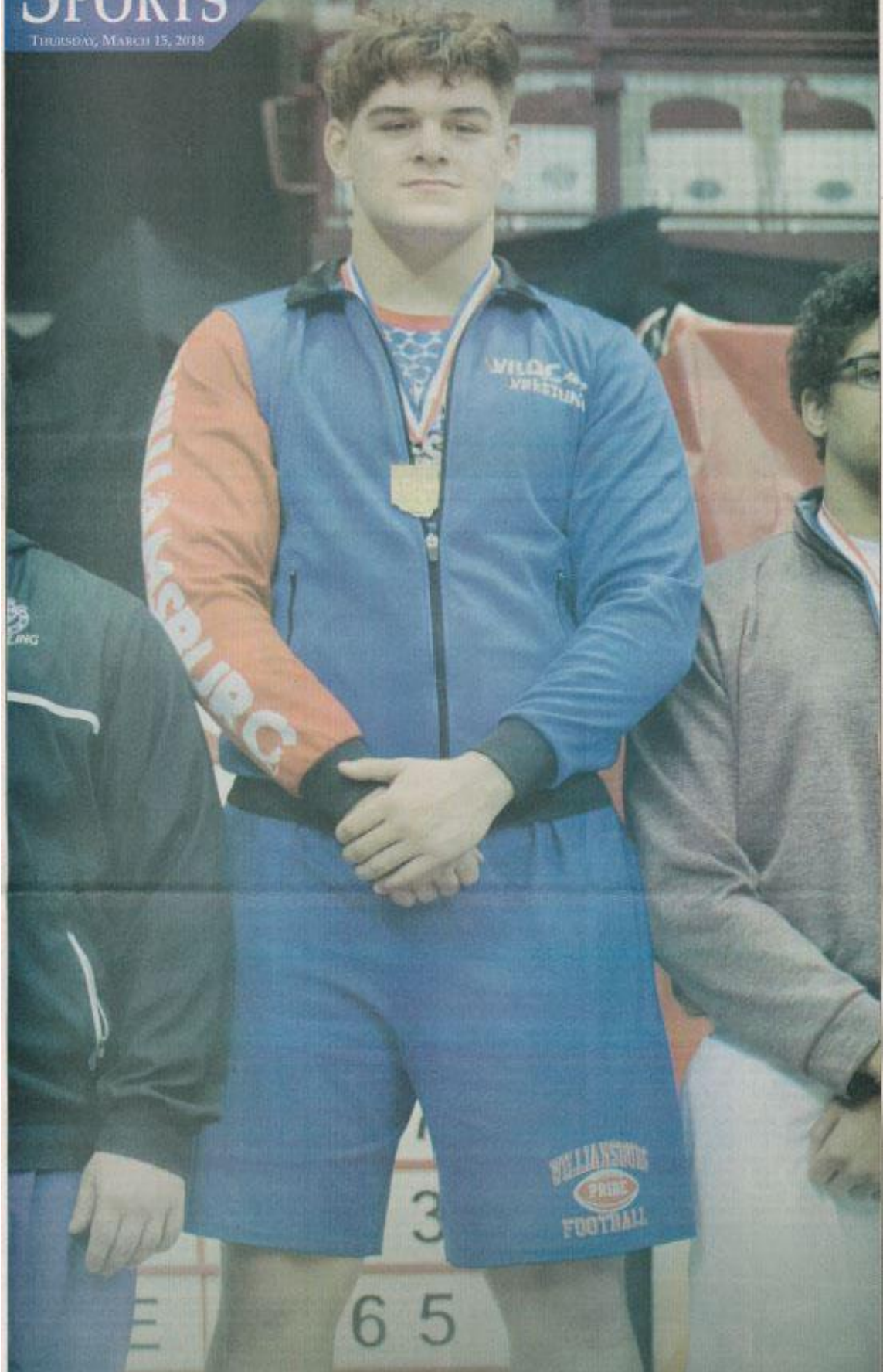


SPORTS

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Section B



They say the waiting is the hardest part.

Williamsburg senior Brian Stears had to wait another year before getting another shot at a state title, after finishing fourth in the 285-pound class in 2017. What's a few hours more?

