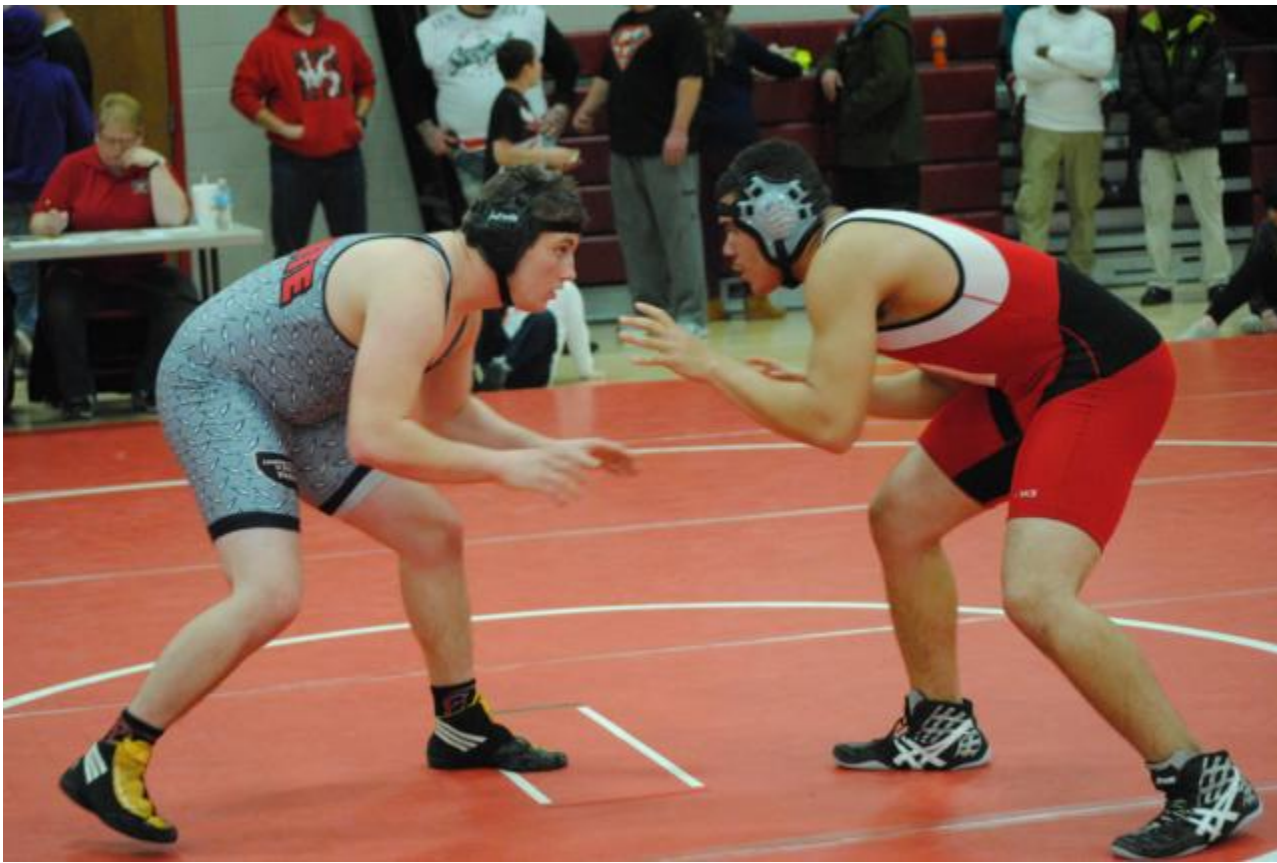


Alton wrestlers defeat Granite City in match for first time since 1938

December 11 2015 10:45 AM



GRANITE CITY – The last time an **Alton wrestling team** defeated **Granite City**, legendary Warrior wrestling coach **Bill “Red” Schmitt** was a senior at Alton High School.

That was back in 1938. A lot of things happened in the ensuing years, but a Redbird victory against a Warrior team that became one of the nation's top programs – much of it under the direction of Schmitt – hadn't been one of them.

