

By RUSTIN WATT

- Daily Leader

A year ago Joe Bach was preparing for a second consecutive undefeated season as a Liberal High School wrestler. Now as a redshirt freshman at the University of Oklahoma Joe is having success and is competing to become OU's starting heavyweight next year.

"It's way different than high school," Bach said. "It was a big jump from high school wrestling to the collegiate level — a lot faster paced."

Joe lost his first ranking match to Oklahoma's starting heavyweight Nathan Fernandez, who was recently named the Big 12 Wrestler of the Week. Since that match there have been a few changes.

After the ranking match as a redshirt Bach has competed in three opens.

At the first open in St. Charles, Mo., Bach took first place and was 5-0 with three pins.

In the Oklahoma Open Bach also took first and along the way beat Fernandez in triple overtime.

The next open took place in Fort Hays where Bach took second place had his first loss in a close match to the current No. 2-ranked heavyweight in Div. 2, Josh Leadingfox.

Since the ranking match loss Bach has taken his redshirt opportunity and ran with it.

Not only has he won two of his first three opens but has also defeated his main competitor on the roster that is keeping him away from the starting line-up.

Bach has shown great improvement in a very short time.

“It took me a while learning to adapt to wrestling heavyweight rather than 215 (pounds) along with the speed and quality of opponents,”

Bach said. “But after my opens and a good match with Fernandez, I feel if I keep improving I can be the starting heavyweight and a strong competitor.”

Bach contributed his success to people who have impacted him.

“Many people have aided in my success. My parents for getting me into wrestling and supporting me along with the coaches I’ve had over the years including Rick Madden, Jim Crosier, Bobby Joe Scott, Coach (Mike)Pewthers, Coach Sleder, Coach Browne, Coach Fowler, and Coach Dowell for getting me ready for the mat along with Coach Svaty and Schroeder working me hard in the weightroom every day,” he said.

Bach took much pride in being a Redskin and is now proud to be an Oklahoma Sooner.

“We’re ranked 12th in the nation currently. Many don’t know that OU is a pretty prestigious wrestling school and program. Just great success in football and basketball can be overshadowing but it’s definitely an honor to be an OU wrestler.”