With fans in Columbus and back home anxiously awaiting the results, Stears made sure the wait was worth it. The senior defeated Martin Ferry's Hunter Bodkin 3-2, becoming the first Wildcat in school history to win an individual wrestling title and the first Clermont County winner since Goshen's Chaz Gresham won in 2012. Williamsburg head coach Brandon Dean could not describe how he felt after the win, but Dean was able to provide historical context for the victory.

"I don't even have words for it," Dean said. "It's incredible. Incredible. He's the fourth Clermont County state champ. Ever. That's impressive. The first male athlete from Williamsburg to win a state title in anything. What a way to go out."

Stears could hardly describe how it felt to be the first male athlete at Williamsburg to win an individual title.

"It's amazing," Stears said. "It's absolutely extraordinary."

The path to victory was not an easy one. In Stears' first match of the tournament, he found himself leading 4-1 after an escape

to start the third. With 20 seconds left, Stears held a slim 4-3 lead over Pymatuning Valley's Caleb Bean. Just before the end of the match, Stears slipped, but was able to stay upright and avoid a two-point take-down, which would have cost him the match. Instead, he won to advance to the quarterfinals.

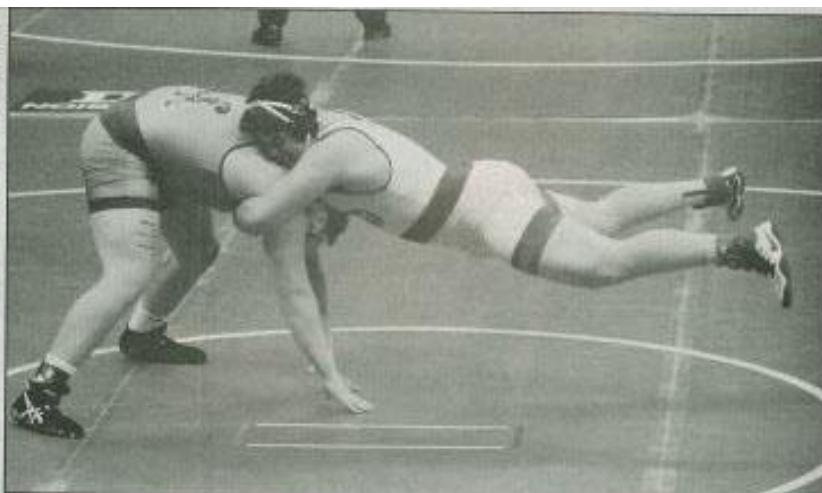
"That first match, I had those first match jitters," Stears said. "I was really nervous. I was able to calm my nerves and really just relax throughout the day, and that helped me a lot."

His second match went much smoother. The senior defeated Genoa Area's Noah Koch via pin in 2:34. Stears said scouting reports on Koch helped him figure out how to attack the junior.

"I had scouted him really well, and I knew what he was after," Stears said. "He was pretty underweight for a heavyweight, so I knew I could really ride him on top. In the first period, I got that last-second take down, which gave me some leeway. In the second, I was able to do what I wanted and attack him."

The next bout was a tight one. Stears squared off against Ashatbula St. John's Derek Elrod, a foe he was at least somewhat familiar with.

"I'd wrestled him before, over the summer," Stears said. "I beat him 5-4. I took him down with 12 seconds left, or he would've beaten me. I knew going into that I couldn't underestimate him. Before that match, we did a lot of scouting, a lot of gameplanning. He had been



Williamsburg's Brian Stears (right, in air) attempts to bring down Ashatbula St. John's Derek Elrod in the semifinals of the 285-pound class in Division III on Friday, March 9, 2018.

to a few big tournaments, so that made scouting easier. Coach Josh Sears gave me a great game plan going into it."

Stears escaped in the second period for a 1-0 lead, only for Elrod to tie the match at one in the third. Stears took Elrod down in the first overtime period for a 3-1 win in sudden victory, sending him to the championship match.

Martin Ferry's Hunter Bodkin was the only thing standing between Stears and the title. Stears said he scouted Bodkin going into the match, and decided he would leave nothing left in the tank.

"Coach Dean and Coach

Sears scouted him really well," Stears said. "We found a bunch of matches from Beekesville and things like that, and I'd watched him throughout the tournament because I figured he'd be the one I took on in the finals. I just went out there, used the gameplan I was given. I didn't try to conserve anything. I wanted to leave it all on the mat."