That is, until Thursday night at Granite City's Memorial Gym Annex.

That's because the Redbirds fought tooth-and-nail with the Warriors and emerged with a 33-23 win to cap off a triangular meet that also featured **Civic Memorial**. Granite City defeated the Eagles 72-3 while the Redbirds scored a 78-6 win over CM.

The main focus, though, was on the clash between the two Southwestern Conference sides and the history between the two schools, and it was something **Redbird coach Eric Roberson** talked about with his team going into the meet.

“We kind of knew the history,” Roberson said. “I told me guys about a week or two ago we had a chance to do something that no team since **1938** had done, so they were pretty pumped; we had a good week of practice and it was great.

“I mean, that's a program over there. It's a storied program with a rich tradition. I thought it'd be a tough dual; I thought it would be close.”

Alton's wrestling program has had stops-and-starts over the years; the program was restarted in 1996 after a hiatus, with Roberson assuming coaching duties, and he's been running the program ever since. “We're just trying to start a history of our own,” Roberson said. “I've been here 20 years and that was the only conference team we had not beaten yet. We just have to keep going and keep wrestling tough

“We can feel good about it tonight, but tomorrow we have to forget all about it.”

“I think it's pretty big for them,” said **Warrior coach George Kirgan**. “You could tell they were pretty excited. The only thing I can focus on is what I do in the (wrestling) room and what I do to prepare. I think our guys were ready; they were prepared. We just didn't have enough firepower.”

Granite has had some issues facing the team so far this season “We're wrestling with a big group; they do their best,” Kirgan said. “A lot of those kids weren't even varsity in middle school. We've got a lot of kids who are walking the halls who could be in the room that aren't.

“We've had kids who are injured; we've had five or six guys who are out injured this year, including Matt Wiley and Joe Garcia...it's hard but what can you do? All you can do is focus on improving; that's what my focus is on this year.”

Kirgan felt the match turned at the 126-pound bout, where Court Wilson managed to score a 2-1 win over Greg Marti. “That was huge for them,” Kirgan said. “We had to win that match to give ourselves a good shot. Losing that match, we had to pin the last

two guys; those two guys (Connor Broyles and Jaelyn Watkins) are tough and then we had our hands full.”

For his part, Roberson felt that once the Redbirds began to roll after falling behind early in the middleweight bouts, the momentum began to shift. “We had to crawl back slow,” Roberson said. “We just got pinned in those middleweights, and then once we got on a roll, we were able to get back in it three points at a time. That was nerve-racking.

“Probably with some of the lightweights – 120, 126, 132 – that's where we probably started chipping away.”

he Warriors did take an early lead with wins at 152 (Brandon Bettag over Montrail Johnson), 160 (Andre Weathers over Nolan Wozczwinski) and 170 (Chase Nelson on a forfeit) before Keonte Holmes won Alton's first bout at 182 over Kyle Thompson. Reggie Rhines (over Nick Zambito) at 195, KeOndrick Russell (over John Buckingham) at 220 and Ryan Kane (over Devvon Boyd) at 285 continued the Redbird surge heading into the lightweight bouts.

Mitchell Milsap, who defeated Garrett Sims at 106, halted the Alton momentum for a few moments, but Nigel Ward got it back for the Redbirds with a win over Garrett Hooper at 113. Hunter Hobbs then upended Preston Nicard at 120 before Wilson's narrow win at 126 over Marti, followed by Broyle



s' win over Jared Skaggs at 132 to essentially clinch the match. John Hirsch downed Watkins at 138, but only by a decision that gave the Warriors three team points to officially clinch the win for the Redbirds. Alejandro Lopez then put the exclamation point on it with a win over Wilyonde Bell at 145.

The Eagles did have a pair of wins for **Brandon Carpenter in their 195-pound bouts**, Carpenter getting a pin over Rhines and a decision over Zambito.

Alton returns to the mats for a SWC match at home against Collinsville Dec. 17, while Granite City host Edwardsville that same night while Civic Memorial takes part in Saturday's Pontiac Tournament before hosting Highland and O'Fallon Tuesday evening.



