

UNI WRESTLING ENDS 2003-04 SEASON WITH CONSECUTIVE 10 WIN SEASONS AND 21ST REGIONAL TITLE

The University of Northern Iowa wrestling squad finished the 2003-04 season in 21st place at the 2004 NCAA Championships in St. Louis. Although the Panthers were picked to finish 11th in the tournament, UNI still concluded a highly successful season. At Nationals, seven Panthers represented the Purple and Gold, including Chris Helgeson (125), Dylan Long (141), Jeff Harrison (149), Nick Baima (157), Hesston Johnson (165), Eric Hauan (174) and Sean Stender (197). At the end of the three-day event, two Panthers were crowned all-Americans.

UNI was led by returning all-American Sean Stender and three-time national qualifier Eric Hauan. Stender, who finished fourth at Nationals in 2003, returned to his all-American status with a sixth-place finish. A Donahue IA, native and North Scott graduate, he finished his junior campaign with a 16-9 record. He was awarded the third seed, despite missing half the season due to being academic ineligible.

The 197-pounder started his tournament run against Matt Daddino of West Virginia. Stender made quick work of Daddino, rolling to a 12-2 major decision. His next victim was Zach Garren of North Carolina State. He again proved to be the better wrestler as he came away victorious, 17-4.

In quarterfinal action, Stender used a solid takedown to prevail for the win in the third period over Pat DeGain of Indiana. In the semi-finals, Stender was matched with 10th seed Ryan Fulsaa of Iowa. Late in the third period, it looked as though Stender was on his way to the finals. But a feisty Fulsaa was able to record a takedown with two seconds remaining in the match to knock out Stender, 8-7.

In the semi-final match for third place, Stender faced a familiar foe in J.D. Bergman of Ohio State. In dual competition this season, Stender routed Bergman, but Bergman would have his revenge going on to prevail and take third-place honors. In Stender's final match for fifth place, it was second seed Chris Skretkovic of Hofstra whom he was paired with. Heading into the third period in a tight match, Stender aggravated a rib and defaulted the bout, earning a highly respected sixth place finish and all-American honors.

Junior Hauan was back yet another year and received the fifth seed in the tournament. The Sturgis, SD, native found himself paired with Keith Clifton of The Citadel. Hauan could barely break a sweat as just :28 seconds rolled off the clock before a medical default was decided by Clifton. Advancing on, Hauan then escaped a 3-2 decision over E.K. Waldhaus of Oklahoma.

In quarterfinal action, fourth seed Ryan Lange of Purdue caused trouble for the Panther. The standard seven-minute match would not be enough for these two as they battled into two overtimes. With 13 seconds remaining in double overtime, Lange marked a takedown and escaped with a 7-5 win. After rebounding with two consecutive wins, Hauan was in the semi-finals of the third-place match. Hauan looked to erase two regular season losses against Tyler Nixt of Iowa. The two men grappled through three periods, resulting in a 6-1 Nixt win. Hauan then moved to a fifth-place battle with a rematch against Lange. Going down to the wire yet again, Lange moved in for a takedown to capture a 3-1 win. The 174-pounder went on to finish his junior season with a 35-7 record and all-American status.

Coming into the tournament, senior Long had high expectations, reeling from a runner-up performance in 2003. Long tore through the regular season, consistently ranked in the top 10 at 141. During a brief stint, he did grab the top spot. Heading into Nationals, he was awarded the sixth seed. Although he did not wrestle as well as many hoped, clearly he was the leader of the 2004 Panther squad. During the regular season, he captured an unprecedented fourth West Regional title. He also held a nine-match winning streak. Long ended his senior campaign with a 25-6 record, compiling an unparalleled 101 wins throughout the four years in a Panther uniform.

Since the beginning of the season, no two wrestlers battled it out on the mat harder than two-time national qualifier Jon Garvin and Harrison. For Head Coach Brad Penrith and his staff, they were left in constant uncertainty which man to put on the mat. The two were ranked in the top 20 in either *Intermat* or the *Wrestling Mall* polls during the season. With anticipation building, Penrith needed to decide which wrestler he would send to compete for a chance at Nationals. The competition finally spilled into wrestle-offs before the West Regional. In wrestle-offs, Harrison managed to control both matches, earning a shot at a national title. "Harrison is wrestling as good as anyone on the team and we could see him doing some severe damage down the road. Garvin has been a huge part of the success of UNI wrestling and will continue to be a huge part of this team throughout the remainder of the season. He has been a leader on and off the mat," said Penrith.

