

By Randy Whalen

There will be good things again for the Lockport Township girls wrestling team.

The Porters showed that with some nice performances in big tournaments to start the season.

"We are young, with only two seniors and three juniors," Lockport coach Nate Roth said. "But they are great leaders and have shown that by getting to practice early and doing what it takes."

With girls' wrestling growing by leaps and bounds, it is easy to forget that the Porters are only in their third season as a program. But they already put themselves on the map as Claudia Heeney went 42-1 as a freshman and finished as the State runner-up last season at 125 pounds.

"It's great to have that talent and leadership and Claudia knocked it out of the park last season," Roth said. "She's planning on starting at 130 pounds in the first few meets and then most likely going down to 125."

"She just helps the team so much. She's a leader as a sophomore and works so hard. It's just great to see her battle."

To open the season, the Porters traveled to the Minooka Thanksgiving Throwdown on Wednesday, Nov. 22, and out of six Varsity entrants, four placed in the Top Five, including a pair of champions, with Heeney at 130 pounds and senior Liz Ramirez at 120 pounds.

In her title match, Heeney pinned Aubrie Rohrbacher from Huntley at the 3 minute: 13-second mark.

"I really do like the competition," Heeney said following her win at Minooka. "We have a lot of good girls in Illinois and it certainly is fun just to go out there and get it. It's very individualized, so everybody has their own accomplishments, and I think that's what is beautiful about it, you have nobody else to depend on but yourself."

"But our (Lockport Township coaches) push the bar very high and they have high expectations. It's really fun to be part of a program where everyone pushes each other and wants each other to do well. I definitely love the program. I feel like the difference between this year and last year is numbers and the girls are getting a lot more talented. So it's really fun to see the sport grow."

Ramirez, who was 33-10 and went to state last season at 115 pounds, was also at the top of the podium at the Minooka Tournament. She had a pin in 3:11 in the title match over Laolonie Molina from West Aurora.

"I just want to get better," Ramirez said following her win at Minooka. "All summer I went to club and I went to offseason training just to get better. Now I have a bit more experience with takedowns because Freestyle is all takedowns and understanding that getting a good setup and a nice shot off. And working with my practice partners, like Claudia, is a big help.

It's huge, especially with her experience. Even at club, there weren't a lot of girls so I had to work with guys and they had more experience than me so they told me what I could do better to improve. I really try to put in the effort, not miss practice, and do work on the side. And I watch videos and that helps me to understand. (Being at Lockport) It does help because they are so knowledgeable. I can go to any one of the coaches, and even my teammates, and they'll know."

Also placing at Minooka for Lockport was sophomore Lucy Madrigal at 125 pounds with a 6-1 win over Valentina Barboza from East Aurora for third. Also, junior Averí Colella came in with a pin in 2:17 over Gwendolynn Ridley from Hoffman Estates for fifth place at 110 pounds.

"I'm just really excited to start wrestling. I'm excited to start up my passion," Colella said before the season. "I just started wrestling last year. It was very random. I just thought, 'What if I do this.' So I just went to open mat and I loved it.

"There is so much to it. Everything has a reason and you just appreciate that. Now I hope to go to state and I think I can do it this season."

West Aurora won the championship in the varsity competition by a 194-114 margin over Minooka. Huntley took third place with 111.5 points while Hoffman Estates edged Geneseo 102-99 for fourth. Yorkville (91), Lockport (89), the District 230 co-op of Andrew, Carl Sandburg and Stagg (85), Plainfield Central (68), Morris (59), Ottawa Township (57), Curie (51) and Larkin (51), East Aurora (46), Glenbard North (46), Macomb (46) and Bolingbrook (45) rounded out the scores.

With five champions, the Porters edged host Minooka 157.5-148 to win the junior varsity title.

On Saturday, Nov. 25, Lockport went to the Niles West Invite and, as Roth said, "had a great day."

Colella was second, junior Lydia Chroback placed third, Rebekah Ramirez took fifth, and Liz Ramirez and sophomore Sophie Kelner won consolation championships.

Next, some of the Lockport girls traveled to the Dan Gable Donnybrook. That is a prestigious National Tournament. The 40-plus boys division and 42-plus girls division tourney was held between Nov. 30 and Dec. 3. It included the best high school teams from the Midwest competing in an individual tournament at Xtream Arena in Coralville, Iowa.

Heeney placed fifth at 130, Rebekah Ramirez was also fifth at heavyweight, and Liz Ramirez placed sixth at 120 pounds.

On Wednesday, Dec. 6, Lockport hosted a triangular meet with Minooka and Plainfield Central. Minooka won it by defeating Plainfield Central 60-12 and the host Porters 66-15. Lockport beat Plainfield Central 36-12 in the other dual of the night.

Liz Ramirez led Lockport with two pins at 115. Colella (105) also went 2-0 for the Porters with a pin.

"I feel like I did well being able to set up my shot and with having control and putting pressure on top," Ramirez said. "This is my third year on the varsity and I want to get back to state this season.

"I like to be able to push myself, even when it's hard out there. But I also want to just keep helping the team and teach them what I know."