



Evan Whitney, Norton's 138-pound state champion in 1973, figure-fours the head as he pins his Trego rival. Whitney also won the state championship in 1974 and was undefeated for the season.

— Photo from the Norton Community High School yearbook

# Thirty-one years and a state championship later

By DICK BOYD

When Coach Bill Johnson's Norton Community High School wrestling team won the Class 3-2-1A State Wrestling Championship this season, it was the first state crown by Blue Jay wrestlers in 31 years.

The Norton Community High School wrestling team coached by J.R. "Jake" Durham won the Class 3A State Championship on February 24, 1973. Now, the Class 2A and 1A wrestlers are combined with 3A into one tournament.

Just how long has it been since Norton won its last state title?

In 1973, the Vietnam cease-fire agreement had just been signed, Richard Nixon was president, Robert Docking was governor, Keith Sebelius was a congressman, J.C. Tillotson was a senator, Dr. E.F. Steichen was a representative, Sam Manning was mayor of Norton, Dr. George Wadsworth was superintendent of the Norton State Hospital, Sam Freeland was president of the Norton Rotary Club which was celebrating its 50th anniversary and Cliff Meireis was Norton County Extension Agent.

In addition, the Norton Community High School Memorial Gym had not been built and all high school athletic events were played in the Wilmeth Kirk Memorial Gym. Playing in that gym for the high school basketball team was boys basketball coach Doug Reusink. One of his opponents was Kevin Jilka, now the Norton girls basketball coach, who was playing for Hill City High School. High School Principal Lary Stull was football, basketball and track coach at Northern Valley High School. One of his athletes was

Bill Lowry, now the Northern Valley superintendent. Bryce Stallard was in his last year as Norton superintendent.

Norton competed in the Northwest Kansas League. Kirk Baker, now Hoxie's head wrestling coach, wrestled for Goodland and placed second in the state at 112 pounds in 1973.

Norton wrestling coach Bill Johnson was 7-years-old and in the second grade in Douglass. He was in his third year of wrestling in the Douglass Wrestling Club. Johnson later was both a state and national champion in Kids Wrestling.

We could go on and on but, you get the picture. It's been quite a long while between championships.

### Sixth title team for Durham

The 1973 state championship team was the sixth and final state title team coached by Coach Durham. Displaying what Coach Durham called "superior effort by an average group of boys", the Norton Blue Jays captured the State 3A Wrestling Championship in the Community Building in Colby on Saturday, February 24, 1973, according to the story in the Norton Daily Telegram. Trailing defending state champion Goodland 49-39 after the first day's competition, Norton outscored the Cowboys 20-6 on Saturday to win the team title 59-55.

"This is the classic example in athletics of a group of boys with average abilities turning them into above-average results through determination and dedication," said Durham with a big grin. "They experienced plenty of setbacks in the early part of this sea-

son but dedicated themselves enough to rise above these disappointments."

The consensus going into the state tournament was that Goodland and Oberlin would battle for the championship.

Seven Norton wrestlers competed in the state tournament. Three were crowned champions: Bill Klein, 98 pound junior; Keith Sides, 126 pound junior and Evan Whitney, 138 pound junior. Dave Ward, 105 pound junior, placed second. Roland Washburn, 132 pound senior and Bruce Koel, 145 pound senior, each placed third. Mark Anderson, 185 pound junior, did not place after losing on Friday by just one point to the eventual runnerup.

Washburn, who placed second in the state the year before, and Koel, went "in the back door" by winning on Saturday afternoon. Goodland failed to score a point in the afternoon or the third place matches. Klein raised the Blue Jays' title hopes when he won his 98 pound match over Jim Dark, Oberlin, with a 16-1 superior decision to put Norton ahead for the first time 52 1/2-49.

Ward wrestled Goodland's Doug Duell, the previous year's 98 pound champion, for the 105 pound title and was outpointed 10-7, leaving Norton just one-half point ahead of the Cowboys.

