

Kline now looks at mat from angle of referee

By Dale Bye
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Eddie Kline smiled as he considered the question.

"I suppose my third state championship was the most satisfying," he finally said. "No one else from Mason City had ever won three state championships and that made it a little special."

That record still stands. Now, nearly 25 years since Eddie Kline won his first state championship, no other Mason City High wrestler has ever won three state championships except Kline. His first two came at 95 pounds and he won his third at 103.

That first year (as a sophomore), I only weighed 87 pounds," Kline said. "I used to weigh in with my clothes on. It didn't make any difference. When I was a junior, I had to take my clothes off to weigh 95, then as a senior I went up to 103.

And I still had to take my clothes off to make weight."

Kline got started in wrestling by default. As a freshman, he was the sixth man on the Roosevelt junior high basketball team.

The coach told me I was in the wrong sport though," Kline says, smiling again. "He said I should be in the wrestling room. I tried it for about two weeks and then I quit and went to basketball."

However, as a sophomore, Kline went back to wrestling. At 5-1, he really didn't have much choice. He just wasn't tall enough for basketball. And at 87 pounds, Kline didn't have much of a future in football either.

"I tried out for football once, but (wrestling and football coach) Howard Barker wouldn't give me a uniform," Kline said. "I was too small and he said I was a wrestler, not a football player."

Once Kline finally got channeled into wrestling, he got off to a slow start, losing his first match to Bob Kain of Algona. That was it, though. Kline won the remainder of his high school matches — 54 straight including 34 falls. Later, his sophomore year, he avenged the loss to Kain at the district meet.



Eddie Kline

As state champ in 1952

Kline lost two takedowns as a sophomore, one as a junior and none as a senior.

"The first championship was against a kid from Newton," Kline remembered. "His name was (Fred) Metz. I got behind 1-0 and he was running away. I just couldn't catch him. Finally, I beat him 4-1. Afterwards, I said to him, 'Listen, you come down to the AAU meet at 95 pounds and wrestle with me instead of running. I played with him for three periods and then stuck him.'"

Kline is still involved in wrestling, but from a different angle. He is a referee, handling all the Mason City junior varsity meets and most junior high meets, 26 in all. This is his 15th year as an official.

"I used to go other places and officiate," Kline said, "but not anymore. I can do more good for the Mason City wrestling program by staying right here and helping the kids out. I can get better pay for going out of town, but pay isn't everything."

Currently, there are two younger Kleins wrestling in the Mason City farm system. D.J. Klein is a seventh grader who compiled a 34-4 record at the elementary level a year ago while Bobby Klein is an eighth grader who was undefeated as a seventh grader. Both Kleins are undefeated this year.

"Generally, I try not to referee my boys' matches," Kline said. "I worked one match with my oldest boy this year and it was a 0-0 tie. That's the only tie he's had all year."

There's also 6-year-old Angel ("she'd

like to be a wrestler too") and 5-month-old Adam ("he'll be a wrestler") at home.

Kline is a custodian at Mason City High and has been for 19 years. That means he works at most of the functions at the Mason City High gym. He's missed two Mason City home football games in 20 years and his record is probably about that good in basketball — both Mason City High and North Iowa Community College.

He weighs 118 and looks as if he could cut down to 105 without too much trouble. Wrestling is a lot different now, according to Kline — especially in the area of making weight.

"I think we cut more weight back then," Kline shrugged. "They can't use a sweat box anymore and we used to work out in rubber suits. Let's put it this way. When I was a junior, we didn't have anyone at 95 pounds so I dropped 15 pounds in three days to make it."

"Did I use a rubber suit? I used about anything that was available to make it."

"They train differently now. We used to have to maintain our weight most of the time, so I never ate greasy foods. Now they weigh in the morning and that makes a lot of difference."

"Kids are more aggressive now, but that's in the rules. There were a lot of kids I had to chase to win. They just wanted to last as long as they could. That's not right."

This year, Kline will be the official for 26 wrestling meets. At most of the meets, there hardly will be anyone there who knew about Eddie Kline — one of 20 wrestlers in Iowa history to win three state champs.

And when it comes down to comparison, Kline's record of one loss in three years probably has been bettered by only one wrestler in Iowa history: Dan Gable.

Maybe Kline regrets not wrestling as a freshman and maybe winning that fourth state title.

"No, not really," he said. "I had a lot of fun playing basketball. And, I really only weighed 84 pounds back then."

By gosh, back then he might have even been too small to wrestle.

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