

By Randy Whalen

A pair of Porters are Class 3A state champions.

Drew Blackburn-Forst and Brayden Thompson earned those titles for the Lockport Township wrestling team.

For Blackburn-Forst, it was a goal that he set out to meet over a year ago and capped a whirlwind eight-month run that saw him win a pair of individual state wrestling championships as well as be the top defensive player on the Porter Class 8A state championship team last fall.

"Winning three state titles is pretty incredible," Blackburn-Forst said. "Especially in a short amount of time I was able to. Thanks to all the coaching by (Lockport wrestling coach) Josh (Oster) and all the other Osters, I improved over the years."

He did as he went back-to-back as state champion at 220 pounds. Last season was at the Illinois Wrestling Coaches And Officials Association (IWCOA) state tournament on Saturday, June 26 at The Bank of Springfield Center in Springfield. This one was in the Illinois High School Association (IHSA) state tournament on Saturday, Feb. 19 at State Farm Center on the campus of the University of Illinois in Champaign.

"I'm equally proud of both titles," he said.

It was actually Blackburn-Forst's third state title. He won an Illinois Elementary School Association one at 167 pounds in 2018 as an eighth-grader at Homer Junior High.

With Thompson winning the title at 170 pounds, Lockport has 14 individual state champions. But Blackburn-Forst is the second one to go back-to-back, joining Brad Johnson.

The previous 12 Porter state champions were, Glen Malone (133 pounds in single class, 1969), Ken Lewis (155 pounds in single class, 1972), Jake Oster (112 pounds in Class AA, 2004), Jameson Oster (119 pounds in Class 3A in 2009), Johnson (189 pounds in Class 3A in 2011 and again at 195 pounds in Class 3A in 2012), Shaunqae McMurtry (160 pounds in Class 3A in 2012), Brian Rossi (113 pounds in Class 3A in 2014), Shayne Oster (138 pounds in Class 3A in 2015), Trevell Timmons (160 pounds in Class 3A in 2017), Anthony Molton (120 pounds in Class 3A in 2018), Baylor Fernandes (160 pounds in Class 3A, 2019), and Matt Ramos (120 pounds in Class 3A in 2019).

In this season's title bout, Blackburn-Forst (35-5) won a 3-2 decision over Marist senior Ghee Rachal (32-3).

The first period was scoreless before Rachal took a 1-0 lead to end the second. Blackburn-Forst escaped tying the match at 1-all before a takedown gave him a 3-1 lead 30 seconds from the end of regulation and held off Rachal, who was fourth last summer at the IWCOA state tournament.

"Ghee is a tough opponent, we know each other from Freestyle and Greco, so it was great to get that win," Blackburn-Forst said, "but I really wanted one last pin to close things out, so I fell a little short in my bid to do so."

It was certainly his toughest match at state. Blackburn-Forst opened on Thursday, Feb. 17 with a pin in 19 seconds over sophomore Harley Stary from Conant. In the quarterfinal, he won by 22-7 tech fall over sophomore Ty Stringer from New Trier in a time of 3:28. Later on that Friday in the semifinal, Blackburn-Forst pinned sophomore Marko Ivanisevic from Hinsdale Central in just 24 seconds.

I hold a couple of records," said Blackburn-Forst, who placed fifth at 195 pounds as a sophomore in 2020. "I had the quickest pin in 19 seconds (over Stary). Plus, I hold the school record for pins at 38, which I did my sophomore season. Those are some great memories."

He plans to make more memories starting this fall at the University of Northern Colorado.

"It was love at first sight," Blackburn-Forst said. "The mountains, the fresh air, it's the BIG 12. What's not to like.

"Plus, the coaching staff and head coach Troy Nickerson are fantastic. I had a great visit there and I stayed with (Texas native) Branson Britten. Plus, knowing (former Lockport teammate and state champion) Baylor Fernandes, and Vincent Zerban (from Civic Memorial in Bethalto) made it all an easy choice for me."

For Thompson, coming to Lockport was also an easy choice.

After wrestling at Montini his freshmen season, he transferred to a Missouri school as a sophomore. But when things opened back up in Illinois after the COVID pandemic restrictions, he came back to Illinois and enrolled at Lockport.

"The Oster's know what they are doing and were very welcoming and loving," Thompson said of deciding to attend Lockport. "They have taken me to another level."

Now he's kept a promise he made to himself after losing once in the state tournament in the quarterfinals as a freshman. He then rallied to win his last four matches through the consolation round and finished third at 160 pounds in Class 3A for the Broncos

Not only did he not lose at state this season, but he also didn't lose at all. The junior kept his word and capped a 45-0 season with the Class 3A 170-pound title.

"When I lost here in the quarterfinals (to eventual state champion, Luke Odom) as a freshman, I told myself that's the only loss I'm going to take here ever again," Thompson said of losing at state two years ago. "I kind of fulfilled that. Moving on, consistency, working hard, that's what it will get you."

