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Sports

Johnson Reaches Lofty Expectations

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Emerald's Skylar Johnson, right, wrestles against Palmetto's Adam Frasier on Saturday in the Class AA-A individual state finals in Lexington. (Staff photo by Matt Anderson.)

LEXINGTON -- Emerald 140-pound wrestler Skylar Johnson was just happy to have qualified for the Class AA-A individual state finals a year ago and he didn't place, but the senior had higher expectations season. Johnson reached his goal Saturday with a 10-8 win over Palmetto's Adam Frasier in the state championship bout at Lexington High School.

Johnson entered the tournament as just the second seed from the Upper State, but he earned his first gold medal with gritty performances

against Frasier and Indian Land's Thomas Harris in the semifinals. "I saw everybody in the crowd, the people who depend on me, and I thought I should not let my confidence get down," Johnson said. "I thought, ♦I need to get serious and put all my energy into the match."

Johnson got a a takedown and a near-fall early in the first period in the match to go ahead 4-0 and that gave him confidence through the rest of the bout. "Any time you get up big that just makes your motor go harder," Emerald coach Andy Wright said. "That was real big for him just to keep moving and finish it, get through it."

He led through the duration of his match, but Johnson wears a hearing aid and he had trouble deciphering what his coaches were telling him early on in the third period. "Coach (Wright) is screaming at me and everything," Johnson said. "I just had to read their lips because they weren't doing the sign language or anything."

Wright said that trying to communicate with Johnson during the third period was fairly difficult. "Well, I mean, Skylar can't really hear. He'll read my lips or we have our little sign language that we do," Wright said. "He's done great all weekend at looking at me and figuring out what I want him to do. "He's done what we've asked and that's just helped him

through this weekend.”

Johnson received a boost early on in the tournament when Abbeville 140-pounder Josh Cowan, who Johnson has never beaten, was eliminated in the first round. That turn of events was important in Johnson feeling like he had a better shot at the title. “Josh is a very great wrestler and when he lost that sort of was like the lights went on with Skylar and he was like, It’s all go now,” Wright said.

Then in the semifinals, Johnson was the underdog against Harris but he pulled out the victory in the third period. Having the confidence to win those types of matches has been the major difference for Johnson this year. “It’s attitude. It’s all about knowing you can go out and get it,” Wright said. “He was satisfied at making (the state tournament) last year. This year it was, I’m going to win it.”