

H-F wrestler Robinson collecting big wins, hopes for state title run

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Vincent Robinson is ready for the state tournament. He's been thinking about it for two years.

A 6-4 sudden-victory loss to Belleville West's Josh Koderhandt in the 3A 120-pound state championship match two years ago is never far from the Homewood-Flossmoor junior's mind. The pandemic took away his shot at redemption last season, but Robinson is eager for another chance this year in the 126-pound class.

"I got a little too confident," he said of his 2020 loss. "That match changed my life. It really changed the way I think, the way I wrestle. It changed the way I work. I just know I got to work harder."

Only a state title ring will erase those memories, Robinson said. So far this season, he's building the resume of a state champion.

At the prestigious Walsh Iron Man event in Ohio last month, he stood out in a field of some of the nation's best wrestlers. He was the last man standing in the 126-pound bracket after beating Washington Community's Kannon Webster 5-3 in the final. Webster was the 2A 106-pound state champion two years ago.

Earlier in the day, he beat Mount Carmel's Sergio Lemley with a takedown in sudden victory in the semifinal. Lemley was a state champion in Indiana last season and the 106-pound 3A champ the year before. Robinson said Lemley made some adjustments from the last time the two wrestled but he was ready.

"The first thing he said after he came off that mat was 'I'm the best 126 in Illinois now,'" coach Jim Sokoloski said. "In all of the national rankings, he was behind both of those kids. I think he was sending a message to state that 'I'm the best in the state of Illinois. I'm going to prove it.'"

Robinson, who recently committed to wrestle for North Carolina State University, comes from a wrestling family. His father Vasil is an assistant coach at H-F with a career of his own at Mendel Catholic and Concordia University. Vincent's older brother Travis Ford-Melton was a four-time state placer and 2016 state champ for Marian Catholic who went on to wrestle at Purdue. Younger sibling Jaydon is also on the Vikings roster.

"My dad just put me into wrestling, and I just fell in love with the sport," Robinson said.



David P. Funk/H-F Chronicle

Vincent Robinson is putting together one of the best individual wrestling seasons in Homewood-Flossmoor history.

Vasil Robinson said it was easy to see that Travis and Vincent were both wrestling naturals early.

"Travis was athletic and Vincent is real athletic. He's special," Vasil Robinson said. "I've been (coaching) since I got out of college. I've got eight or nine that are in Division I (college). He's just following the footsteps. He's got better coaching. He's a better athlete. He's just got it in him. You can't teach that."

"He's a true student of the sport. This kid loves wrestling. It is his life and that shows. We're definitely better with him here," Sokoloski said. "He's a once-in-a-lifetime athlete. He checks every box. He's an honor roll student. He's everything you could ask of a top athlete."

His record sits at 16-2, as of Jan. 11. The only two losses of the season came at the Powerade Wrestling Tournament at Canon McMillan High School in Pennsylvania.

"The thing that I love about Vincent is he's not afraid to say that he wants to win (state)," Sokoloski said. "The expectation is for him to win it. If he doesn't win it, everyone is going to be disappointed."

Robinson told Sokoloski when he first got to H-F that he was going to be the first Vikings state champ. The names of the Vikings' all-state wrestlers are on a graphic on the wall in the wrestling room. The top line, for state title holders, is empty.

"I got to get that one. I got to get that state title. That's the main goal for the season," Robinson said.

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