

Harding breaks, matches Wildcat weightlifting records



Louisburg's Dalton Harding recently tied the all-time bench press record at Louisburg High School with a press of 365 pounds, and also broke the one for his 185-pound weight class that was 25 years old.

Dalton Harding walked into the weight room on his final day at Louisburg High School and was going to give it one more try.

It was one more attempt at a record he had spent countless hours working toward. One more attempt at a shot of leaving his mark at the school.

Since he was a sophomore, Harding had wanted an opportunity to at least match the school's bench press record. Just a week prior, he had come up five pounds short of the 365-pound goal.

"I was just so disappointed when I tried it the week before and it was getting in my head that maybe I won't be able to get it," Harding said. "I worked for almost three years to get that."

So, he laid down on the bench, gathered himself and put his hands on the bar. Harding got one more chance at the record – a chance that was three years in the making.

With spotters on each side of him, and weightlifting coach Ty Pfannenstiel looking on, Harding lifted all 365 pounds up in

the air and then back down again.

The record was his – well, sort of.

His 365-pound bench press tied the school record for all weight classes, which was set by Joe Nieman in 2004, but Nieman was in the 250-plus weight division – more than 65 pounds heavier than Harding.

A week earlier Harding broke Richie Wrigley's old record of 350 pounds in the 185-pound weight class that was set back in 1993.

"I was so happy," Harding said. "I got 360 the week before and I just couldn't get the 365 and I came back and it was a lot easier that day. I'm not sure why...maybe I got more sleep or something. I'm just really glad to get my name up on that board."

The last three years have been difficult for Harding ever since an injury basically sidelined him from playing sports from his sophomore year on.

During the junior varsity football season in October of 2015, Harding played on the offensive line and suffered a major knee injury. He tore his ACL, part of his MCL and tore his meniscus in half.

Then after completing his therapy from that surgery, he tore his meniscus again the following May.

"It was really bad because the second tear was about two months after I was done with therapy," Harding said. "Then I had surgery and started the whole process all over again. It wasn't a fun time. At least I could walk after the second surgery because after the first surgery I was in a wheelchair for 8-9 weeks. I couldn't really do anything.

"It just got to the point where I couldn't walk anymore," Harding said of his second tear. "Part of the meniscus

actually would break into pieces and flop backwards. My leg would lock up at an angle too and we would have to force it back into place. There is about 40 percent of my meniscus left, and if I ever tear it again, it is a full knee replacement."

It was a scary thought for a high school teenager who just wanted to play sports.

The fear of another knee injury pushed him away from football and Harding had to make a difficult decision at a young age.

"It was tough because football is like a brotherhood," Harding said. "It is just a big family and that was hard. I got through it though. My favorite sport was baseball and that didn't really work out either. I kept thinking about playing football my senior year, but I just decided it was too big of a risk. I don't even lift legs anymore. I can do it for a couple days, but then it just kills me."

So, with sports out of the question, Harding hit the weights even harder. He would work out at school, but did a lot of stuff at home with his father Dennis and brother Garrett.

His knee injury prevents him from using his legs a lot to lift, which is why he stick with the bench press.

"I use the workout program that my dad used when he was in school," Dalton said. "He still has the sheets printed out and laminated at home and me and my brother still go by that. I got the upper body part and my brother Garrett has tree trunk legs and he can leg press about 1,000 pounds. Weightlifting is just kind of in our blood."

That 365-pound mark is also a special one as that is what his father Dennis bench pressed in college and he wanted to at least match his dad – if not break it in high school.

"I definitely want to beat him, for sure," Dalton said. "My

goal since I was young was to get over that, but to get 365 with everything I have gone through really means a lot to me. Then when I saw the records on the Louisburg boards, it gave me even more motivation to reach that. Hopefully my name will stay up there for quite a while."

Although his days at Louisburg High School are now behind him, Harding isn't planning on giving up weightlifting. Shortly, he will make his way to Beloit to become a diesel technician, but plans on increasing that bench press number as much as possible.

"There isn't a whole lot to do in Beloit so I will have a lot of time to lift," he said. "Hopefully in a year or so I can get up to 385."