

Take Down

Blair Oden ['18] executes a cross-face against his Frisco Wakeland opponent at the Arlington Martin meet, pinning him. **MICHAEL PATTERSON** | staff Photographer



Strength in numbers

By | Jack Kieffaber

Every wrestler has a signature move, and 126-pounder Blair Oden ['18] set up to use his: the cradle. His opponent shot for a single-leg and surged forward for a 2-point take-down. Oden drove hard, knowing if this failed him, he'd land face down on the mat—and the scoreboard.

He threw his legs back to counter his opponent's grasp, pressed down towards the mat, and swung on top, and reached across to grab his arm in a cross-face maneuver. Now, it was cradle time.

Blair leaned back and pinned his opponent for the win. It was one of two victories he'd take home during varsity wrestling's first meet of the year at Arlington Martin.

"It was the hardest tournament that we will go to this year and obviously the first so we were still shaking the rust off," Oden said, "If I'd won one more match, I would have come across a three time national champion, so the competition is really tough. I was getting out-muscled a little bit,

but the first day, I went 2-0, which I was happy with."

Oden was eliminated the next day after losing tight 2-point contests.

Oden's solid performance was also ESD's only showing, as the only other wrestler qualified for the tournament, senior Jackson Fitzgerald (145), failed his hydration test.

Filling the roster has always been an issue for the team, having never manned every weight class in any of its six years.

This makes placing in meets an extreme challenge, but that didn't stop the team from having a breakout record last season.

"Last year we finished at 6th at SPC, and 9th at state," Head Coach Riqui Villarreal said. "We had the most placers we have ever had in the history of the program and 9th place was our best finish in the history of the program."

Villarreal, in his second year, is well on his way to getting more athletes into the wrestling room.

"Of course we've got two returning All State guys in Jackson and Blair," he said, "but we also have a couple more returning

Varsity wrestling looks to build on historic year with fuller roster

sophomores who wrestled at state last year in [sophomores] Rowan Brown (120) and Baron Fletcher (120). As for new guys, I was thrilled to get a new football guy in [sophomore] Chase Toledo (182) to come out. They're showing promise, and I think they are going to stick with it."

Other new faces include freshman John Heldman (152), Christopher Talbot (132), a freshman with two years of middle school experience, and senior Henry Rathjen (160), a lacrosse player by trade who Villarreal is working to get ready to wrestle in counter matches.

Many of these newcomers got the chance to establish themselves early in their first dual meet against All Saints last week.

"Chase went 2-0 last night in his first two matches ever," Oden said. "Not to mention Christopher went 2-0 in his first high school meet. Rowan Brown had one match and won it, and Jackson barely lost in overtime, but it was a really good fight. I think, compared to last year's team—and even the coaches have said it—we're already way ahead of where

we were last year."

With small yet growing numbers, Villarreal is looking for his athletes to place higher as a team this season.

"My goal is to improve on our finishes team-wise and then to have as many or more all conference and all state wrestlers as we had last year," he said. "If everyone continues to improve the rate they are now, my aim is to have 10 or 11 guys wrestle at the SPC tournament and wrestle at state and improve on our finish."

Oden is shooting for a higher team ranking, but has some unfinished personal business, though he's not sure whether he'll commit to wrestling at nationals in Bethlehem, PA, if given the option, or stay in town to start lacrosse practice, Oden has all his focus on a Prep State title.

"My first goal is to win SPC again," he said. "My ultimate goal is to win Prep State. It's going to take more work this year. I think I am up to it and I'm on a team that can push me to get there."

The team wrestles again on Dec. 19 at R.L. Turner in Carrollton.