

Mackenzie Pratt Makes History As Tigers' First Girls Wrestling State Champion, Is An iCAN Clinic Female Athlete of Month

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March 2 2023 4:00 PM



EDWARDSVILLE - Sophomore girls wrestler Mackenzie Pratt made history for Edwardsville High on Feb. 25, 2023, as she became the first state champion in the program's short history, winning the 140-pound class by sweeping all four of her matches in the state tournament held at Grossinger Motors Arena in Bloomington.

Pratt also became the Tigers' third state champion coached by Jon Wagner, who retired as Edwardsville coach at the end of the season, following boys champions Noah Surtin and Luke Odom. It was indeed a history-making weekend for Pratt and the Tigers.

Pratt is an iCAN Clinic Female Athlete of the Month for the Tigers.

As Pratt recalled the weekend, she said it was both exciting and a bit worrisome at the same time.

"I was happy and excited," Pratt said during an interview. "It just made me realize I had worked so hard to win state and I was relieved that so much pressure was off my shoulders."

Pratt qualified for the inaugural state meet in 2022, along with two other Tiger wrestlers, and made it through as part of a five-person contingent to this year's tournament. It helped make things that much sweeter for her.

"Yes, because we had three girls who went last year," Pratt said, "and this year, to have two more girls go was really exciting. It was, like, nervewracking and exciting at the same time."

In all the weight classes, the competition was very much top-notch and high-quality. Pratt, who finished the season at 30-1, won three of her four matches by fall, starting with a pin of Perla Lomeli of Carpentersville Dundee-Crown at 1:16, followed by a quarterfinal win by fall over Annalisa Gibbons of Galesburg at 1:10. She then defeated Valeria Rodriguez of Schaumburg 5-3 in a very close match in the semifinals, then pinned Alivia Ming of Goreville at 1:07 to win the championship.

Of all of her matches at state, Pratt felt the semifinal bout against Rodriguez was her most difficult.

"She was very strong," Pratt said, "stronger than most of my other opponents I wrestled. I just worked off her mistakes, like when she didn't pressure off me a couple of times. You have to work off her mistakes and take advantage of them."

Going into the final against Ming, Pratt felt very calm and confident, yet also very excited for the opportunity as well.

"My feelings were calm," Pratt said. "I was calm and relaxed, yet excited at the same time."

Wagner confirmed Pratt's feelings and also felt that she was going to win the bout and the championship.

"Well, I felt great about Mackenzie winning the state championship," Wagner said. "She had a great tournament, Mackenzie is aggressive and very dedicated. This weekend, she was very motivated and smiling and when Mackenzie is smiling, that's when she's at her best."

Pratt was very appreciative of all the support she received from her family, teammates, and coaches, and also felt very good about her achievement.

"I feel very special," Pratt said, "because not a lot of girls get to do what I do and not all girls get to accomplish what I did."

Wagner said that Pratt was his final state champion wrestler and his only girls' champion to date was a very special happening for all involved.

"Yes, it was very stressful," Pratt said, "because it was his last year. I wanted to make sure he got to go out with a state championship."

Pratt also credited her stepfather, Dan Moerlein, for introducing her to the sport and helping with her development.

"If he didn't enjoy wrestling so much," Pratt said, "I wouldn't be here today."

Pratt has two more years to go with the Tigers' program and already feels like she's part of a very special time in Edwardsville High athletics.

"It just feels pretty good to start the girls' wrestling program," Pratt said, "and leave it off on a good note when I graduate."

As far as plans beyond high school, Pratt has some very ambitious goals she hopes to achieve in wrestling.

"I hope to wrestle in college and I also hope to compete in the Olympics and the world championships and stuff like that," she said.

Overall, Pratt is very happy with how she and the Tigers' season turned out and the close-knit relationship she had with her teammates, but also sad at the same time, as she

thinks some of the younger girls who tried out wrestling, some for possibly the first time, may not be back.

"Sad and happy, those are my feelings," Pratt said. "Sad for what I'm leaving behind because I don't know if some of the freshman girls will be coming back. Happy that the season is over and I can start lifting heavy again," she said with a laugh.