

STATE TOURNAMENT

Fayetteville wrestler makes short work of opponents

BY MARTY COOK ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

BENTONVILLE — Michael Gordon wasn't sure he was going to wrestle for Fayetteville this year.

Gordon, a junior, didn't want to participate if he wasn't going to get better. No offense to the rest of the state, but few Arkansas wrestlers appear to measure up to Gordon.

"He's not in bad company outside the state, either," Fayetteville Coach John Kauffman said.

Gordon (16-0) did decide to wrestle for the Bulldogs and is the overwhelming favorite to win the 145-pound division at the state championships today. He won his second-round match against Little Rock Hall's Deshawn Bradley with a pin just 26 seconds into the match.

It's hard to fault Bradley, who was wrestling his first competitive match.

Gordon, by comparison, has been wrestling since he was 6 years old and recently won a national wrestling tournament in Kansas City. He plans to wrestle at the junior nationals later this month in Virginia.

Competition at the state meet pales into comparison to the wrestlers Gordon has gone against in club matches and amateur competitions since he moved to Arkansas from South Dakota in 2003.

"I was real shaky at first because I didn't think I could get as good as I could get," Gordon said. "I wasn't going to wrestle just to wrestle. I wanted to be the best."

Kauffman said he understood Gordon's initial reluctance. Kauffman said Gordon went after wrestling full bore after just a few minutes at the team's first practice.

"We have a saying in wrestling that iron sharpens iron," Kauffman said. "You have to wrestle the best to be the best."

Gordon's experience showed against Bradley. Right after the start of the match, Gordon attempted a shot at Bradley's leg but Bradley feinted away.

Gordon continued the move with a counter high, got a hold of Bradley, who quickly found himself tossed over Gordon and onto his back. Gordon made short work of Bradley from there, maneuvering into position to get the pin.

"It's just a matter of being mentally prepared," Gordon said. "I have to stay focused all the time. It's always a matter of giving 100 percent, even in workouts. You just have to keep working harder and harder."

Gordon's work ethic has influenced teammates, none of whom have his experience or expertise. Kauffman said nothing matters more in wrestling than work ethic.

"He has a fantastic work ethic," Kauffman said. "That has really rubbed off on the guys, his attitude of never being satisfied with what you've done."

"Wrestling is one of the few sports where natural ability is trumped by what you put into it."

Gordon helps out more than just by example by showing off techniques to teammates. Kauffman said Gordon is like another coach for the Bulldogs.

"He is immensely invaluable when it comes to practice," Kauffman said. "He's a really good technician."

Gordon is also doing what he can for the sport he picked up after hearing an announcement over the school intercom when he was a first-grade student in Iowa.

"All of my friends were like, 'Let's do it, let's do it,'" Gordon said. "I wasn't very good at it at first. I won my first tournament after just two weeks."

"I didn't think I was going to win. That's when I knew I could be really good at the sport."

He calls the chance to become the state's first state champion extra motivation. Wrestling is not an official sport sanctioned by the Arkansas Activities Association but is being run this year on a trial basis.

The hope is a successful year will lead to sanctioning.

"I want to see this sport continue to grow," Gordon said. "There's no way to stop it. It's everywhere around Arkansas. Sooner or later, it's going to take off."