

Class of the conference

Written by MITCH MAERSCH
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Ozaukee's Kraus named Central Lakeshore's top wrestler after breakout year

A breakout season for Ozaukee wrestler Colton Kraus has culminated in the highest honor his league gives.



The 113-pound junior was named Central Lakeshore Conference Wrestler of the Year after posting a runner-up finish at the WIAA Division 3 state individual tournament.

Although Random Lake captured more collective honors by winning the conference and advancing to state team competition, no other wrestler was even in the individual conversation among conference coaches, said Ozaukee coach Luke Gundrum.

Kraus had the highest state finish among any Central Lakeshore wrestler and earned Ozaukee's first Wrestler of the Year award since the conference began the honor four years ago.

"It was pretty unanimous," Gundrum said. "Who ended up finishing the year highest at the state tournament has a lot to do with that."

It didn't hurt that Kraus went 39-8 during the season and won conference, regional and sectional titles. He was undefeated in the CLC, shut out both of his sectional opponents (8-0 and 11-0) and won both of his regional matches by pin.

At state, Kraus won a 10-8 battle against Clear Lake's Cody Shafer (39-10) and scored a 10-1 major decision over Cadott's Sean Sonnentag (40-8) to reach the first-place final.

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Kraus was beaten, 9-3, by undefeated Kal Gerber of Cameron, who finished 47-0. Kraus was the only opponent Gerber didn't pin at state.

"Colton's been tough all year and really put things together at the end," Gundrum said.

The state finish capped an impressive year for Kraus. During the regular season, he placed third at the Watertown Early Bird Scramble, first in the Sheboygan Falls Duals and Green Bay Preble Scramble, seventh at the brutal Mid-States Classic, third at the Merrill Invitational and second at the Pewaukee Invitational.

It was a breakout season for one of the most talented wrestlers Gundrum said he has ever coached.

As an undersized freshman, Kraus hurt his shoulder and couldn't beat out teammate Cole Large at 106 pounds. Last season, Kraus again weighed 106 pounds but wrestled at 113, giving up too much weight against his toughest opponents.

This season, he actually reached 113, and his foes paid the price.

"He took advantage of the opportunity," Gundrum said. "He's paid his dues. He's wrestled a long time."

Kraus had plenty of support from his teammates along the way. He was one of five Ozaukee wrestlers who qualified for state, four of whom left Madison with medals in one of the best finishes in school history.

Joining Kraus on the medal stand were Ethan Brouillette, Large and Kevin Beckmann.

Gundrum said Kraus works hard, but that's not unusual for team members.

"They know what it is and what we expect. I don't have too much trouble with them backing off in practice or not working as hard as they should be," Gundrum said.

"They understand the harder they push themselves, the better they're going to be. They're a pretty self-motivated group."

One thing that might set Kraus apart is his mental approach.

"He's not shaken or rattled by big matches," Gundrum said.

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That kind of cool helped give Ozaukee its first state finalist since 2002.

“It’s a big deal for our program and should be a big deal for our school. It’s an exciting thing for him to get that award,” Gundrum said.

“The whole state tournament was pretty exciting.”

Image Information: OZAUKEE JUNIOR Colton Kraus, shown with his second-place state medal, was chosen as the Central Lakeshore Conference Wrestler of the Year in a vote of coaches.
Photo by Mitch Maersch