

High Point braved snowstorm to make it Cheesehead

By Tom Goff

High Point coach John Gardner had heard a lot of good things about the Cheesehead Invitational. He liked the unique format of the event, knew of the high caliber of competition against nationally ranked teams and followed it online whenever he had the chance.

So when he received an invitation to bring his team from New Jersey to Wisconsin for the 16<sup>th</sup> annual Cheesehead this weekend at Kaukauna High School, Gardner jumped at the chance.

But the Wildcats almost didn't make it. Mother Nature hit the High Point area with a foot of snow in 18 hours from 3 p.m. on Thursday, which closed airports and forced the Wildcats, coaches, wrestlers and fans to do some creative travel rearranging.

"Starting out yesterday morning, I didn't think we were going to make it," Gardner said. "(We had) smooth sailing, we got to the airport and they were calling for a storm, so I figured we'd be early enough and be able to get out and they were able to get the flight to our gate, but there was no crew to fly the plane, so the time we were supposed to board, they made an announcement that our flight was cancelled."

Not to worry, Gardner had a backup plan.

"What ended up happening is that there were a number of our parents who had a second flight, which was later they said in the beginning they didn't know if they were sure it would get out depending on the storm, but luckily for us it did go out, so we able to bump most of our parents off their flights so the boys were able to get on and get out here and I was able to get all of my assistants, too, so that was a nice thing. We got in later than we expected, but it's a great opportunity for our kids to compete and we're very happy to be here."

That forced parents and fans to drive to Philadelphia to catch the roughly 2 1/2 hour flights flights to Milwaukee.

Cheesehead tournament director Scott Kluever is happy that the Wildcats and their entourage made it, as well.

"The coach called and they had some people from their community came and watched tournament. We knew we wanted another good New Jersey team and High Point has good tradition. If they wanted to come, we wanted them."

High Point is only the second team from New Jersey to compete in the 16 years of the Cheesehead, joining Blair Academy, which was runner-up to Apple Valley, Minn., in 2011.

Prior to competing in the Cheesehead, The Wildcats won the eight-team Colt Classic on Dec. 15 in Lincroft, N.J., and had four champions in Dominick Gallo at 120, Jared Kobis at 126, Mike Derin 132 and Jason Gaccione at 145. Gallo and Kyle Stoll (195) won titles for High Point in the Mustang Classic on Dec.

28 in Brick, N.J. No team score were kept, because teams were allowed to enter more than one wrestler at a weight.

Gardner, whose his team won the state section II title last year and is ranked sixth in the state this year, is anxious to see how his team fares against some of the top teams in the country at the Cheesehead, but he has realistic expectations, as well.

“We’re a program from the state of New Jersey that’s done pretty well for a long time,” he said. “We’ve won state titles but to be able to compete against some of the nationally ranked programs here, that’s not where we are. I think we have some boys who are pretty decent and some boys can do fairly well, but that depends on the weight and what your bracket looks like and we also have some kids who are going to be in way over their heads. For some of our kids, it’s going to be a learning experience. But as long as you’re learning and being tested, you have an opportunity to get a little bit better, so that’s all we’re looking for.”