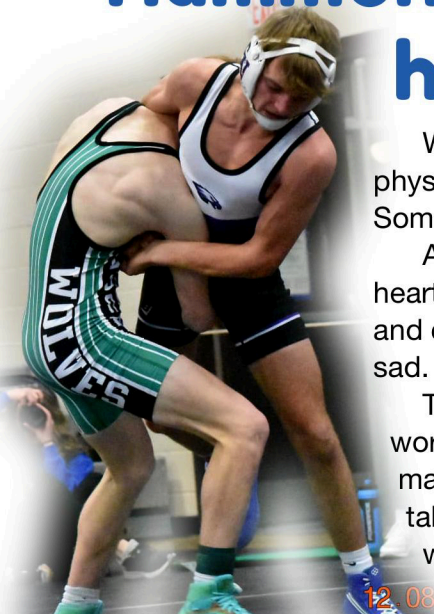


Hammond displays dedication during his high school career



Wrestling a Loomis opponent, Hammond strategically gets a headlock.

Wrestling is an ancient sport that combines athleticism and strategy. Other than physicality, wrestling instills discipline and sportsmanship, but it also requires dedication. Someone who embodies all these characteristics is senior Braxton Hammond.

As a freshman, Hammond had a rough start to his high school career. Losing in the heartbreak round at districts may have been a setback, but Hammond worked harder and came back stronger. "I was very disappointed after losing at districts. It was very sad. My goal was to make it to state the next year."

Throughout the next year, Hammond improved greatly. He learned new moves and worked to perfect them. All the hours in the wrestling room are clearly shown on the mat. At wrestling meets, Hammond would show off his offense and penchant for takedowns. Because Hammond is an explosive, tough wrestler, many fans came to watch him throughout his career.

One concern for wrestlers is being overweight before meets. Hammond said, "The worst part about wrestling is cutting weight." Hammond would regularly stay after practice to keep his weight down and to work on his skills. His dedication was easy to see: lifting weights, running, riding the bike, jumping rope, and practicing shots in the wrestling room. All these taught Hammond discipline and how to focus.

As a sophomore in 2022, Hammond not only met his goal of qualifying for state, but he was the state champion in the weight class of 106 pounds. Hammond placing first wasn't on the Southern Valley fans' minds when he first qualified. Hammond caused a major upset paving his way to the finals. "When I qualified for state, I was happy I was there. I didn't know how things would turn out. After winning, I was very excited, but it didn't set in for a week."

Hammond's high school career saw two more trips to the state tournament, both with third place finishes. As a junior, he lost by one point in the semifinals. Hammond said, "I was sad to not make the finals, but placing at state is a good thing. It felt good." At the 2023 state tournament Hammond also reached an impressive milestone. His 100th career win came in the quarterfinals.

Another career accomplishment for Hammond came at the Arapahoe meet during his senior year. Hammond said, "I didn't know I was getting close to my 100th pin. It was a surprise. It felt good."

Hammond's high school coach, Dexter Becker, knows that Hammond's successful career started long before high school. Becker said, "Most of his success is due to him signing up for little kids wrestling and being involved in it for a long time and his dad hauling him to so many meets as a kid to wrestle good competition."

Many younger Eagles look up to Hammond. They admire how he never gives up and how he is always willing to help them during little kids' practices. Hammond taught young wrestlers that it is important to keep trying.

Hammond's teammates also benefited from him being on the team. Coach Becker said, "He is a wrestler that the guys can lean on a little bit. He could rekindle a fire in an off-round at a meet to get the guys going again."

As Hammond finished off his high school wrestling career on the podium at state, he was a little disappointed to not get the gold, but Hammond had a smile on his face, being rightfully proud of himself as he ended an incredible high school career. Hammond said, "I hope everyone remembers my work ethic. I'm going to miss wrestling for the Eagles."

Becker added, "Braxton trained till he hurt, ran till he couldn't breathe, wrestled till he had no more. I will miss having a kid so willing to put himself out there and do whatever it takes to win. Winning isn't all, but it sure is fun and when you have a kid put it all on the line to win, that's respectable."



Braxton Hammond on the podium at state his senior year.