

Until he recently signed a letter of intent with Penn State, Apple Valley's Mark Hall was the most highly recruited prep wrestler in the nation.

His high school and off-season wrestling resume is spectacular. He's a 2014 FILA Cadet World champion at 76 kilograms and a 2015 Junior World team member with more than 250 career victories and later this season has a chance to become Minnesota's first six-time state champion.

But there had been one missing jewel from his wrestling crown. Despite all of his success, Hall had never won a Cheesehead championship.

That all changed Saturday night when Hall pinned Brian Krasowski of Carl Sandburg in three minutes, 10 seconds to win his first Cheesehead title in four tries.

"Four tries, finally got it on the fourth one ... it feels good," said Breske, who finished the tournament with five pins and a 24-16 major decision that gave him a few anxious moments, when Nick Knudsen of New Prague actually put him on his back when he got a little sloppy while trying to finish off a technical fall. Hall came close to being pinned, but was able to get out of the predicament, giving up just five points.

"It was a little scary," Hall confessed. "It's been awhile since I was on my back. Probably two summers ago. I think the last time I gave up back points was in seventh grade. I definitely made a mistake. I was going for a takedown. It would have been the last takedown, I was going to tech him, but I let my elbows come out a little bit and he's a formidable opponent. He's a good guy and you let a guy like that catch you a little off guard, he can put you to your back. I don't train that way by any means. It was just a mental lapse and I stopped wrestling for a moment."

Prior to this year, two thirds were the best he had to show for three prior Cheesehead appearances when he was in the seventh and ninth grades because Minnesota is a junior high inclusive state.

"I actually have both of my bronze Cheesehead medals hanging up in my room and I see them every day," said Hall after winning both of his matches during the first day of the Cheesehead on Friday night. "This was one of the tournaments I really wanted to win. It's a tough tournament."

After a first-round bye, Hall made short work of his first four opponents in the 170-pound class, pinning Trevor Byram of Waverly-Shellrock in 46 seconds and Chris Prosser of Edwardsville in 2:20 on Friday night and Kaukauna's Zach Frassetto in and DeForest's Alex Schodin in 1:31 on Saturday morning.

As a seventh grader at 130, Hall lost to eventual champion Ben Whitford of Marmion Academy 9-7 in the semis. The following year, he wrestled just one match due to a pulled hamstring and wound up 16th. In 2013 as a freshman, he beat Hartford's Beau Breske 3-0 in the third-place match after losing to Brian Murphy of Glenbard North in overtime.

Apple Valley didn't attend the tournament the past two years due to other commitments, but they returned again, giving Hall one more chance for his elusive Cheesehead championship.

While he's excited about that, he's looking forward to his opportunity to become his home state's first six-time state champion even more.

"I'm excited to get there, but there's a process I'm enjoying right now with my teammates too and this is just part of it," Hall said.

Hall had a lot of offers from major universities, but said he chose Penn State because it was the best fit for him.

“Any guy that’s being recruited, you get this feeling in your heart where you want to be at and that’s the feeling I got with Penn State,” he said. “The goals I have, I felt that Penn State was the best place to get (them).”

Those goals include becoming a four-time national champion and an Olympic competitor.

The fact that the Nittany Lions are ranked No. 1 in the nation under coach Cael Sanderson didn’t hurt either.

“That had a little bit to do with it,” he said. “They’re consistent. That’s one of the things Cael preached to me in the recruiting process and every time I talked to him, That was probably the one thing he said. That there was no consistency like Penn State.

Hall made the announcement on his choice of colleges live on Flo Wrestling. Hall also had official visits to Wisconsin, Ohio State, Nebraska and Minnesota before deciding on Penn State.

“If I could go to all five schools at the same time, believe me I would,” he said after thanking all five for “making me a better person and giving me these opportunities.”

Last year, Hall went 42-0 and spent the summer competing in national and international events. Coming into this season, his career record was 229-4 and he also carries a 3.7 grade point average.

Two years ago, he won a world championship in Slovakia, one of two Apple Valley wrestlers to do so. The other, sophomore Gabel Steveson also was a world champion this past summer in Bosnia.

Hall is very impressed with what he’s seen out of his teammate so far.

“Gable is something special,” he said. “He’s only 15 years old and he’s going to be really good if he can keep his head on straight. If I could tell him anything, it would be just to keep his head on straight because he has all the other things set. He’s a natural and he’s one of the guys that I don’t like wrestling with because I know every time I wrestle him he’s going to put me into some funky positions I don’t get put in regularly. He’s really tough.”

When his high school career ends, the people he’ll remember most are the ones who help him the most in the wrestling room.

“Probably I’ll remember my coaches, I think.” He said. “The school itself and the community is awesome. I have awesome teammates, but my coaches really push me and those are the people I credit most, wrestling with me and getting me where I am.”

