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FLINT SPORTS AUDIO

Productive offseason renews Davison grad's zest for wrestling

by Mark Spezia | The Flint Journal

Friday August 28, 2009, 6:13 AM

AMES, Iowa — Jon Reader admits he needed something to reinvigorate his enthusiasm for wrestling.

That might sound a little strange coming from somebody who won his first tournament at age seven before becoming a three-time state champion at Davison and landing at Iowa State - one of the nation's top programs.

He has wrestled just fine for the Cyclones, earning All-America honors his first two seasons after being red-shirted as a freshman.

Deep down, however, Reader could sense something was amiss.

"The last two summers, I did not wrestle in any tournaments at all," he said. "I just went home and worked out. Before then, I was competing almost year-around. I don't why I got away from that, but maybe I started to lose some of that aggressiveness I had."

That was then.

Now, Reader has regained that unbridled passion for the sport and then some after spending the spring and summer testing himself against some of the world's best across three continents.

"This offseason has really reignited my love for wrestling." Reader said. "I'm really fired up now and so excited for next season. This has done so much for me."

He recently returned from a two-week stay in Poland where he trained with several Olympians at the country's Olympic Training Center in Spala and competed in the Ziolkowski Invitational.

"That was just a ton of fun, spending all that time with Olympians from several different countries," Reader said. "It was a great experience for competing and learning."



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Reader learned plenty from wrestlers like 2008 Olympic silver medalist Yusup Abdusalamov of Tajikistan.

"I picked up a lot about technique and being patient," he said. "The American style is to be really aggressive, but those guys practice waiting for the right time to make a move. They will work for the right opening and take advantage."

After training roughly five hours a day, Reader competed in the Ziolkowski Invitational. He won all four of his matches in dual-meet competition with the U.S. team. He went 1-1 in the individual portion of the event, losing to a two-time Olympian.

"We didn't do too bad considering we were the youngest team there," Reader said. "It was us college kids against senior-level guys who are all part of their country's national teams."

Reader also took a silver medal at the Pan Am Championships in Maracaibo, Venezuela, losing to Cuba's Ivan Fundora, who was fifth in the 2008 Olympics. Reader beat 2004 Olympian Evan McDonald of Canada to reach the title match.

He also placed fourth at the World Team Trials and fifth in the U.S. Senior Nationals.

"I've probably had my best summer of wrestling, ever, and really feel I have taken my skills to a new level," Reader said. "That's what this was about and why I stayed here (in Ames, Iowa) this summer instead of heading home."

As if all the competition was not enough, Reader has also dealt with a surprise coaching change at Iowa State.

Cael Sanderson, an Iowa State alum and the only four-time unbeaten NCAA champion in history, left after three seasons in April to become Penn State's next coach.

He was replaced by another Iowa State great - 1992 Olympic gold medalist and Lansing native Kevin Jackson.

While Sanderson had led the Cyclones to three straight Big 12 titles for the first time and three top-five NCAA Tournament finishes, Reader has welcomed the change.

"We did not see coach Sanderson's departure coming at all, and we all questioned whether it could possibly be true, but it has been a great move for me," he said. "I think it was a 100% positive thing for me and the team. We are all right on the same page with the coaching staff. We're so ready to get the ball rolling for next season."

Reader hopes next season will be one of championships - individual Big 12 and national titles and a team NCAA championship, the first since Jackson's senior year (1987).

Reader was fourth at the NCAA championships, improving from seventh as a freshman. His only two losses in the NCAA Tournament were in double overtime and overtime as the Cyclones placed third.

Reader was also third in the Big 12 Tournament for the second straight year and finished 30-8 and fourth in the final D1wrestling.net 165-pound rankings. He has a 60-19 collegiate record.

Reader needs to finish at least eighth at the next two NCAA Tournaments to become just the second four-time All-American from the Flint area,

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joining former Northern and University of Michigan standout John Fisher (1986-89).

"I was crushed after last season when I fell short of my goals, especially the way I lost those two matches," Reader said. "They could have gone my way, but I had some technique problems. Next year, I really want to stand on that podium an NCAA champion. We're also very capable of winning a team championship."

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