

Arcata takes H-DNC wrestling title

Neil Tarpey/The Times-Standard

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EUREKA -- Arcata High edged Del Norte and Eureka for top team honors while Trent Stevenson and Michael Larson carried off the major individual hardware.

These teams and individuals were the leading winners at the 38th annual Humboldt-Del Norte Conference Wrestling Championships held at Eureka's Jay Willard Gymnasium on Saturday.

The Tigers accumulated 163 total points to nip the Warriors, who ended the day with 162.



The Loggers took third with 156 points, and Fortuna placed fourth with 88 points, one better than McKinleyville's final tally of 87.

Stevenson, Arcata's senior who is currently ranked No. 1 in the NCS and No. 2 in the state, captured the crown in the 140-pound bracket as he won by a fall over Eureka's Jason Spellenberg, and was selected as the Most Outstanding Wrestler of the lower weight classes.

What does Stevenson enjoy about local wrestling tournaments and the NCS championships?

"I like the local matches because you know everyone," he said. "And I like the competition at the section."

Stevenson, who defeated his No. 2 NCS competitor 13-2 earlier this season, looks to be a strong pick to win the section and to advance to state. Even with his considerable talent, Stevenson is always working to improve himself. Probably best known for his upper techniques, Stevenson said that at camps this year, "I worked on my feet."

McKinleyville's Michael Larson, currently ranked No. 5 in the state, won by a fall against Del Norte's James Sampier for the 189-pound title, and took home the award as the Most Outstanding Wrestler of the upper weights.

How come Larson has become so dominant?

"He's mentally and physically tough," said Mack coach Virgil Moorehead, summarizing what looked like a focused and tenacious wrestling performance.

"For a big kid to move that quick, well he's not going to give in or give up anything," added Moorehead.

Del Norte's Roger McCovey, currently ranked No. 1 in the state, and the defending NCS champion in the heavyweights, also showed both power and skills as he won by a fall over Arcata's Stephan Vaudiau.

But it was not just the upper weights that provided the most exciting matches.

After Del Norte's Jordan Lacy beat South Fork's Brandon Bilandzijas 19-11 in the 112-pound bracket,

another Cub wrestler, Gabriel Miclette, engaged in a highly competitive match with Hoopa Valley's Merk Robbins in the 112-pound class.

Robbins won 6-5, but wrestling fans might want to keep an eye on these two freshmen -- who have already competed against each other for several years -- during their high school careers.

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"We have gone back and forth for years, and we respect each other as wrestlers," said Robbins.

What does Robbins think makes Miclette a tough opponent?

"He has a lot of techniques and he takes advantage of people's mistakes," added Robbins.

What about Robbins' own advantages?

"My takedowns and my physical strength," he said.

When asked about his two wrestlers making it to the finals, South Fork head coach D.J. Miclette said, "I'm really pleased with our performance in the lower weights."

Bilandzijas, a sophomore, has won 19 of his 32 matches in his first year wrestling. Miclette is now 32-8 for the year.

Fortuna also had two wrestlers win in the lower weight classes.

Ivan Cardoza, competing at 119-pounds, won by a fall over Eureka's Wesley Carroll to become a two-time H-DNC champion.

And Jared Santos, wrestling at 125 pounds, won by an 11-3 major decision over Eureka's Kyle Christensen.

Other winners included Mack's Jake Poston at 130, Del Norte's Joey Kravitz at 135, Eureka's Jake Cruz at 145, Arcata's Taran Lu at 152, Mack's Adam Johnson at 160, Arcata's Trevor Floyd at 171, and Del Norte's Jake Young at 215.