

Meuleners keeps national heavyweight title

Winning one national championship is exciting enough, but how exciting is it to win two in a row? Just ask 285-pound junior Matt Meuleners, Young America, Minn., that question, since he is now owner of a second NCAA Division II national wrestling heavyweight title.

Before he could make it to the championships, though, Meuleners and the NSU squad had to wrestle at the Division II Super Region III Tournament at St. Cloud University in St. Cloud, Minn., on Feb. 26. Heading into the event, the Wolves were tied for ninth place in the region, while Meuleners was ranked second in his weight division. Last year, Meuleners took second place at this regional tournament.

As the defending national champion in the heavyweight division, Meuleners had to prove that he was still the best. He worked his way to the top, defeating every wrestler in his way and eventually earning a 9-1 major decision over an opponent from Wisconsin-Parkside. With this win Meuleners snagged his first career regional title and another ticket to the national championships in Pueblo, Colo., in early March.

Going to nationals for the third time (he placed eighth in the 197-pound bracket in 2010), Meuleners said in a post-championship interview that it wasn't much different from years past. It was all about "taking [it] one match at a time and worrying about that."

This is exactly what Meuleners did, too. He defeated three wrestlers as he worked his way up the bracket, only to find himself facing conference rival Jake Kahnke from St. Cloud State. Last year Kahnke defeated Meuleners every time during the regular season, but Meuleners defeated Kahnke to earn his first national title. The 2011-2012 regular season was a similar story. Meuleners and his coaches knew that he would probably have to face Kahnke in the championship round and came prepared.

The championship match started with a scoreless first period but quickly picked up speed as both wrestlers put points on the board. Things eventually got sent into a winner-takes-all overtime, where Meuleners scored a takedown to earn the 3-1 win and keep his national title.

As a junior, Meuleners still has one more season to showcase his skill and make it to nationals again. "Hopefully I can become the first three-time champion in Northern's history," Meuleners said.

The NSU wrestling squad as a team had a decent season. According to the NSU wrestling web page, they ended the season 6-6 overall and 2-5 in their conference.

At the Super Region III tournament, one Wolf came close to making it to nationals. 184-pound junior Chad Gibson, Rapid City, entered the event ranked sixth in the region in his weight division. Gibson won his first match but fell in his second, knocking him into the wrestlebacks. He worked his way back up with a bye and another win before falling in the consolation semifinals. He finished sixth overall.

Four other Wolves also competed in the regional tournament. NSU finished in eleventh place overall.