

Wrestling team honored for championship season

By DICK BOYD

Coach Bill Johnson and his Class 3-2-1A State Champion Norton Community High School wrestling team were honored at halftime of the Norton boys basketball game last Monday evening in the Norton Community High School Memorial Gym.

Bruce Poage, the "Voice of the Blue Jays", began by telling the large crowd that this was Norton's first state wrestling championship since 1973. He stated that the Blue Jay wrestlers were undefeated this season in duals, including a defeat of 4A state champion Scott City; won the Mid-Continent League championship; won five of six invitational tournaments; finished fourth in the Newton Tournament of Champions and second to defending state champion Hoxie in the toughest regional tournament in the state.

The ten Norton wrestlers who competed in the state tournament were escorted onto the floor by Norton cheerleaders. The other members of the team joined them. The ten state competitors were: senior James Annon, champion, 130; senior Scott Goldsby, second, 140; senior Jordon Haussermann, third, 152; senior Bo Pfannenstiel, fifth, 171; senior Curtis Black, 125; junior Michael Sprigg, champion, 275; sophomore Clay Madden, champion, 112; sophomore Lance Roe, fourth, 135; freshman Nathan Broeckelman, second, 119; freshman Kent Mann, fifth, 103.

Poage also recognized four Norton wrestlers who did not qualify for the state tournament. They were seniors C.J. Thiele, 160; Mark Maybon, 189 and Sean Lauer, 215, and sophomore Jeremy Harding, 145. "They knew that, had they competed in any of the other three regional tournaments, they would have qualified for the state tournament," said Poage.

Poage introduced J.R. "Jake" Durham whom he called "a true coaching legend". Coach Durham is a member of the KSHSAA Hall of Fame, the Kansas Wrestling Hall of Fame and the National Wrestling Hall of Fame. He coached the Norton Blue Jays to six state championship, including the last in 1973.

"This is awesome," said Coach Durham. "Norton's state championship was one of the most inspiring things I've ever witnessed. My hat is off to Coach Johnson and his wrestlers.

"I've been to several of their practices and have been impressed with their dedication and hard work in practice. They deserved to win the state championship and I know everybody agrees. They've been knocking on the door, year after year. This championship didn't just happen. I've never seen a more determined group of wrestlers than this weekend.

"Shortly after I came to Norton we won our first state championship in 1959. Norton hosted the tournament and Principal Gerald Travis was impressed. He said he'd been in Norton since 1929 and we'd never won a state championship. That was 30 years and it was 30 years before this year's championship. Guys, let's not wait another 30 years. Okay?"

Coach Bill Johnson came to Norton in 1991. "This was a period of time when wrestling was struggling at Norton Community High School," said Poage over the public address system as he read comments from Superintendent Greg Mann. "Participation was low and community interest had waned. Thanks to Coach Johnson's tireless and selfless hard work and dedication, he has orchestrated and overseen a remarkable turn-



Following a ceremony honoring Norton's state champion wrestling team at halftime of the boys basketball game last week, Coach Bill Johnson presented the championship trophy to high school Principal Lary Stull.

around in the Norton wrestling program.

"During Coach Johnson's 13 years as coach of the Blue Jays, his teams have finished fifth or better in the state tournament eight times, including two third place finishes, three second place finishes and this year's state championship."

Coach Johnson was introduced, followed by a thunderous ovation from the Blue Jay fans. "Many thanks to everyone who has supported us," said Coach Johnson. "It was fun to look up and see our fans jumping up and down.

