

## High school wrestling: Midd-West's Knepp thriving after injury

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— WILLIAMSPORT -- Four months ago, Midd-West junior Ty Knepp didn't even know if he would be able to wrestle at all this season.

A serious injury in a soccer game in mid-October threatened to take away the sport he loves the most.

Although he didn't know it when it happened, Knepp sustained a lacerated liver and bruised kidney.

Today, Knepp is in the semifinals of the District 4 Class AA Tournament at 140 pounds and one win away from keeping alive his goal of qualifying for the state tournament.

After a bye in the preliminary round Friday night, Knepp cruised to an 11-1 major decision over Hughesville's Jamal Beechey in the quarterfinals.

Knepp, now 16-1 on the season with 13 consecutive wins, faces Canton's Brandon Kutz in this morning's semis at Williamsport High School.

He built a comfortable 7-1 lead in the first period with an early takedown and two sets of back points.

Beechey rode him out in the second with Knepp receiving a questionable stalling warning.

"He was just kind of riding parallel with his legs in, and there wasn't much I could do to get out of it," he said.

But Knepp went back to work in the third after choosing to start neutral. He took Beechey down and scored another two-point nearfall in the final seconds.

Knepp has been motivated for this postseason ever since he lost in last year's Northeast Regional 135 consolation finals to Wyalusing's Andrew Lewis. That loss left Knepp one win shy of a berth in the state tournament.

The injury left him even further away from his goal.

At first, the news was not encouraging. Knepp was told he would likely miss his entire wrestling season.

When the season began, doctors said he would be out four months, essentially the season. But, as fall turned to winter, the prognosis kept improving. Finally, he learned he would miss only two months, and he returned to the mat in a home meet Jan. 8.

"I was nervous. It was at home and all the fans were there to watch me and I had been out for a long time," he recalled.

The layoff was not easy on someone so used to the competition.

"Wrestling was the only thing I was thinking about, getting healed up and getting back on the mat," he said. "I was just thinking, 'Do what they tell me and things will work out.'"

His lone loss this season came in his fourth bout, 2-1 to Kevin Ryan of Mount Union in the Juniata Duals.

Knepp, son of former Midd-West head coach Dan Knepp, conceded that he feels fresh for the postseason, but he said the injury has motivated him.

"After missing so much, I knew how much I wanted to be in there," he said.

Despite the injury, he said he plans to play soccer again next fall for the Mustangs. The injury occurred when he went up for a header on a 50-50 ball and an opposing player caught him with a knee. It happened in the first half and Knepp played the rest of the game, but knew there was a problem later that night when he discovered blood in his urine. His parents immediately took him to the hospital emergency room.

"I actually thought (at the time of the collision) that I had broken my ribs, because I broke my ribs last year in wrestling season," he said. "It kind of felt the same and I played through it."

When he learned the true nature of the injury, "It was pretty scary," he said.

With the frightening injury behind him, Knepp is now concentrating on prolonging his wrestling season.

"My wrestling goals are the same as they were before I got hurt," he said. "I want to win districts and regionals this year and place at states, that's been my goal."

Photos



Chris Sciacca/The Daily ItemMid-West's Ty Knepp works for position against Hughesville's Jamal Beechey during 140 pound action.