College wrestling roundup: Oregon State wins Pac-12 title, Clackamas crowns two national champs and Malychewski punches return DIII ticket

Joe Latham
Oregon State junior Joe Latham takes down Arizona State's Ray Waters on the way to a 14-5 win at the Pac-12 Championships on Sunday. Latham went on to finish second at 174 pounds and earn automatic qualification to the NCAA Championships later this month. (Craig Scharer/Courtesy of Oregon State University)

Scott Bernard Nelson | snelson@oregonian.com

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Oregon State won its third consecutive Pac-12 Championship on Sunday, piling up 155 points to 134 for second-place Stanford. The No. 17 Beavers won three individual titles in Palo Alto, Calif., and finished no lower than third place in any of the 10 weight classes.

Eight OSU wrestlers punched their tickets for the NCAA Championships March 20-22 in Oklahoma City.

Joey Delgado at 141 pounds, Scott Sakaguchi at 149 and RJ Pena at 157 won back-to-back individual titles for the Beavers to take any drama out of the team race before the final round was half over.

Joe Latham at 174 pounds, Taylor Meeks at 197 and Amar Dhesi at heavyweight finished second, and Pat Rollins at 125, Joey Palmer at 133 and Toney Chay at 165 finished third. Austin Morehead finished third, also, but won a wrestleback match for "true second" over Arizona State's Blake Stauffer to earn the conference's final NCAA berth at that weight.

The Joeys – Palmer and Delgado – provided the biggest highlights for the Beavers in a meet in which most things went right.

Palmer, a surprise late addition to the 133-pound weight class at National Duals two weeks ago after a season largely defined by injury and middling results, again proved that the move up from 125 pounds was exactly what the doctor ordered. On Sunday, he recorded two pins and pushed No. 10-ranked Ryan Mango of Stanford to the limit in a 6-5 loss before he beat Jose Mendoza of Cal State-Bakersfield 10-5 in the third-place final to grab the conference’s last NCAA berth.

And Delgado, not likely to be seriously considered for an at-large berth and in a weight class with only one
Pac-12 qualification spot, won three consecutive matches to claim the conference title as a freshman and punch his ticket.

The biggest negative for the Beavers was Meeks getting upset in overtime in the 197-pound final by Stanford’s Dan Scherer. It’s a loss that likely drops the returning All-American out of the running for a pre-seed at the NCAA Championships this year.

The Beavers return to action Saturday at Boise State, a dual rescheduled after a snow-related cancellation earlier in the season. But both teams are likely to keep athletes on the sidelines who have already qualified for the NCAA Championships, so it will probably feature backups and on-the-bubble wrestlers taking one last opportunity to make their case for at-large berths.

Clackamas:

Clackamas Community College broke a school record with 7 All-Americans, crowned two national champions and finished 3rd at the National Junior College Athletic Association tournament, which ended Saturday night in Spokane. Driving home Sunday, coach Josh Rhoden still sounded a little stunned it wasn’t enough to win the Cougars’ second national title.

“If you’d have told me beforehand we’d have 7 All-Americans and 139 points, I’d have said the championship is ours,” Rhoden said. “Probably 85 percent of the years, the winner has fewer points than that.”

Not this year, though, when the top three junior college teams in the country all delivered dominating performances against the rest of the field. Northeastern Oklahoma A&M won the title with 169 points, Northwest College (Wyo.) was second with 149 and CCC came in third with 139. (Southwestern Oregon Community College finished 15th, with 45 team points.)

CJ Palmer at 133 pounds and Adrian Salas at 184 delivered individual national titles for the Cougars, and both racked up bonus points while rampaging through their brackets. Palmer recorded a pin, a tech fall and a major decision before controlling John Dillon of Mercyhurst North East (Penn.) 4-0 in the title match. And Salas recorded three pins in his five matches, including a first-round pin of Matt Hurford of Ellsworth CC (Iowa) in the championship.

Rhoden said the team race was largely decided in the quarterfinals, when Kenny Martin at 149 pounds and Kyle Bateman at 165 gave up late leads to get knocked off. Martin’s was a head-to-head matchup against Northeastern Oklahoma, and the swing in team points was hard to overcome the rest of the way.

Bateman, a freshman from Sandy, came back to win four more consecutive matches to finish 3rd. Another
freshman from the Portland area, Ihogham Odighizuwa at 197 pounds and a David Douglas alum, also went 5-1 at the tournament to finish 3rd.

The other Cougar All-Americans: Robbie Rizzolino, who finished 6th at 141 pounds; Eleazar DeLuca, 4th at 157; and Brandon Johnson, 8th at heavyweight.

Six of the 7 All-Americans return next year – Palmer is the lone exception – and the future looks solid at the Oregon City school.

Rhoden said he and the team’s assistant coaches will take a few days to reflect on the season, and then they’ll hit the road to start recruiting again. At least on Sunday, he admitted to still feeling a little “bittersweet” about the tournament, which he clearly had hoped to win.

“We’ve set the standard so high that you’re disappointed when you don’t win it all,” he said. “But the program as a whole is in just such an awesome spot. We’re graduating our kids, we’re wrestling well. It’s pretty special.”

Pacific:

Caleb Malychewski, a senior 184-pounder for Pacific, punched his ticket to the NCAA Division III National Championships for the second consecutive season, placing third at western regionals over the weekend. The senior from Camas beat Joshua Willaert of Saint John’s (Minn.) 4-1 in the third-place final to clinch his trip to nationals, March 14-15 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Malychewski is 29-6 on the season.

Eric Harder at 133 pounds, Ryan Baxter at 149 pounds and Bruce Balcita at 165 pounds all finished fourth for the Boxers, one match short of qualifying for the NCAAs. Harder (27-9 on the season) and Baxter (22-12) are juniors, so they’ll be back for another shot next year.

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