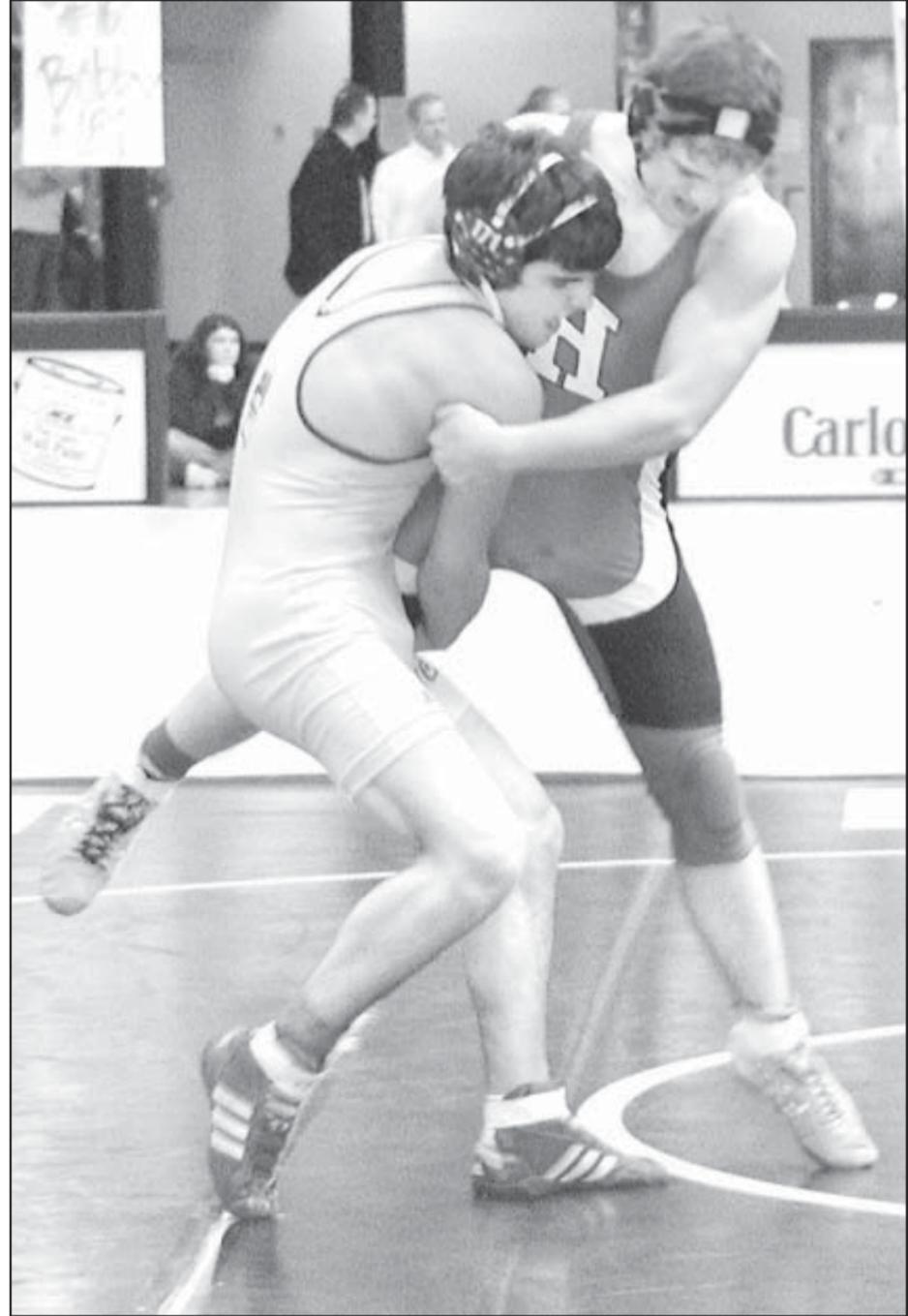
"When I came to Norton in 1991, we had 13 wrestlers on the team. After the Hoxie Invitational (first of the season), four of my seniors wanted to quit. Things have really turned around and I'm really proud of these young men. Many things had to fall in place for them to win the state champion-

ship.

"On New Year's Day we decided to have a 'Cowboy Up' theme. We went out and took lots of pictures of our wrestlers on horseback and adopted that Western theme. In the regional tournament we used the 'Wild, Wild West' theme and it was a great atmosphere. Little did we know that the state tournament would be wilder and wilder. The West was won when Michael Sprigg lifted that guy up and took him down!"

Following Coach Johnson's speech, he officially presented the 2004 State Championship trophy to high school principal Lary Stull as the crowd roared!

Assistant coaches of the state championship team were Doug Ray and Deyton Hager. Student managers were Kelli Johnson, Jessica Sprigg, Kayla Douglas and Alexi Wolf.



Bo Pfannenstiel, Norton's 171-pound senior wrestler, tried for a takedown during his 4-1 decision over Hoisington senior Isaac Schneider to earn the fifth-place medal in the Class 3-2-1A State Wrestling Tournament in Hays. Pfannenstiel, who was ranked No. 4 in the state, also placed fifth in last year's state tournament.

— Telegram photos by Dick Boyd

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