Both wrestlers did just that. Stears and Bodkin battled to a scoreless first period, with Stears choosing to take the lower position in the second round. He escaped easily, and held a 1-0 lead after the second period.

The script flipped in the third period. With Bodkin choosing the lower position, Stears surrendered a quick escape to tie the match at one.

The match stayed tied through the first one minute overtime period, before Stears scored two points in the next 30-second block. He was awarded one point on a stalling penalty, and scored a crucial second point on an escape.

Bodkin escaped in the second extra period, but he ran out of time.

"When he first came in

our room, he was on the fast track to nowhere, good," Dean said. "He fell in love with the sport, he fell in love with us. We fell in love with him. He's poured his heart and soul into it and academics. Now he's As, Es. Scored a 25, 26 on his ACTs. You're talking about a kid who went from Ds and Fs as a freshman to where he's at today, it's one of the most incredible transformation stories I've ever seen."

Dean added that Stears has gotten to where he is now by hard work, an attribute he said comes from Stears' father.

"When you go through as much in life as that kid's went through," Dean said. "He pinched every day. He's never had anything handed to him. He's worked for everything he got. His dad is phenomenal. I love his dad. His dad is a hard worker, he loves Brian and takes good care of him. He's tough. Brian's never got anything handed to him, he's worked for it. When you work for everything you've got in your life, that's what happens."

Stears finished the regular season a perfect 36-0. After the match, he thanked

the Williamsburg community for their support.

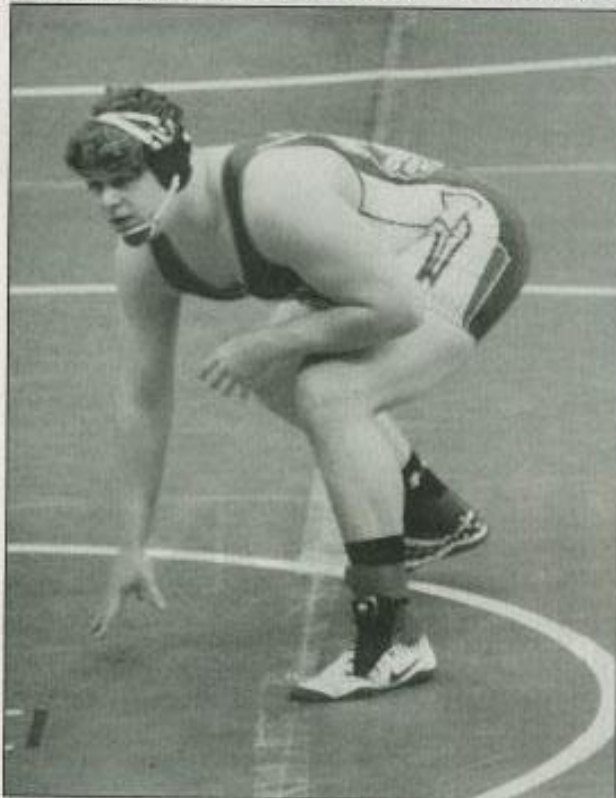
"I love the support," Stears said. "I love that the whole community is behind me, supporting me in all aspects of my life."

With the win, Stears now joins an elite group of Clermont County wrestlers as state title champions. Goshen's Gresham won at 189 pounds in 2011 and 182 pounds in 2012, defeating St. Piers Graham's Huston Evans in both matches.

Bathal-Tate's Joey Calhoun defeated Mantua-Crestwood's Doug Wright 10-8 at Wright State in 1991 to win the 130-pound title, the county's second championship win.

Clermont's first title winner was another Goshen Warrior, Mike Holcomb. Holcomb earned his heavyweight title by pinning Columbus-Watson's Dan Kimball in 3:40 in 1979.

Stears said he plans on continuing his wrestling career in college, and announced his verbal commitment to Bellarmine University on Twitter on Monday, March 12.



Williamsburg's Brian Stears looks for an opening against Genoa Area's Noah Koch on Friday, March 9, 2018.



Williamsburg's Brian Stears circles around Martin Ferry's Hunter Bodkin in the championship match of the 285-pound class on Saturday, March 10, 2018.