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## Bryan's Hollister grateful for second chance after frustrations boil over at NWOAL wrestling meet

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Bryan's Christian Hollister (top) works to keep control against Lima Shawnee's Alton Clayton during their 285-pound match at Saturday's Division II sectional wrestling tournament at Defiance High School.

Photo by Jeff Ratliff

Christian Hollister cannot take back what he did on Feb. 5 at Bryan High School. But the Golden Bears' senior wrestler learned a few lessons from his actions and took advantage of a second chance.

During the Northwest Ohio Athletic League tournament, Hollister became increasingly upset throughout his first-round match against Montpelier's Monte Treesh after a call did not go his way. After he lost an 11-3 major decision, Hollister stormed off the mat, threw his headgear at the scorer's table and was immediately sent home by Bryan wrestling coach Matt Dominique.

"I just remember yelling at coach, yelling at (Bryan athletic director) Mr. (Chad) Savage, yelling at some other people and walking out," Hollister said in an interview Wednesday. "But after that, it kind of hit me what I did.



"It kind of hit me that I just did that in front of all the people that were there and then yelled at all those people and said the things I said. I didn't feel great about it."

Three weeks later, and after multiple apologies and conditioning punishments, Hollister wrestled his way back to districts after finishing fourth at 285 pounds at Saturday's Division II sectional tournament at Defiance High School.

"Second chances, I believe in second chances," Dominique said. "Everybody makes mistakes, we all screw up, there's nobody that walks this earth that's perfect.

"We all make mistakes along the way, we all have to have somebody there to pick us back up and give us that second chance because if not, there'd be a lot of us who probably wouldn't be where we are today if it weren't for people giving us second chances."

Hollister (28-10 record), who was a district qualifier as a junior as well, has had a solid senior season for Bryan. He was expecting big things at the NWOAL meet on his home mat.

His tournament, though, ended earlier than he expected.

Hollister, who pinned Treesh in the third period of a match in mid-January, said he heard a whistle during his league-tournament match against the Locomotives' senior around the end of the first period. He stopped wrestling, and as a result, Treesh got a takedown.

The whistle came from the match on the other mat.

"In my eyes, I thought the ref should have stopped the match," Hollister said. "... I couldn't get it out of my mind after that and it just kept eating away at me and it made me more and more mad as it kept going."

Hollister had to leave the gym shortly after as his teammates continued to wrestle in the tournament.

Dominique was visibly upset as well. He said there was another situation later in the tournament in which he questioned a couple calls that a referee made.

"(My wife, Chantel) asked me, 'How is you acting the way that you did with that referee any different than the way Christian acted in his match?'" Dominique said. "And it really took a lot for me to sit down and I had to really think about it.

"I think to some extent, I was just as bad as what he was. I was fighting for my kid because I felt there were some calls that didn't go the way they should have gone and maybe I didn't handle myself the way that I should have handled myself.

"One of my big things is that I want these guys to have me as a role model, the rest of our coaching staff as role models and we want to produce good young men who go out into the community and are seen as good young men that can get jobs and have all the right thoughts and are looking in the right directions and doing the right things.

"So for me looking back, I said to myself, 'You've got to start dealing with these things maybe in a little bit different way.'"

A few days after the meet, Hollister apologized to his teammates, coaches and wrestlers in Bryan's junior high program regarding his actions. He also apologized directly to Savage, who said the two had "a good conversation, a good heart-to-heart."

"After the fact, Christian and I have had many conversations," Dominique said. "The coaching staff has talked with him and there were obviously consequences that had to be dealt with, things that had to be done before he was able to compete again. He did what he needed to do to be able to get back on the mat. That's the main thing."

Hollister said he received calls from several teammates that night to see what was going on. He also said the team does not talk about his actions at the league tournament.

"We haven't talked about it and I think we're closer than ever after these past few meets knowing that the season's coming to an end," Hollister said. "We're all here supporting each other."

During the fall, Hollister was a key component of the Golden Bears' football team that finished 6-4 overall, 4-3 in the NWOAL and picked up the program's first playoff win since 2013. The 6-foot-3, 255-pound lineman earned first-team all-league honors as a defensive lineman.

Being passionate about sports and competition fuels Hollister.

"Everybody close to me knows that I'm a very competitive person. If there's a competition to be had, I want to win it," Hollister said. "That's how I come at these sports."

"I want to win in wrestling, I want to win the match, I want to win the tournament, I want to win state. When it came to football, it was I want to win this 1-on-1 between me and you and then I want our team to win the game. I want to win, that's my drive."

Hollister will continue his wrestling season at the Division II district tournament at Norwalk High School. Hollister, as well as Bryan senior Dylan McCandless (195 pounds) and sophomore Malachi Collins (170), each punched their ticket to districts with a top-four finish in their respective weight class at sectionals.

All three wrestlers will begin competition on Friday. Wrestlers in weight classes from 106 pounds to 152 begin on Thursday, 160-285 start Friday and the tournament will conclude Saturday.

Hollister opens his tournament against Shelby senior Nathan Zehner (34-1), and he's thankful for the opportunity.

"I was very grateful for coach for giving me that second chance because I knew it when I told him that I quit, I knew I didn't really mean it," Hollister said. "I didn't want to quit. I've wrestled for, this is my seventh or eighth year or something — you don't do a sport that long if you hate it.

"So after I told him that, it got at me immediately. I was like 'I don't want to not finish this season, it's the last season I've got.' So I'm really thankful for him for letting me come back and finish my last season. It means a lot to me to come back here and finish this."