From Struggles to Strength

Stanton Girls Wrestling team brings home two conference titles

By: Senior Rylan Hansen

The Mustangs walked into the gym with looks of defeat before the tournament even started. With two of the five girls overweight just 20 minutes before weigh-ins, the pressure hit hard. Senior Rylan Hansen and Freshman CheyAnne Wurdinger were both .4 pounds over after they checked their weight on the new scale, but despite the setback, the Stanton Girls Wrestling Team brought home two conference titles.

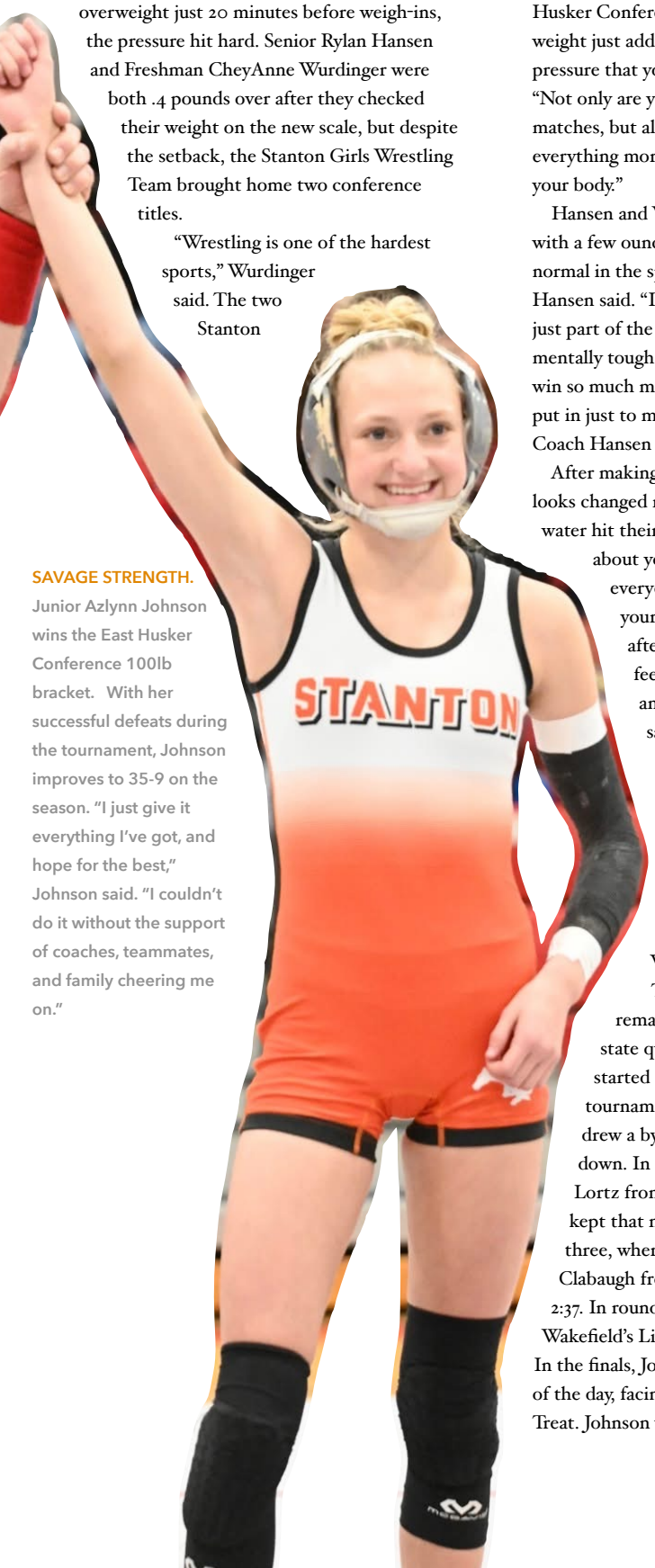
"Wrestling is one of the hardest sports," Wurdinger said. The two Stanton wrestlers bundled up in thick clothes and tossed their shoes on to hit the mat in hopes of still getting a chance to wrestle at the East Husker Conference Tournament. "Making weight just adds to the already large amount of pressure that you already have," Hansens said. "Not only are you expected to wrestle tough matches, but also make weight before. It makes everything more stressful on your mind and your body."

Hansen and Wurdinger both made weight with a few ounces to spare. "Cutting weight is normal in the sport of wrestling," Coach Randy Hansen said. "It is definitely not fun, but it's just part of the sport and what makes you so mentally tough." "It makes the kids want to win so much more because of all the work they put in just to make weight behind the scenes," Coach Hansen added.

After making weight, these two wrestlers' looks changed moments after the food and water hit their systems. "It's hard to worry about your weight while still juggling your everyday activities and still prioritizing your well-being," Hansen said. "But after weigh-ins, there is no better feeling than some ice-cold Gatorade and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich."

The Mustangs put in the miles this week on their feet and in return came home with some hardware. "It feels really good to come home with a medal, especially knowing all the hard work I put in paid off," Wurdinger states.

