Lights crown three regional champs
MSU-N matmen send six grapplers to nationals after Saturday's NAIA West Regional in Havre
By George Ferguson
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Going into Saturday’s NAIA West Regional Qualifier, Montana State University-Northern head coach Tyson Thivierge noted just how tough the region is, and always is. And, after a busy day inside the Armory Gymnasium, Thivierge’s assessment of the tournament was spot on.

The No. 5 Lights struggled to keep pace in the team title race, as Northern was without two of its top point getters in senior Jared Miller and junior Willie Miller. But, the Lights, who finished fifth with 83.5 points, still came away with three champions, six national qualifiers and seven placers Saturday afternoon.

"It was a tough tournament," Thivierge said. "Our region is the toughest in the NAIA in my opinion. The last three years, look at what Southern Oregon, us and Great Falls have done at the national tournament. There is a lot of talent in our region and this tournament was no different."

Leading the way for the Lights was the stellar trio of Ethan Hinebauch, Garrett DeMers and Toby Cheff. All three MSU-N grapplers won regional titles Saturday, and will be top seeds at the NAIA national tournament in two weeks.

Hinebauch had a short work day, as pins over Simpson’s Dominic Merlo and UGF’s Brock Picard got him into the final. There, the top-ranked wrestler in the country at 165 pounds was supposed to square off against arch rival Eric Lopez of Menlo. But Lopez had to forfeit the match with a wrist injury, and Hinebauch, who had already beaten Lopez twice this season, saw his Armory Gymnasium career come to end.

DeMers and Cheff had more work to do Saturday, and they did it very well.

At 197 pounds, DeMers was the No. 2 seed and had lost to Southern Oregon’s top-ranked Charles Johnson twice this season. But in the final, DeMers was spectacular in a 9-6 decision, giving the Lights their second regional champ of the day.

“He (Johnson) beat me two times during the regular season, and that was really disappointing,” DeMers, who’s a returning All-American said. "So I really wanted to beat him here, and get a good seed at nationals. We had been working all week to beat him. I put everything I had into that match, and it feels really good to do it here. That was one goal, and now it’s on to my next goal which is to win a national championship."

Winning a national title will also be the goal for Cheff. The junior heavyweight missed a big chunk of the season with an injury, but he hasn’t lost since he returned in December, and that trend continued Saturday. Cheff pinned UGF’s Dylan Lemery in the semifinals, then beat second-ranked Scott Brasil of Menlo 5-1 in the championship match. The win sends Cheff back to the national tournament for the third straight season, and he’ll go in as the top-ranked heavyweight in the country.
“Being off the mat was hard, watching the guys practice every day made me hungry to get back on the mat,” Cheff said. “So I worked really hard to get back, I worked really hard on getting in shape while I was out. I had great partners in the practice room who helped me get back, and honestly, my biggest weapon as a heavyweight is being in better shape than the other guys. And that helped me out a lot today.”

Northern’s three big guns who won championships Saturday, along with Willie Miller, who received a wildcard entry at 184 pounds, are all certainly capable of going after national titles in two weeks. But the Lights also got a big boost from junior Cole McArthur at 174 pounds. McArthur, wrestling in arguably the toughest weight class in the tournament, finished third, punching his ticket to the national tournament. McArthur suffered his only loss of the day at the hands of SOU super star Brock Gutches, but he came right back to win by decision over Matthew Tsarnas of Simpson in the consolation semifinals, then win an exciting 6-5 decision over SOU’s Reed Tennyson in the consolation match. It was a huge win for McArthur, who’s really begun to come on strong the last couple weeks.

Northern’s Tommy Cooper (157) and Cesar Montes (141) got close to wrestling their way into nationals, but came up just short. Both wrestlers won their fifth-place matches, and Montes got into a challenge match for fourth, but fell in a tough decision in that match. Cooper didn’t get a challenge match but his performance Saturday was enough for the region's coaches to send him to the national tournament via a wildcard entry.

"I thought Tommy really stepped up," Thivierge said. "He came back and wrestled lights out in his last match and that showed the other coaches that he was deserving of going to nationals."

In the final team race, SOU and UGF went head-to-head all day, but it was the Raiders who came out on top with 158.5 points. SOU won three individual titles Saturday, but qualified an outstanding 10 grappers for the national tournament. The Argos, of head coach and former Northern standout Caleb Schaeffer, scored 154 points and won three individual titles, while also sending 10 wrestlers to nationals. Menlo was fourth with 93.5 points.

And while Northern didn't threaten for the team title Saturday, Thivierge really liked how strong his team finished the day.

"We knew guys like Ethan and Garrett and Toby, we knew what they were capable of doing and they went out and did it, and I'm happy for them," Thivierge said. "We also knew we would have to wrestle well in the lighter weights in this tournament, and we didn't do that well enough. It just wasn't our day there.

"But, I liked how we finished the day," he added. "A lot of times, we come out and start off like gang busters and then fade as the day goes on. But this tournament, we didn't start off how we wanted to, but I thought guys finished really well. I thought we got better and better as the day went on."

The Lights will now have a week off before heading to Topeka, Kansas for the 2015 NAIA national tournament, which runs March 6-7.

**NAIA West Regional**

**Team Scores**

Southern Oregon 158.5, Great Falls 154, Embry-Riddle 94, Menlo 93.5, Montana State University-Northern 83.5, Simpson 55.5, Warner-Pacific 32.5.

