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SPORTS

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BOYS' SWIMMING CLASS 2A

Stillwater diver, Edina measure up

Hornets win their second consecutive team title.

BY HEATHER RULE
Special to the Star Tribune

Doctors had Johan Fick back with his injured back, he might not be able to dive for the rest of the season.

He wasn't having it. "I was telling them, 'That's not going to work,'" Fick said. "I'm going to finish the season. This is my last season."

Though the Stillwater senior said it was painful, he returned to diving in time to win a section title after already missing about a month and the last few meets before section. His perseverance paid off as he won his second consecutive Class 2A diving title with a 402.75 score.

Along with the injury, Fick said he's had a lot going on family-wise, with his mom in the hospital recently. But she was at the pool Saturday to cheer him on from the stands.

"Being able to win tonight, especially after my mom just got out of the hospital, it meant a lot," Fick said. "I just thrilled."

Edina back-to-back
Edina won the Class 2A team title, going back-to-back for the first time since a three-peat in 2008-10. The Hornets finished with 321 points, winning the title without winning an individual event. That's what the depth and all three



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It was a group effort for Edina, which won the Class 2A championship without winning an individual event.

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Dunn wins two freestyle titles
Edina Freestyle swimmer Soren Dunn won a relay state title as a freshman but hadn't won an individual state title in his five-year swimming career until he swept the 50 freestyle and 100 freestyle events. To finally stand on top of the podium is an incredible feeling, he said.

In the 50 freestyle, he finished in 20.67 seconds. The quick race can always be a

bit of a shoot-out to see who touches the wall first. "I was pretty nervous, and I wasn't sure what was going to happen," said Dunn, who added that the wiggle in the bottom to win the 300 freestyle (48:30).

Block not flustered
With the upcoming preliminaries, Chamhansen/Chaska junior Evan Block swam in Lane 4 for the final heat in the 50 freestyle and 100 freestyle

events. But the timing system wasn't working properly. In the always-quick race, Block appeared to touch the wall second in the 50 freestyle but looked up to see seventh place and in his name on the video board as the unofficial result.

After some checking, Block did indeed take second. "There was no wiggle," Block said of seeing the number seven. "Because I finished, I saw the guy next to me finish."

He also won his first individual state title with a 48.86 in the 100 butterfly and swam on the winning 200 and 400 freestyle relays.

Zheng defends titles
Zhang won the 200 individual medley for the second year in a row (4:41.04). He followed that up by becoming a one-time champion in the 100 breaststroke.

BOYS' SWIMMING CLASS 1A

Winona sets three state meet records

Blake/Block easily won fourth straight team title.

BY HEATHER RULE
Special to the Star Tribune

Winona swimmers broke three of the four Class 1A state records that fell on Saturday.

The Winwhawks had record-setting relays in the 200 yard and 400 freestyle events, plus senior Grant Wolner set records in the 100 butterfly at the boys' swimming and diving state meet at Jean K. Freeman Aquatic Center at the University of Minnesota.

Wolner defended his title in the butterfly in a record-setting 49.28 seconds. Having swum 50:12 in the preliminaries, he saw the 49:33 record in the program and put the num-

ber in the back of his head for the final race. "I was pretty stoked," Wolner said. "Just to get under by that little of a margin is huge."

Besides, his coach has always told him he's more of a finals swimmer. Wolner enjoys the atmosphere of the state meet, saying he likes to "get jacked up" and excited.

Wolner also swam on the winning relays, along with senior teammates Alex Ferguson, Tanner Luonani and Jack Herzog, and finished third in the 200 individual medley (1:30:03).

Herzog won the 200 freestyle (1:40:29) and defended his 100 freestyle title, just missing his own record. His final time was a 44.61, compared to his 44.62 in the preliminaries. He said he swam

on the process. "So, I'm more of a swimmer, was part of all these event victories for the Bearcats. He swam the backstroke leg of the victorious 200 medley relay (1:25:60), then won the preliminaries (20:31). He also won the 100 backstroke (48:31).

Opdahl wins diving
Chicago Lakes Area sophomore Steven Opdahl led after preliminaries and went on to win the diving title with a 471.5 score.