Three other Mustangs also had a remarkable tournament. Returning state qualifier, Junior Azlynn Johnson, started off her first conference tournament with a bang. In round one, she drew a bye, but she didn't let that slow her down. In round two she defeated Chloe Lortz from NEN Girls by fall in 0:48. She kept that momentum rolling over into round three, where she faced off against Ella Clabaugh from Oakland-Craig with a pin at 2:37. In round four, Johnson went up against Wakefield's Lili Manjarez and got the fall at 2:50. In the finals, Johnson wrestled her longest match of the day, facing off against North Bend's Lexi Treat. Johnson won the match with a pin at 4:58.



SAVAGE STRENGTH. Junior Azlynn Johnson wins the East Husker Conference 100lb bracket. With her successful defeats during the tournament, Johnson improves to 35-9 on the season. "I just give it everything I've got, and hope for the best," Johnson said. "I couldn't do it without the support of coaches, teammates, and family cheering me on."

TOTAL TAKEOVER. Freshman CheyAnne Wurdinger gets the silver, while teammates Junior Azlynn Johnson, and Senior Rylan Hansen take the gold as East Husker Conference wrestling champions. The hardwork put in at practice on mats prepared them for tough competition. "We just kept at it, and worked until we couldn't anymore," Wurdinger said.

The 100-pounder improves her record to 35-9 on the season. "I'm really pleased with how the day went," Johnson said. "Being able to see these kinds of results at conference makes me feel more prepared for districts."

At 115, Wurdinger had quite the day, even with all the extra running put in beforehand. The freshman started her day by taking on Kaitlyn Mahaney from NEN Girls which ended in Wurdinger's favor with a pin at 3:00. In quarterfinals, Wurdginger took on West-Point Beemer's Abbey Wolken and ended with a place in semi-finals with a (18-0) tech fall at 4:00. In her semi-final match, she just barely found her way out and ended on top with a (1-0) decision over Wakefield's Arianna Juarez. In her first Championship match of the year, Wurdinger faced off against a familiar competitor. On Tuesday, during the dual, Wurdinger wrestled Madison's Azul Pedraza, whom she pinned. But, with the heightened emotions and the exhaustion faced from a long day's worth of wrestling, Wurdinger just couldn't hold on. Pedraza threw a

headlock and won the match by fall at 1:42. Wurdinger's record on the season improved to 30-20. "Annie wrestled really well today, and she has a lot to be proud of," Coach Hansen said. "She has made massive steps in the right direction from where she started this year."

In the 120-pound division, Bria Johnson continued to improve her junior season. "Bria is working really hard in practice, and you can see the improvement that is being made," Coach Hansen said. "She continued to battle through every situation, and that's all we ask for." In round one, Johnson wrestled against Angie Miranda of Wakefield getting the pin at 4:00. In quarterfinals, Johnson drew a hard draw with Lyons-Decatur's Dakotta Erickson and lost by fall at 2:51. In the consolation round, Johnson lost a nail-biter to North Bend Central's Natalie Mimick with a 14-11 decision. Johnson's record improves to 17-20.

At 135, Rylan Hansen made quick work of the competition. The returning state runner-up continued her quest for gold, even with a little bump in the road with weight earlier in the day. The 135-pounder started off her final conference tournament with a medical forfeit over West Point-Beemer's Janelle Guedea. In the semi-finals, Hansen went up against Wakefield's Mirella Ruvalcabe and got the fall at 1:09. In the finals, Hansen matched up against Kruse Leichleiter of Tekamah-Herman. The match ended at 3:31 with the fall given in Hansen's favor. Hansen improved her record to 39-2. "I think it was a really great day; you know, conference is always super fun, so to be able to go out there and perform well is always so exciting,"Hansen said.

In the 140-weight bracket, Sophomore Terah Fraser had the hardest bracket of the day. In round one, Fraser was matched up against the eventual Champion, Tekamah-Herman's LilyAnn Willing. Fraser was pinned at 0:10. In round two, Fraser was matched up against Melony Manjarrez of Wakefield, and that match ended at 2:00 with Manjarrez getting the fall. In round three, the sophomore faced off against West Point-Beemer's Ava Mahnke. Mahnke recorded the fall at 1:05. Fraser's record improved to 7-17. "I just kept pushing myself not to give up," Fraser said.

The Mustangs continue to work hard and improve as they draw nearer to the postseason. The team is led by returning state qualifier Azlynn Johnson and returning state runner-up Rylan Hansen. These two continue to push themselves and their teammates. The next time the Mustangs hit the mat is on February 6, at Columbus Lakeview High School, where they will battle their way through the toughest district in the state with hopes of making their state bid. The Mustangs have lost a lot of potential to come home with hardware in mid-February, but only time will tell. "I'm really excited to see where they end up finishing this season because everyone knows that they have a chance to top the podium, but it all depends on who shows up and wrestles that day," Coach Hansen states.

MENTAL TOUGHNESS. Junior Bria Johnson attempts to break free of her opponent to secure a take down maneuver. Johnson fell in both rounds at East Husker Conference adjusting her record at 17-20. "They were tough matches," Johnson said. "But, I just tried to listen to my coach and my teammates when things seemed difficult, and hoped I could get out of it."

PURE GRIT. Senior Rylan Hansen holds the pin against her defender at the East Husker Wrestling Tournament. Hansen secured the pin earning another win for the Stanton Mustangs. "Once I got her into position, it was all good from there," Hansen said.