

By Randy Whalen

Through the ups and downs of this season, it was evident that Lockport Township boys wrestling was one thing.

A team.

That team is now heading back to the State Finals.

The Porters won nine bouts, including four falls, and defeated the host Warriors 42-22 in a Class 3A dual meet sectional on Tuesday evening, Feb. 21 at Lincoln-Way West.

Now Lockport will make its fourth straight and seventh state finals appearance in the past eight contested postseasons. The Porters, who placed third last year, will face Warren on Friday night at 7 PM in a state quarterfinal match at Grossinger Motors Arena in Bloomington.

"It's awesome to go back with Lockport," Lockport senior Logan Swaw said. "I think we are going to do a lot better than people's expectations. We have a strong bond as a team, we pick each other up and have each other's back."

Swaw was the Class 3A State Runner-Up at 160 pounds in the individual State Finals, with a 3-0 loss in the finals to senior Ethan Stiles from Conant, who became a three-time state champion. That was held on Saturday, Feb. 18 at the State Farm Center, in Champaign.

Now Swaw and his teammates will be back in the team State Finals thanks to some key performances.

Take sophomore Timmy O'Connor, who missed nearly two months of the season. But Tuesday evening he returned to the lineup in a big way and won a key match at 113 pounds. While the margin of victory for Lockport (17-8) ended up being big, O'Connor's match was pivotal. He came away with a 5-3 win in the fourth bout of the night and that put the Porters ahead 14-4.

"Yes, it was," O'Connor said when asked if it was big. "I hadn't wrestled in a competition in a while, for over a month. I dislocated my left knee in (the Flavin Invite at DeKalb on Dec. 30) tournament but I'm feeling better every day.

"I was nervous at the start but I kept looking at my coaches. They just said to go out and have fun. He (freshman Haden Anderson) got a first-period takedown. But I knew how to get out of it and had to

bounce back. When it was tied 2-2 after two periods I got another takedown. At state, I have to keep doing it for the team."

Things started well for the Warriors (16-3) as junior Nick Kavooras got an 11-1 major decision at 220. But Lockport captured the next five matches. That started with junior Wojciech Chrobak (16-0 tech fall) at heavyweight. Freshman Isaac Zimmerman (pin in 1:43), at 106, O'Connor came through, sophomore Liam Zimmerman (pin in 23 seconds) won at 120, and senior Jad Alwawi (12-0 major) had a victory at 126 to make it 24-4.

"We told Liam that he would probably be weighing in at 132," Lockport coach Jameson Oster said. "But then Justin Wardlow (state runner-up at 120) broke his elbow at state and then Liam had to get back down to 120. He's been the utility player for us and did a great job.

"Since the sectional, we've lost three guys to injury. But we have the motto of next man up and there's great depth on this team."

Wardlow broke his elbow in the third period of the 120-pound state semifinal but continued on and held on for a 6-5 victory over Teddy Flores from Maine South. With that win, he became the first Porter freshman to advance to the state championship match. But due to his injury, Wardlow couldn't wrestle for the title and medical forfeited to senior Massey Odiotti from Loyola Academy, who became the first state champion in that school's history.

Senior Carlos-Munoz Flores (132) and sophomore Payton Roberson (195) are the other two injured for the Porters. They hope to be back this weekend.

Senior Logan Kaminski (9-3 at 138), sophomore Durango Valles (10-3 at 152), Swaw (pin in 1:06 at 170), and senior Aidan Nolting (pin in 3:02 at 182) also had wins for Lockport. Kaminski was also a state placer, finishing sixth at 138 while Alwawi was also at the individual state tournament for the Porters at 126 pounds.

Lincoln-Way West and the Porters were slated to meet during the regular season on Thursday, Dec. 22 at Lockport. But that was postponed because of inclement weather and never rescheduled.

Senior Karter Guzman (pin in 2:43 at 132), sophomore Luke Siwinski (11-7 at 145), freshman Jimmy Talley (7-3 at 160), and senior Anthony Sherman (pin in 1:23 at 195) had wins for the Warriors.

"Going in, I saw there was a path to victory," Lincoln-Way West coach Brian Glynn said. "We were going to have to basically wrestle flawless. I believed in the group we had. They wrestled really solid but we didn't win a lot of those toss-up matches and in order for us to win, we were going to have to win all of them.

"Lockport is a very good team and they're experienced. We have a very young team and we've got some good years ahead of us so I think it was very important for us to be in this dual meet so the guys next year can have that expectation."

On the other mat, Yorkville pulled away at the end and registered a 35-23 win over Edwardsville to advance to state for the first time in 11 years. The Foxes (17-5) are coached by Oster's brother, Jake Oster, who won a state title for the Porters at 112 pounds in Class AA in 2004.

"We had 11 starters back and this was the goal," Jake Oster said of getting to state. Now our goal is to get a trophy."