The 2004 senior class held a strong presence on the mat for UNI. The class consisted of Long, Patrick Garcia, Johnson, Garvin, and Andrew Kruse. Garcia came into his senior season with unlimited potential. After struggling through most of the year, his season ended at the West Regionals. He was just shy of making it back to the NCAA Tournament for a second consecutive year, taking third place. He ended his UNI career with a 36-27 record. Johnson was a permanent fixture at the 165 slot. He excelled all season and often was looked at to cause an upset. Johnson advanced to his first post-season experience, taking second place at the West Regional. He ended his collegiate wrestling career with a mark of 66-35.

Garvin completed his career at UNI with a 58-43 record. He constantly was looked upon for leadership. His season did end sooner than he wanted, but still he was a major contributor.

Many Panther fans may not have seen Kruse on the mat much this season. He showed devotion in the practice room and was a key supporter of the team. Kruse tallied up six wins and eight losses in his career.

At West Regionals in Colorado Springs, CO, the Panthers grasped their 19th consecutive title, defeating individuals from Air Force, Fresno State, Wyoming and Eastern Illinois. Sophomore Helgeson was one of the men advancing to St. Louis. He captured his first regional title after taking runner-up honors a year ago.

A familiar face at the NCAA tournament the past three years has been Long. With a win over Blake Gunter of Wyoming, Long grabbed his fourth consecutive regional title in a Panther uniform.

Harrison was awarded the No. 1 overall seed in the tournament. In his West Regional debut, he came away with third place and was one of three wrestlers to receive a wild card.

Redshirt freshman Baima also made his debut by taking runner-up honors. Baima was defeated by the no. 1 seed, Andrew Shuler of Wyoming. Johnson tallied up a second place finish at 165. The senior lost to two-time West Regional champ Levi Provost.

To no ones surprise, Hauan rolled up another title. The 174-pounder was flawless in his quest for a second regional title. Stender, who finished sixth at the NCAA's this year, returned to Nationals riding back-to-back 197 titles.

The Panthers finished the dual meet season with a 10-6 record and ranked 16th in the nation by *Intermat Wrestling*. In the first dual action of the season, UNI buried South Dakota State 32-9. UNI then got a dose of its own medicine at the hands of 20th ranked Wisconsin, 24-13. Feeling the absence of returning all-American Stender, the Panthers continued to struggle at 197.

After a loss in Iowa City, the Panthers rebounded, sweeping up five consecutive wins heading into the National Duals. With dog fights against Minnesota and Penn State, UNI took down Iowa State 22-21, snapping the two-loss skid. The Cyclones came to town a week later looking for revenge. Stender was back in the line-up, but an injured Johnson sat for the Panthers. The seventh-ranked Cyclones needed the last match to scrape by with a 19-16 victory.

UNI then hit the road for three matches in the last leg of the season. Against the two defending national champs in Oklahoma State and Division II Central Oklahoma, UNI lost to the Cowboys but easily pinned a win over the Bronchos, 35-3. In Tempe, AZ, against Arizona State, Hauan racked up a decision in the last match, enough to take down the No.18 Sun Devils, 17-16. In the last home dual of the season, UNI closed out another 10-win season over the Buckeyes, 22-18, to finish the season 10-6 and ranked 18th by the *Wrestling Mall*.

In mid-December, the Panthers lost Penrith's top assistant, Derek Mountsier. Mountsier was in his fourth season with the Panthers and was the first assistant hired by Penrith. Mountsier has moved to Tulsa, OK, to be near his fiancée and is entering private business. Fourth-year assistant Randy Pugh replaced Mountsier as head assistant. UNI's other two assistants include Jose DeAnda and Tolly Thompson.

UNI continues to be looked at as one of the dominant wrestling programs in the nation. Year after year, the Panthers scratch and crawl their way into the top 15 programs. With six national qualifiers and two all-Americans returning next season, the Panthers undoubtedly will be prime for a 2004-05 tournament run.