More for Karpenko
Last year when Andrew Karpenko of Minnetonka Academy swam to two records in the preliminaries

and two in the finals for a pair of individual state championships, he said it was the best of his life.

So, where does Saturday's performance rank? "This was another phenomenal meet for me," Karpenko said.

"This one is just icing on the cake for the whole four years."

"It's hard to put into words just how satisfied and happy I am with how the season ended up."

The swimmer broke his own record from the preliminaries in the 100 breaststroke, defending his title with a Class 1A record time of 54.22, just under the 54.26 from the day before. He also won the 200 individual medley for the third consecutive year (1:48:52).

Records set

CLASS 1A

100-yard butterfly
Grant Wolner, Winona, 49:28.
Previous: 49:33 by Paul Hux, Monticello, 2012.

200 freestyle relay
Winona (Jack Herzog, Alex Ferguson, Tanner Luonani, 1:25:84).
Previous: 1:24:87 by Monticello, 2013.

100-yard butterfly
Andrew Karpenko, Minnetonka Academy, 54.22.
Previous: 54.26 by Karpenko, in preliminaries on Friday.

400 freestyle relay
Winona (Gregson, Luonani, Wolner, Herzog), 8:05.61.
Previous: 8:06.11 by St. Thomas Academy, 2016.

Note: These were no records set Saturday on the Class 2A meet.

Always-going Saber sparked team to two state titles

Paxton Creese reached the 120-pound final last.

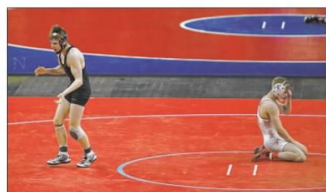
BY JIM HALLSEN
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There were two things Paxton Creese hadn't done in the past two seasons heading into the state tournament: Lose to a wrestler from Minnesota. And slow down.

The 120-pound senior from Shakopee is a Tannum-in-dé on the mat, a 5-foot power surfer that never stops. He prefers wrestling on his feet, where his boundless intensity often leads to lopsided results thanks to his penchant for putting up points.

"People refer to me as the 'Take-down Machine' because I'm always on my feet, cutting people, taking them down, scoring points," Creese said.

Creese's frenetic style — some would say frenzied — paid off in a huge way. He was 35-1 in 2019 en route to the Class 2A 115-pound champ-



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Ryan Henningson of Winona-Winona Center, left, celebrated after defeating Paxton Creese of Shakopee 6-0 in the 120-pound final in Class 1A. Creese finished 48-2 this season.

enough. This year, he was 48-1 heading into his 120-pound championship match Saturday against Ryan Henningson of Winona-Winona Center. Both of his losses came

against an out-of-state wrestler while competing in the Clash Duels in Rochester. He defeated Henningson in the 115-pound final last year. On Saturday, however, it was

Henningson who came out the winner in a 6-4 decision. It's not just on the mat that Creese stands out. His buoyant nature has been a source of energy for Shakopee on its

path to back-to-back Class 1A team championships. In the Sabers' wrestling room, the incessant Creese provides all the light needed.

"Ever since I was a kid, everyone always referred to me as a social butterfly," he said. "I love making people always get something going on."

While Creese has had plenty to get fired up about at the high school level, his wrestling passion lies with Greco-Roman style, which he doesn't get to indulge during the season. The style fields any holds below the waist, forcing wrestlers to concentrate on upper-body holds and throws.

High school wrestling, labeled "folkstyle," allows lower-body holds.

With Creese's strength being wrestling on his feet, it makes sense that he and Greco-Roman wrestling are a perfect fit.

"I love Greco-Roman," he said. "When I was little, my dad taught me a couple of Greco

moves from his judo background and ever since then, I just grew into it."

It's why Creese's M.O. tends to be more about building up big leads rather than pinning, though two notable pins have punctuated Creese's 2020 state tournament.

"That was one of the craziest moments of my career, just for the excitement it brought," Creese said.

"We'd already started out the match with two good wins, but that was just one. The whole bench was going crazy."

He made quick work of St. Michael's-Bernville's Jed Wester in Saturday's 120-pound semifinals, getting a pin at 1:22 of the first period, setting up his shot at a second state title that fell just short.