including a third returning H-DNL champion, senior Isaac Lopez, as well as junior Alex Osborne, who was a league champion as a freshman and placed second last season.

Soren Lewis also placed second in league last year at 152 and is considered one of the top contenders in his weight division once again this year.

Senior Reynaldo Martinez also could contend at 157 after placing second in league in his weight division last year and is “looking pretty good,” according to his coach, as are Braydan Johnson and James Gensaw Jr., the latter of whom won a league crown as a freshman two years ago before placing second last year.

And that’s not all.

Freshman Remington Escobedo is having an immediate impact on the team at 150, including going 3-2 at a pair of big tournaments in January.

“He’s been coming along all year and he’s earned the right to travel with the varsity team for tournaments,” Clinton Schaad said. “He’s been stepping up quite a bit and learning from the older kids.”

The Del Norte girls team has also impressed this winter.

The Warriors won a first-ever girls league title two years ago and could contend again this season, although with just seven grapplers on the roster they may not have the depth to challenge the Eureka Loggers, who are the defending league champs.

However, with six members of the team either sophomores or freshmen the future appears bright for the squad, which should continue to build in the coming years.

The Warriors' lone senior is Channey Schaad, who is a returning league champ and the team captain and has been setting the tone for her younger teammates.

Sophomore Karlye Dodson also could contend for a league title after placing third last year, while a group of five impressive freshmen — Aubrey Dodson, Rylon Caron, Elizabeth Hernandez, Golden Rule and Natasha Denicholes — have all made big strides in their first year competing at the high school level.

Denicholes got her high school career off to a flying start when she placed first in her weight division at the season-opening Battle at the Border Tournament, which was hosted by the Warriors in early December.

"The girls are improving every single time they get on the mat," Clinton Schaad said. "It's fun to watch. They work hard and they listen to the coaches, and it's paying off."

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