Another Norton-Goodland matchup came at 126 pounds with Sides versus Bill Havice. Sides had the psychological edge, having upset two-time defending state champion Frank Gonzales, Bonner Springs, who was unbeaten in 66 matches, on Friday. Sides shutout Havice 5-0 and Norton extended their lead to 55 1/2-

2-52. With two Goodland wrestlers and one Norton wrestler yet to compete, it was still anybody's championship. The 138 pound match decided the issue, however, when Whitney met Goodland's Keith Wieck. Whitney dominated the Cowboy for a 12-2 victory — a superior match giving Norton 3 1/2 more points and running Norton's total to 59. Even a pin by the remaining Goodland wrestler would not overtake the Blue Jays! Goodland's Alvin Stasser did win the 155 pound class with a 2-1 decision over Tod Alstrom, Oberlin, but the three additional points brought Goodland's final total to just 55.

Oberlin, who had 32 1/2 points after the first day, ended with 47 1/2 points and a third place finish. Atwood, who placed second to Norton in the Norton Invitational, won the Class 2-1A state championship with 92 1/2 points. Hoxie was second with 78 points and St. Francis third with 43.

### Remarkable season

The Norton championship was truly remarkable when you looked at the season. Norton placed third out of four teams in the season-opening Hoxie Invitational, then didn't win a dual meet until midway in the season. After winning the Norton Invitational in December, the team won its final four duals of the season and finished fourth in the Northwest Kansas League.

Norton was runnerup to Oberlin in the district tourney and the re-

gional tourney where the Red Devils edged them 73-72. Goodland was in a different district but finished third in the regional behind Norton with 70 1/2 points.

Klein was the only Norton wrestler to win gold medals at the district, regional and state tournament. Joe Durham, 119 pound senior, placed second in the district tourney after being injured in the semi-finals and forfeiting the championship match. The injury caused him to drop out of the regional tournament so he was unable to qualify for the state tournament. Durham was a 98-pound state champion as a sophomore in 1971.

In 1972, Washburn was second at 132 pounds, Klein was third at 98 pounds and Sides was fourth at 119 pounds.

In 1974, the Blue Jays placed third in the state tournament. Whitney won his second straight state championship at 138 pounds and finished the season undefeated. Ward won the 112 pound

championship. Anderson was runnerup at 185 pounds and Klein placed third at 105 pounds. Sides was undefeated for the season but dislocated an elbow in practice the night before the state tournament and was unable to compete for a second straight state championship and third state tourney medal.

Wrestling with one good arm, Sides won his first match in the state tournament but lost the second to a wrestler he had beaten badly earlier in the season and injury defaulted his next and final match, ending the season with one loss.

Oakley, whom Norton had defeated handily for the district and regional tourney titles, won the state championship with 80 points. St. Francis was second with 51 1/2 and Norton was third with 51. Sides was called the "unsung hero" of the Norton team.

When Sides won in 1973, it was the first time in Norton High School history that a father and son (Continued on Page 8)

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Division II (Boys)—5th-6th-7th Grade

Division I (Girls)—1st-3rd Grade

Division II (Girls)—4th-6th Grade

Entry Fee \$10 (Late Fee \$20)—Due by Sat., April 10, 2004 at Norton Recreation Commission

Registration Forms Available at Norton Recreation Commission

K-18 (Boys) — Ages 15 and Up (As of July 31)

Entry Fee \$10 (Late Fee \$20)—Due by Tuesday, May 11 at Norton Recreation Commission

### Adult Coed Softball (Slow Pitch)

Starts Sunday, May 23 — Ages 17 and Over

Entry Fee: \$150/Team; Due by Tuesday, May 11, 2004

### Youth Track and Field Fun Day

Saturday, May 8, 2004, 9 a.m.

Ages 5 and 6 Years; 7 and 8 Years; 9 and 10 Years; 11-13 Years  
Due by Saturday, April 3

### Baseball Coaches Meeting

T-Ball: Saturday, April 17, Noon; Cookies: Saturday, April 17, 1 p.m.  
Division I: Sat., April 17, 2:30 p.m.; Division II: Sat., April 17, 4:00 p.m.

### Softball Coaches Meeting

Division I, Sunday, April 18, 2:00 p.m.  
Division II, Sunday, April 18, 3:00 p.m.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL:

Norton Recreation Commission  
(785) 877-3087