He defeated Marmion Academy senior, Tyler Perry by a count of 7-2 in the final. Ranked No. 2 in the country at 170 pounds by Flowrestling, Thompson won an amazing nine major tournaments including Donnybrook, Dvorak, Powerade, and Cheesehead, this season.

Thompson took a quick 2-0 lead after one period. He extended his lead to 3-0 with an early escape to begin the second period before adding four more points in the period on the way to his eventual 7-2 win over Perry (39-4).

"Like all of us, I was a little nervous, but I've been doing this for a while," Thompson said. "I've been going to every tournament since I was little, and I've been telling myself I'm the best kid in the country. If you want to be that guy, you have to be that guy on the mat when everyone's watching."

To open the state tournament, on Thursday, Feb. 17, Thompson had a pin in 2:25 over senior Elijah Chiaro from St. Charles East. The next day, in the quarterfinals, Thompson won by a tech fall in 4:30 over senior Will Schuessler from Downers Grove South. Later on that Friday in the semifinal, he won by another tech fall, this one 17-2 in 2:40 over Libertyville junior Austin Gomez.

A couple of weeks later, on March 2, Thompson announced that he had committed to continue his wrestling career at Oklahoma State University.

"After careful consideration, I'm thrilled to become an OSU Cowboy," Thompson said on Twitter. "I want to thank my family, my friends/teammates, and my coaches that have got me to this point."

But before he goes, he will look to become the third Porter with back-to-back state championships next season.

Unfortunately for Lockport, senior Keegan Roberson was injured in his regional title bout at 145 pounds on Saturday, Feb. 5 at Homewood-Flossmoor. He suffered a leg injury in a 7-5 loss to H-F sophomore Jaydon Robinson that kept him out the rest of the postseason.

Roberson was a wide receiver on the football team and a state champion caliber wrestler. He finished as state runner-up at 138 pounds in Class 3A IWCOA Tournament this past summer season. The title bout loss was by a 6-4 count in sudden victory overtime.

Also placing for the Porters at state was junior Logan Swaw (32-8) at 152 pounds. He finished sixth overall. He won decisions by the score of 5-0 and 4-2 in the first round and quarterfinals. But then lost a tough 5-1 decision to the eventual state champion, Ethan Stiles, in the semifinals. Swaw then lost his next two bouts in the wrestleback rounds.

Wrestling at 113 pounds, senior David Vukobratovich (30-11) had a pin in 3:16 in his opening round match. But then lost the next two bouts. At 126 pounds junior Jad Alwawi (23-20) lost his opening round match then won an 8-5 decision in the consolation round before dropping his final match.

Rounding out the half dozen Lockport wrestlers at state was Paul Kadlec (32-18) at 160 pounds. The senior lost a tight 3-2 decision in the opening round. But then had a 5-3 decision in the first consolation match and won his second consolation match by injury default. Then in the blood round, he got pinned by Plainfield North senior Jared Gumila (48-6) at the 5:14 mark.

Gumila had defeated Kadlec 10-5 in the title match of the Granite City Sectional.

"Paulie Kadlec wrestled a great match," Lockport coach Josh Oster said. "He was up 3-0 late in the third and got hit with a headlock. He left it all out there. That one hurts."

At the H-F Regional, all 14 of the Porter wrestlers finished in the Top Four. Only the Top Three advance to the sectional, however. So 11 Lockport wrestlers advanced. It would have been 12 but Roberson got hurt.

Vukobratovich (at 113), Swaw (at 152), Thompson (at 170), and Blackburn-Forst (at 220) won regional titles for the Porters. It all added up to a team regional championship.

Including last season's IWCOA state tournament regional title, it was Lockport's eighth straight regional championship as a team.

Lockport finished with 229 points, Lincoln-Way East (215.5) was second, followed by host H-F 3 (171), Lincoln-Way Central (113). Providence (63), Andrew (61), Rich Township (23.5), and Bloom Township (4) rounded out the 8-team regional.

The victory was a total team effort and even better because undefeated Lincoln-Way East had edged out the host Porters 34-33 on Jan. 20 in the SouthWest Suburban Conference Blue Division title match.

"Paul Rasp wrestled all season for us but he got hurt on Thursday (Feb. 3)," Oster said of the senior. "So I had a sophomore, Max Knezovich, register at 182. He hardly wrestled varsity all year (he's now 6-5) But he went out and won two matches for us before finishing fourth.

"Obviously (the Griffins) are good. They beat us in the dual. But we wrestled a little bit of a different lineup and our guys came through (in the regional)."

At the Granite City Sectional, on Saturday, Feb. 11, the Porters had a trio of sectional champions. Those were Swaw, Thompson, and Blackburn-Forst.