**MSU-N Individual Results**

**125 - Riley Miller**

Quarterfinal - Chandler Strand (Embry-Riddle) 11-9 won by major decision over Riley Miller (Montana State-Northern) 12-9 (MD 16-8); Cons. Round 1 - Casey Coulter (Southern Oregon) 8-7 won by decision over Riley Miller (Montana State-Northern) 12-9 (Dec 4-2)

**133 - Justin Rodgers**

Champ. Round 1 - Justin Rodgers (Montana State-Northern) 5-28 received a bye () (Bye); Quarterfinal - Michael Ruiz (Great Falls) 29-4 won by fall over Justin Rodgers (Montana State-Northern) 5-28 (Fall 0:51);
Cons. Round 2 - Justin Rodgers (Montana State-Northern) 5-28 received a bye () (Bye); Cons. Round 3 - Nick Oliver (Embry-Riddle) 9-19 won by decision over Justin Rodgers (Montana State-Northern) 5-28 (Dec 6-5)

141 - Cesar Montes (5th Place)

Quarterfinal - Amari Sengsavanh (Warner Pacific) 20-18 won by decision over Cesar Montes (Montana State-Northern) 11-22 (Dec 14-8); Cons. Round 1 - Cesar Montes (Montana State-Northern) 11-22 won by fall over Julius Peek (Embry-Riddle) 3-7 (Fall 2:12); Cons. Semi - Steele Escobedo (Menlo) 2-1 won by decision over Cesar Montes (Montana State-Northern) 11-22 (Dec 7-4); 5th Place Match - Cesar Montes (Montana State-Northern) 11-22 won by decision over Amari Sengsavanh (Warner Pacific) 20-18 (Dec 6-4).

149 - Drew Randall

Champ. Round 1 - Jawyne Fambrough (Warner Pacific) 12-18 won by fall over Drew Randall (Montana State-Northern) 8-9 (Fall 6:49); Cons. Round 1 - Drew Randall (Montana State-Northern) 8-9 received a bye () (Bye); Cons. Round 2 - Robert Workman (Embry-Riddle) 10-13 won by fall over Drew Randall (Montana State-Northern) 8-9 (Fall 4:22).

149 - Logan Foster

Champ. Round 1 - Robert Workman (Embry-Riddle) 10-13 won by fall over Logan Foster (Montana State-Northern) 5-19 (Fall 2:42); Cons. Round 1 - Logan Foster (Montana State-Northern) 5-19 received a bye () (Bye); Cons. Round 2 - Jawyne Fambrough (Warner Pacific) 12-18 won by fall over Logan Foster (Montana State-Northern) 5-19 (Fall 4:00).

157 - Tommy Cooper (5th Place)

Quarterfinal - Dalton Urrutia (Southern Oregon) 28-5 won by decision over Tommy Cooper (Montana State-Northern) 26-23 (Dec 12-5); Cons. Round 1 - Tommy Cooper (Montana State-Northern) 26-23 won by major decision over Eric Luna (Warner Pacific) 8-3 (MD 13-4); Cons. Semi - Colin Merkley (Embry-Riddle) 24-9 won by decision over Tommy Cooper (Montana State-Northern) 26-23 (Dec 9-3); 5th Place Match - Tommy Cooper (Montana State-Northern) 26-23 won by major decision over Travis Patrick (Southern Oregon) 13-10 (MD 19-5).

165 - Ethan Hinebauch (Champion)

Quarterfinal - Ethan Hinebauch (Montana State-Northern) 46-5 won by fall over Dominic Merlo (Simpson) 9-18 (Fall 1:00); Semifinal - Ethan Hinebauch (Montana State-Northern) 46-5 won by fall over Brock Picard (Great Falls) 20-22 (Fall 3:25); 1st Place Match - Ethan Hinebauch (Montana State-Northern) 46-5 won by forfeit over Eric Lopez (Menlo) 2-1 (For.).

174 - Cole McArthur (3rd Place)

Quarterfinal - Cole McArthur (Montana State-Northern) 9-8 won by fall over Kolbjorn Skafestad (Great Falls) 13-13 (Fall 6:57); Semifinal - Brock Gutches (Southern Oregon) 27-2 won by fall over Cole McArthur (Montana State-Northern) 9-8 (Fall 4:56); Cons. Semi - Cole McArthur (Montana State-Northern) 9-8 won by decision over Matthew Tsarnas (Simpson) 10-12 (Dec 2-1; 3rd Place Match - Cole McArthur (Montana State-Northern) 9-8 won by decision over Reed Tennyson (Southern Oregon) 12-9 (Dec 6-5)

197 - Garrett DeMers (Champion)

Quarterfinal - Garrett DeMers (Montana State-Northern) 43-10 won by fall over Erik Medina
(Simpson) 9-8 (Fall 1:57); Semifinal - Garrett DeMers (Montana State-Northern) 43-10 won by fall over Jonathan Moskowiz (Warner Pacific) 0-2 (Fall 0:24); 1st Place Match - Garrett DeMers (Montana State-Northern) 43-10 won by decision over Charles Johnson (Southern Oregon) 22-5 (Dec 9-6).

285 - Toby Cheff (Champion)

Quarterfinal - Toby Cheff (Montana State-Northern) 14-0 received a bye (); Bye; Semifinal - Toby Cheff (Montana State-Northern) 14-0 won by fall over Dylan Lemery (Great Falls) 22-13 (Fall 0:24); 1st Place Match - Toby Cheff (Montana State-Northern) 14-0 won by decision over Scott Brasil (Menlo) 2-1 (Dec 5-1).

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