

Finally Fulsaas

By Brian Triplett - The Daily Iowan

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There came a point in time when Ryan Fulsaas thought his whole world was upside down.

The Iowa wrestler had been previously hampered by injuries, but this time, the pain was not physical.

After failing to qualify for the NCAA national championships as a junior in 2003 because of a poor performance at the Big Ten tournament, Fulsaas felt lost.

"I was like, 'Why is this happening to me?' " he said. "Why do I have this one bad day, and it just all goes tumbling down?"

That was more than a year ago.

Dozens of deep discussions with friends, family, and coaches, a roll of white tape, and one hypnosis later, the relentless Hawkeye wrestler found himself on the mat of the 2004 NCAA Tournament, where he gave a hard-fought performance that Iowa coach Jim Zalesky said will surely be used as an example to inspire future residents of the Iowa wrestling room.

The 197-pound senior went into his first national tournament as a No. 10 seed and came out with a second-place finish after knocking off the No. 2- and 3-ranked opponents in nail-biting fashion.

Although he eventually suffered a loss to defending national champion Damion Hahn of Minnesota in the finals, Fulsaas finally proved his doubters wrong.

And as Zalesky confirmed, there were more than just a few of them.

"I don't know how many times I heard this year, 'I can't wait until that kid's gone. I can't wait until he's out of here. Why are you gonna recruit that kid?' But he works hard," said Zalesky, who knows a thing or two about skeptics as well after an eighth-place team finish at nationals last season.

"He comes into the room every day, and he's coachable."

After three tough up-and-down seasons, Fulsaas understands the source of the

criticism. He's just glad it's finally over.

"If you don't win, I guess it's easy to doubt somebody," said Fulsaa, who only recorded six wins his freshman season and was sidelined the second half of his sophomore year by a knee injury. "Just constantly listen to your coaches and take all the positive feedback. If there's negative feedback, which, in life there always is, you take it and you move forward."