

SPECIAL FEATURE

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By Dennis Garcia
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ASHEBORO - Last Saturday at the 3-A Midwest Regional Wrestling Tournament, Asheboro High School wrestling coach Jake Berrier and one of his top wrestlers, Xavier Santos, had a big decision to make.

Santos, who had to feverishly cut three pounds late in order to qualify for the 113-pound weight category, appeared to be suffering from the effects of losing that weight in a very short period of time.

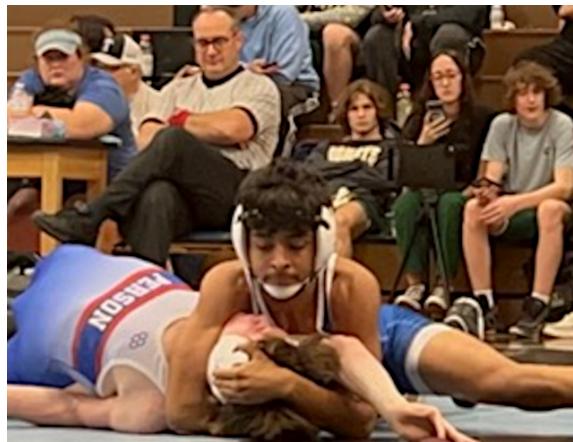
After recording two first-period falls to advance to the semifinals and earn a spot in this week's state wrestling tournament, Santos dropped a slim decision to Dudley's Aiden Rodriguez in his semifinal match. It was then that Berrier and Santos had what perhaps looked like from the outside a hard decision to make. Berrier said it wasn't hard at all.

Because of the rapid weight loss, Santos was not up to par for his final match of the night, which would have determined if he entered the state tournament as a third or fourth seed. Berrier said he felt best if Santos took a medical forfeit that match instead of wrestling at less than full strength.

"He went to bed that last night and couldn't get to sleep," Berrier said. "When you're cutting weight, your Adrenaline is going and you can't sleep. Going into that last match, I just saw how tired he was and mentally fatigued. There are people who are not going to understand medical forfeit. Some people do it just so their wrestler wouldn't have to wrestle. We weren't thinking that way. We were thinking about protecting our kid."

Santos said it was the right decision.

"I felt tired, I couldn't go to sleep until 3 or 4 in the morning," Santos said. "My legs were sore, my butt was sore from sitting on the bike. I felt like I was at about 80 percent. I was a little upset at that time



Asheboro senior Xavier Santos. Photo provided.



Xavier Santos (right) in action. Photo provided.

(not being able to wrestle), but Coach told me I was still on track for the state championship." With four No. 1 seeds (regional champions), four No. 2 seeds (regional runner-ups) and four No. 3 seeds (consolation finals winners), earning one of the four fourth seeds means an uphill climb to the title. In the opening round set for Thursday at the Greensboro Coliseum, Santos is paired against First Flight's Jacob Kresicki, a No. 1 seed, who is 41-3 on the year. But seeds are just numbers and all 16 participants in the weight class are capable of running the table.



*Asheboro's Santos (top) earlier this season.
Photo provided.*

wrestling at 115 pounds. This year he enters as a fourth seed, but that seed is just a number. "It all depends on your mentality," Santos said. "Records go out the window. You have to beat everyone there."

Santos is certainly capable of doing that no matter what number is beside his name.

"I believe Xavier Santos is still the best 113-pound wrestler in the state," Berrier said. "He is going to go out and bust that bracket up. There have got to be people scratching their heads on how he is a fourth seed. We just felt like protecting him with the way he felt was the best way to go."

Santos, a three-year starter who will take a 42-7 record into the state tournament, won the Midwest Regional last season and placed fourth in the state. He also qualified for the state tournament as a sophomore.

With two pounds being added to each weight class for the championship, Santos will be