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Shirey wins 100th match

By Zach Knepp

MIFFLINTOWN – Mid-West wrestling fans have had their share of milestones to celebrate over the past two years thanks to this year's senior co-captains Ty Knepp and Sam Shirey.

Last March the pair became the first teammates in program history to both earn state medals (Knepp was fourth at 140 and Shirey seventh at 145). Saturday Shirey joined Knepp in the 100-win club at the Juniata Duals tournament last Saturday.

The milestone victory came as a first period pin over North Cambria's Andy Chunko in their 160-pound bout.

"It felt great," exclaimed Shirey. "It was something I really wanted to accomplish."

The standout wrestler's coach was quick to point out how special it is for a high school grappler to reach the century mark in wins.

"To get that many wins is a big deal," said Clint Swartz. "I'm proud of him. He deserves this accomplishment."

After the tournament, Shirey's career mark stood at 102-43.

It is no accident that Knepp and Shirey have become top notch wrestlers together.

"It helps us to wrestle with each other at practice," Shirey said. "We can push each other and make sure we don't take a second off."

Today, it seems the two star wrestlers cannot be mentioned without the other when it comes to District 4 wrestling. Now that they both have achieved 100 wins, this link will grow stronger the rest of their careers.

However, that was not always the case. The two seniors took very different paths on their way to being listed on the 100-win banner in the school's gym.

Knepp was seemingly burdened with high expectations before his first varsity match. His outstanding local and national youth wrestling career had him in the spotlight at an early age. He was a two-time Pennsylvania Greco-Roman state champion and placed fourth at U.S.A. Wrestling's national championship tournament. His father is also long-time Middleburg and Mid-West coach Dan Knepp.

He stepped up to the challenge his freshman year, ending with 25 wins, and has not looked back. Despite missing half of his junior season, Knepp boasts a 109-21 record, and will be looking for his third regional medal this February in Williamsport.

While the wrestling community expected Knepp to evolve into a champion, Shirey got to the same level due to his own expectations. As a freshman he went 11-17. That rough season motivated him to work hard on his skills. That following season he finished 27-15, but failed to make much noise in the postseason.

"After my sophomore year, I made getting 100 wins a goal for myself," he said.

During the past two years, hard work and countless workout sessions helped Shirey achieve his goal.

This came as no surprise to his former coach.

"Sam works as hard as anyone," said Dan Knepp. "I don't think people know how much time he puts in year-round wrestling."

Last season Shirey posted a 38-9 mark and finished as the runner-up in the district and regional tournaments on his way to Hershey.

“Last year was definitely Sam’s coming out year,” said Swartz. “We’re looking for him to keep it going through the rest of this year and have another good postseason.”

After the Juniata Duals, Shirey’s record stood at 26-1 at 160. Knepp is currently unbeaten at 27-0.