

The Macomb Daily

Family connections part of Dakota's wrestling foundation

Family matters



Dakota head coach Ed Skowneski III, front right, and assistant coach Keith Weiland (next to Skowneski) watch Cougar wrestlers compete in the Division 1 individual district at Dakota on Saturday. (DAVID DALTON for MediaNews Group)

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Being part of a sports team often creates a family-type atmosphere.

Dakota wrestling, however, already had that family environment in a lot of instances.

It starts at the top with head coach Ed Skowneski III who has his dad, Ed Skowneski Jr., as one of his assistants. Assistant coach Keith Weiland is joined on the team by his nephew, Caleb Weiland, and his son Troy.



Dakota's Jake Ferguson, right, wrestles during a Division 1 district final against Chippewa Valley. (KEVIN LOZON for MediaNews Group)

There are several brother combinations on the squad. Aiden and Logan Criteser both qualified for the Division 1 individual regional next weekend at Chippewa Valley. They'll be joined by their cousin, Jake Ferguson.

The Wilson brothers, Orion and Ozia, are both regional qualifiers. Sam Battaglia won a district championship as a heavyweight and his brother Nick is one of the promising young wrestlers on the team.

Two other brothers are Dom and Vinny deMusa.

The family connection isn't new to the Dakota program. The Alkazir brothers, Brandon and Austin, both placed in the state tournament before they graduated.

"That's part of building a program," Skowneski III said. "You build this long lineage of great wrestlers, good families, good people sticking together. It's great. And I'm able to hang out with my family."

Keith Weiland said there's a special bond among the family members on the team and they're usually good practice partners.

"It's a pretty good fight when they go against each other," he said. "My brother and I used to really go at it."

The family atmosphere goes beyond the blood relationships.

"A lot of our alumni come back and talk to our guys in practice," Skowneski III said. "They hang out. It's how you build a huge program."

There's a dynasty at Dakota. The Cougars have advanced to the final four in the state team tournament every year since 2016.

Dakota has placed wrestlers in the top eight at the individual state finals every year since Skowneski, a state champion at 145 for Chippewa Valley in 2003 and runner-up in 2002 and 2004, became head coach. The Cougars have had at least one individual state champion since 2018.

Last year, Caleb Weiland was first at 112 pounds. Brendan Ferretti was a three-time state champion winning at 130 pounds in 2021, 119 in 2020 and 112 in 2019. Nick Alayan won at 119 in 2019. Dakota had two state champions in 2018, Brock Prater at 103 and Layne Malczewski at 171.

The Cougars will wrestle in the team regional at Troy on Wednesday. In semifinals at 5:30 p.m., Dakota faces MAC Red rival Romeo and Troy takes on Rochester Adams. Winners meet for the championship at 7.

Six other Macomb County teams advanced to regionals.

At De La Salle Collegiate, the Pilots face Royal Oak and Fraser meets Lakeview in Division 1 semifinals at 5. The championship match starts at 6:30.

In Division 2 at Warren Woods-Tower, the Titans take on Fitzgerald while Brother Rice meets Walled Lake Western at 5. The final starts at 6:30.

In Division 3 at Richmond, the Blue Devils meet Otisville Lakeville and Algonac faces Mount Morris at 5:30. The final starts at 7.

Richmond will try to return to its winning ways in the regional.

The eight-time state champion lost to Imlay City in a 2022 final, marking the first time since 2008 that the Blue Devils didn't reach the state quarterfinal round.



Dakota's Aiden Criteser (top) wrestles Troy's Phillip Lucut at 175 pounds during the Individual district at Dakota on Saturday. (DAVID DALTON for MediaNews Group)