

# Bethalto's Vinny Zerban sets stage for bright future with Illinois Kids Wrestling Federation state title

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer  
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BETHALTO – Vinny Zerban will be entering Civic Memorial high school next year as a state champion.

Zerban, an eighth-grader at Trimpe Middle School in Bethalto and a member of the Bethalto Bulls wrestling club, won the 108-pound senior state championship at the

recent Illinois Kids Wrestling Federation state tournament at BMO Harris Bank Center in Rockford, winning four bouts on his way to the title.

“I'm really proud of him,” said Zerban's stepfather, Howard Couch. “It's a huge accomplishment – he's a two-time state champion now (Zerban won the 89-pound title in the 2016 senior state tournament) and we're all proud of what he's done.”

Zerban defeated Jeremy Jakowitsch of the Barrington Broncos club 12-2 in his opening bout of the tournament, then advanced to the semifinals with a 2:18 fall over Joey Cape of the Super Soldiers Wrestling Club. Zerban then scored a 16-0 technical fall win over Tyler Milani of the Tinley Park Bulldogs club to move into the final, where Zerban took the crown with a 9-2 win over Michael Caliendo of the Batavia Wrestling Club.

The Bulls finished in seventh place in the senior team competition with 65 points, with the team title going to Fox Valley Elite of the Chicagoland area with 236.5 points.

“It's not an easy sport,” Zerban, who has wrestled for the past seven years, said. “I've learned quite a bit of lessons from wrestling, just to keep going and to keep working hard.”

Zerban will be part of an upcoming trip to Europe organized by the Wrestling World Tours organization; the group will be visiting Finland, Estonia and Russia in late March and early April to take part in a major youth Freestyle and Greco-Roman tournament in Estonia and training with wrestlers from the region they'll be visiting in the the styles at the tournament, which are the styles of wrestling used in the Olympics.

“It'll be a learning experience for him going to Europe,” Couch said. “We focus more on what's called folkstyle wrestling here; you're on your feet more in Greco-Roman and freestyle wrestling, but he'll be facing some of the best competition while he's in Europe.”