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Photo by Tracy Dreslinski
Utica Ford II senior heavyweight Vince Vultaggio grapples with Grosse Pointe North senior Josh Franklin Feb. 25 at Ford II.

Pointes to The Palace

North, South grapplers to end season at individual state finals

By Brad D. Bates
C & G Sports Writer

Three wrestlers from Grosse Pointe North and Grosse Pointe South will get to see how they measure up to the best of the best March 12-14 at the Palace of Auburn Hills.

South sophomore heavyweight Reggie Lewis, North senior 215-pounder Josh Franklin and North senior 189-pounder Nathan Strickland qualified for the Division 1 state finals at individual regional meets Feb. 28.

Lewis took fourth in his weight at Brownstown Woodhaven; Franklin was second at Birmingham Groves and Strickland placed fourth.

Franklin (40-4) took home career wins 150 and 151 at his regional before falling to Roseville High sophomore Chris Nash in the regional-title bout.

“This is Josh (Franklin)’s second year qualifying, and he lost his last match by a point last year and just missed placing,” North coach Bryan Lorenzo said. “Josh could win the whole thing this year; it’s not out of reach.”

Franklin opens his state-final run March 12 against Saline High senior Matt Price (42-13). Franklin and Nash would not face each other again until the championship round March 14.

Strickland improved to 35-7 with his two wins at the individual regional. He will face Temperance Bedford junior Mason Cole (45-5) March 12.

North sent sophomore 171-pounder Evan Locke (17-13) and freshman 103-pounder Patrick Salazar (37-11) to the regional at Groves. While neither qualified for The Palace this year, they give Lorenzo a strong foundation to build on.

“We’re going to do the same thing that we did this year,” Lorenzo said about getting the Norsemen ready for 2009-10. “The motivation will come from having a

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successful season and wanting to do it again.”

North wrapped up the team portion of its season in a regional semifinal Feb. 25 at Utica Ford II. The Norsemen fell to the host Falcons 37-23, despite voiding three weights.

“At this point, they can sit back and enjoy what they accomplished,” Lorenzo said of his team’s MAC White dual-meet championship and district championship.

“We started the season 1-8, and most teams are writing the season off after starting 1-8. To go 6-1 in the league duals and then win a district shows that this team has a lot of character and heart. Our senior captains, Dave Kubacki, Nathan (Strickland), Josh (Franklin) and Dwanta Hall, did a really great job leading us this year.”

The Devils’ due

South coach Pat O’Donnell saw Lewis qualify for the Palace after just missing out on the trip as a freshman. Lewis improved to 27-11 at his regional.

“It was a little bit of a surprise, but the thing about heavyweights is anything and everything can and will happen,” O’Donnell said.

“(Lewis) was a regional qualifier last year, and he was disappointed with finishing fourth in the district this year. He peaks at the right time of the year, though.”

Lewis, who will face Holland West Ottawa senior Michael McClure (51-0) March 12, topped Highland Park High senior Travis Ramsey 3-2 to clinch his spot at The Palace.

O’Donnell said prior to regionals he told Lewis that he “earned” his opportunity to wrestle for a spot at The Palace.

“You can only tell a kid that if he’s put in the work, and he has.”

South also sent senior 119-pounder Griffin Forton (37-11), senior 125-pounder Joey Konen (29-10) and sophomore 103-pounder Sergio Rodriguez (23-9) to regionals.

“It’s heartbreaking when you have kids that worked so hard to get to states miss out,” O’Donnell said of seeing seniors like Konen and Forton end their careers.

“Joey Konen outwrestled his opponent and deserved to win. Sometimes you establish yourself as the best wrestler, but you lose on points. All these guys went out with their best efforts, though.”

The Blue Devils, who won the MAC Gold dual-meet title and a district crown, finished their team season by falling to Novi Detroit Catholic Central 67-9 Feb. 25 at Novi High after topping Livonia Stevenson 35-30 in a regional semifinal.

“We wanted to beat Livonia Stevenson, a team that had beaten us earlier this year,” O’Donnell said. “We wanted to get one last team effort out of them.

“We drove an hour out to Novi, so we said, ‘Let’s get our money’s worth and wrestle two matches today.’ I was glad to beat Stevenson and put in a good effort against Catholic Central.

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