

# Broken leg, broken dreams

## Career-ending injury during EKL wrestling match ends State hopes

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In a crowded gym, chatter fills the air as wrestlers compete for the Eastern Kansas League Tournament title. With mats spread throughout Blue Valley West's gym, it's hard to choose which duo to watch. Your eye scans the gym when one pair catches your attention.

Blue Valley varsity wrestler senior **Grant Robbins** battles against a Gardner-Edgerton athlete. Robbins leads the match 8-3 by the end of the third period.

You stop watching, already predicting the outcome. As the match progresses, Robbins stays dominant. In a panic and fear of losing, his opponent attempts to flip Robbins over and gain the advantage position, by clenching Robbins' legs between his.

As Robbins desperately tried to break free of his opponent's grasp, his legs got caught, and he was unable to move. As the Gardner wrestler twisted Robbins' legs with his in one direction, his hands were forcing it the opposite movement.

Snap.

The chatter suddenly comes to a halt, and all eyes are focused on one mat. Despite the alarming noise, the match continues.

Robbins broke his femur Saturday, Feb. 9, ending his wrestling career forever.

"It didn't really hurt," he said. "It was just like when your ears pop on an airplane. I was just in total shock."

Robbins said he could immediately tell he broke a bone after he heard the snap.

"The kid kept pulling on it, and then it suddenly hit me," he said. "It was very painful."

Screams from coaches, teammates, and Robbins were all directed at the ref to end the match.

"When he finally stopped the match, my leg was completely messed up," he said.

Head wrestling coach **Kale Mann** was watching a different BV match when he heard about the injury from a manager.

Mann said everyone in the vicinity knew it was bad.

"They heard the snap," Mann said. "Usually that injury comes from a car wreck or something like that. It just doesn't happen in our sport."

Initially, the injury was mistaken for a dislocation of the knee.

"I was in a lot of pain," Robbins said. "They didn't know why because they thought it was my knee, but then everyone was completely startled when they found out it was my femur."

Varsity wrestler senior **Jacob Sims** said it was weird to see this happen firsthand.

"People break femurs — it happens," he said. "That's probably one of the worst things that can happen in a wrestling match. We knew stuff like that can happen, just not as often, but it just sucks that it happened to him."

Robbins broke his femur in a spiral fracture.

"If you look at the x-ray right away, it looks like it is in half," he said. "If you zoom in on it, it's jagged in the middle."

They performed surgery on the femur and, in place of the bone marrow, the doctors inserted a metal rod.

Mann has seen more serious injuries during his 14 years as a wrestling coach.

"I had a young man break his neck and become paralyzed," he said. "It's upsetting, and you worry about it because you don't know how serious it is. His injury could have had a lot of blood loss, but it was kind of a relief that it wasn't as bad as it could have been."

Mann said the severity of the injury is not as detrimental as it could have been.

"His prognosis and recovery are going to be quicker than had he torn his ACL," he said. "The end results are actually going to be, hate to say it, better for him than if it was a less severe injury."

Visiting Robbins in the hospital brought the team closer together.

"We are lucky to have each other, knowing this can happen at any moment," Sims said. "We just hope every day it doesn't happen again."

Mann said he was disappointed the match wasn't stopped prior to the snap.

"I've actually seen a video of the match, and it's pretty disturbing," he said. "The official was out of position and that happens. I think [Robbins] thought it seemed like a lot longer with the shock that sets in. I think it should have been stopped before it broke, because there are rules to keep the wrestlers safe. The match wasn't stopped for, like, 3-4 seconds, and that's a pretty long time for a broken leg. Then it took a long time to get the wrestlers untangled."

Robbins played a big part in the team, not just through his athletic capabilities.

"He probably would have been a State-qualifier," Sims said. "We're going to miss him a ton. [Robbins] and I are both captains, so he will also be missed in the leadership aspect. We're going to have to come closer as a team that way. It will be pretty weird not having him there by my side."

Robbins said if he didn't break his femur, he would have won the match and advanced on to the next round. He had to forfeit by injury default.

Despite the Gardner athlete apologizing to Robbins, Robbins said he thinks the Gardner wrestler was happy.

"He was losing badly, and he would have been kicked out of the tournament — he would have been done," he said. "But since he won, he got another match, and he won it."

Robbins said he couldn't think of a worse way to end the season.

"My wrestling career is over," he said. "I'm supposed to have a full recovery though. It's the worst thing ever. That was EKL and then there was Regionals and State. I had pretty good expectations, and that's not how I wanted to go out."

Sims said Robbins' injury is going to impact the team in the future.

"It's scary knowing that it happened to him," he said. "Just knowing anything can happen at any time is scary. You feel blessed that it isn't you and blessed that your season isn't over and that you're still going. We definitely missed him at State. We all got more focused as a team knowing it's that much harder to accomplish our goals."