

HIGH SCHOOL STATE WRESTLING TOURNAMENT

Bentonville wrestler wins 3rd state title in rematch

BY NICK WALKER ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Arguably the most anticipated match of the 2009 Arkansas State Wrestling Tournament ended the way both of Cody Conklin's first two title matches did.

With Conklin's arm being lifted as champion.

Bentonville's Conklin won his third consecutive state wrestling title and his second consecutive 160-pound title with a 5-1 victory over Little Rock Catholic's Dexter Carter. It was a rematch of last year's 160-pound title match, which Conklin won 9-4.

The Tigers also won their third consecutive state wrestling title, having essentially wrapped the title up before the start of the finals Saturday evening at the Jack Stephens Center in Little Rock.

"It feels good to be a threetime champion," Conklin said. "There's not many people around the country, much less in this state, that can say the same."

Conklin set the tone for the 160-pound match early, taking Carter down less than 1:30 into the first period. Carter responded with an escape with about 52 seconds remaining in the opening period, but that's about as close as he would get.

Conklin, a senior, elected to start from the defensive position in the second period and took a 3-1 lead with an escape at the 1:40 mark.

He essentially put the match away with a takedown about 40 seconds later.

"I wanted to get a fourpoint lead on him so that he would have to do more than get an escape and a takedown," Conklin said.

"I kept working for that and then I just tried to stay on him so that he would wear out."

Carter appeared to be close to getting an escape after starting from the defensive position in the third period, but tired as he neared getting out of Conklin's grasp.

"I could feel that he just gave out as he was getting up," Conklin said.

The match had all the elements of a title bout.

Conklin and Carter came into the match undefeated. The match also featured wrestlers from central Arkansas and Northwest Arkansas, the two dominant areas of wrestling in the state.

The only thing missing was any animosity between the two, or even really any sort of familiarity.

"There's supposed to be some sort of rivalry between us, although I hadn't really heard that before I came here this weekend," Conklin said. "It's just another match."

That didn't mean that either wrestler was taking the match lightly.

"I've been thinking about getting back here ever since I lost to him last year," Carter said.

Carter had gone so far as to attend two out-of-state wrestling camps and began taking private lessons with former All-America Oklahoma State wrestler Pat Smith at the Arkansas Wrestling Academy.

"He's been focusing on this match since the second that match was over last year," Catholic Coach Paul Mammarelli said.

Carter, a junior, had been wrestling for one month when the two faced off for the 160-pound title last year. Conklin, meanwhile, had been wrestling for years, having moved from Kansas to Bentonville before the start of his sophomore year. Conklin won the 152-pound title as a sophomore before moving up a weight class last year.

"I kept hearing about how much better and bigger [Carter] had gotten and how he was going to pin me," Conklin said.

"I don't mean to brag, but I've been wrestling for a while and I've gotten my butt whooped before and I wasn't going to let that happen in my last match."





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Bentonville's Cody Conklin (right) defeated Little Rock Catholic High School's Dexter Carter on Saturday night in the 160-pound championship match at the Arkansas State Wrestling Tournament at the Jack Stephens Center in Little Rock

