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Photo by Tracy Dreslinski
 Roseville High senior 189-pounder Mike Petrone, left, ties up with Clinton Township Chippewa Valley senior Paul Jameson Feb. 25 at Utica Ford II.

'Major' decision

Roseville wins coach's first, and team's first regional in four years

By Brad D. Bates
 C & G Sports Writer

STERLING HEIGHTS — The Roseville High wrestling team wasn't going to lose its focus during the Division 1 team regional Feb. 26 at Utica Ford II.

The Panthers broke a four-year regional-title drought after topping Clinton Township Chippewa Valley 34-21 in the semifinal and Utica Ford II 65-10 in the final, and punched their ticket for the team state finals March 6-7 in Battle Creek.

"It's wonderful, because we've prepared so hard for this," senior 152-pounder Bobby Nash said. "A month ago, we were starting to peak, and most of our guys were convinced we were one of the best teams in the state."

While this is the Panthers' seventh trip to Battle Creek in the last 12 years, it is their first in four years and the first for Major Mickens as a head coach.

"I don't think you really know what you are as a coach until you've put yourself through it," said Mickens, who was an assistant with past Roseville teams.

"Once you take control of a team, get them better and better ... it's overwhelming. You know it's not you, and if you didn't have the kids, you couldn't do it. I've been blessed with a group of kids who will run through a wall for me."

After seeing last year's senior class graduate without a trip to the finals, the need to get this year's seniors there weighed on Mickens.

"From the very beginning, these guys had it," Mickens said of his team's championship drive.

"I told these guys that they had the ability to get to Battle Creek. They fulfilled that drive a little bit, and then it clicked for them. Once that happened, they went with it."

The connection that Mickens shares with his grapplers, particularly the seniors, makes

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this regional title all the sweeter.

"This is my fourth year coaching the varsity, and I did junior high before this, so I had this group of seniors for six years," Mickens said. "I know them very well. These guys are really family to me."

Their level of familiarity and close bonds are why Mickens feels comfortable pushing his wrestlers to new heights.

"I've been putting these guys through challenges, even in regular matches," Mickens said.

Mickens recalled a situation where sophomore 215-pounder Chris Nash needed one point in five seconds for a major decision. Nash, who was on top following a restart, executed a power half and fulfilled his coach's challenge.

"Other kids would have said there's no way I can do this in five seconds. (Chris Nash) had the mentality that, 'Coach asked me to do it. How am I going to do it?'"

"They believe in what I tell them to do, because they know if I tell them to do it, it's possible."

That's why the Panthers were just as happy for their coach following the win against Ford II as they were about extending their season.

"It feels great, because Mickens is a great coach," Bobby Nash said. "He started coaching us my freshman year, and we didn't make it.

"It's been the same team since then, and now we're all seniors. I'm really happy to help coach, because he's been there with us the whole time."

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