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Teenage wrestler ready for next challenge - high school

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After 79 career wins, a state championship and a spot on two national teams, is wrestler Jared Bartram ready for the next step — high school?

“I’m a little nervous,” Jared said.

Jared, 14, is an eighth-grader at Albritton Middle School, but a midsummer move by his family will have him attending Jack Britt as a freshman in the fall.

Jared has been wrestling since age 7, developing a passion for the sport that has become a year-round focus.

He has wrestled for school and recreation-league clubs, putting in as many as four hours of practice daily.

The dedication has paid off.

Most recently, Jared competed at the Southern Championship tournament, held March 31 at the Crown Expo Center.

He won all four matches to claim the title in the 140-pound Schoolboy division, for 13- and 14-year-olds, ending the season with a 45-0 record.

“My father kept telling me, ‘With great sacrifices come great rewards.’ It’s proven over the years to be true,” Jared said.

Indeed, Jared has made the sacrifices necessary to commit to wrestling.

“It can be hard going to school and wrestling,” Jared said, “because you don’t always have time to hang out with your friends like you want to, but you just have to wait because it’ll be worth it.”

During his wrestling career, Jared has worked closely with his father, Marty Bartram. Marty has coached Jared and the other members of Fayetteville’s NCAAU Rhino Wrestling Club for five years.

No one knows Jared’s potential better than his father.

“I think if Jared’s goal was to wrestle in the Olympics, he could achieve that goal. Some wrestlers are just gifted, but I would say Jared has really worked for everything he’s achieved,” said Marty.

This summer, Jared will be working to qualify for the USA Schoolboy National Dual team. He must also gain corporate sponsors to pay for the entry fee and travel expenses to compete at the tournament, taking place in June in Indianapolis.

Jared has suffered only one minor setback during his wrestling career, breaking his ankle just six weeks before the 2006 USA State Championships in a trampoline incident.

“I told him, ‘Hey, you’re not supposed to have your shoes on on the trampoline,’” Marty said. “He did wrestle in the state championships, but he wasn’t really in shape and didn’t do well.”

Said Jared: “I felt pretty stupid, but I kept coming to practice to watch and learn. I gained a lot of weight, so I had to start small and work my way back up.”

A clean break requiring no surgery, the injury is now fully mended.

Jared's wrestling is back on track, and he is focused on earning a starting spot on the Jack Britt roster and the opportunities wrestling might provide.

"I'd like to get a full-ride scholarship to a good school for wrestling. I want to keep winning at the college level," said Jared.

The Rhinos have been holding practices at Jack Britt for several years now, giving Jared some familiarity with the school. Jared has even competed in the Cadet division for 15- and 16-year-olds to prepare for facing off against high school age wrestlers.

But in the 140-pound weight class, Jared will be sure to face seniors and juniors, a daunting task for a 14-year-old.

His father is confident of Jared's ability to succeed at the high school level.

"Anything above 125 for a freshman is tough, because those seniors and juniors are grown men. But technically, he's where he needs to be as a freshman. It'd be nice if he could be a state qualifier, but our first goal is for him to start."

Jared hopes his aggressive style will prove useful at the high school level.

"I have to score the first point. I don't like to let anybody get ahead of me," he said.

"I know I have to go a little harder than I usually do against guys my own age, because these guys are older, stronger, and more experienced."