

## **New Milford caps perfect SWC run with win over New Fairfield**

John Nestor

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**NEW MILFORD --** Both the New Milford and New Fairfield wrestling teams have bright futures, but the Green Wave showed Wednesday night they are prepared to shine in the present as well.

Sparked by a pair of hard-fought wins at 138 and 145 pounds, New Milford finished a perfect run through the South-West Conference with a 47-26 victory over New Fairfield at New Milford High School.

With the win the Green Wave (16-1 overall, 11-0 SWC) enter this weekend's conference tournament with momentum after defeating their closest rival. The Rebels (10-1 SWC) entered the night perfect against SWC competition but got a glimpse at why the Green Wave have won eight straight SWC titles and 10 out of the last 17.

Ranked eighth in The Norwich Bulletin's state poll, New Milford was coming off a loss to top-ranked Danbury in the finals of the New Fairfield Duals on Saturday. New Fairfield came in intent on sending a message ahead of the SWC Championships, but instead it was New Milford that got its point across.

"I wanted to see how we would respond and I am very pleased with how the guys rallied back after the loss against Danbury," New Milford coach Chris Piel said. "New Fairfield is a tough team and they match up well with us so I like the momentum that we will get from a win like this."

The match started at 220 and New Milford's Robert Tozzi edged Ryan Tharas, 7-6, to give New Milford an early advantage. New Fairfield's Shawn Graves pinned Jomar Orejuela at 285 before the Green Wave reeled off wins in seven of the next eight matches.

The biggest wins came by freshman Brett Leonard at 138 pounds and senior Louis Alhage at 145. Leonard and New Fairfield's Tyler Cerlich were locked in a scoreless battle after two periods. The final period was a wild one as momentum swung back and forth before Leonard recorded a pin with 1:11 to go. Cerlich had gained control and appeared that he was on his way to finishing Leonard with a cradle before Leonard reversed and gained control with a headlock and went on to record the pin and give the Green Wave a huge six points and a 32-10 lead.

Alhage edged Tyler Burlinson, 2-1, with the winning point coming from the referee after ruling that Burlinson had fled the mat with about 10 seconds to go in a match that was tied 1-1.

The win by Leonard was a microcosm of the Green Wave season so far as a number of young wrestlers have answered the challenge for Piel this season.

"I can't say enough about our freshman class with Brett Leonard and Bryan Rojas and our sophomores Kyle Lindner and Zach Arnold," Piel said. "We graduated 14 excellent wrestlers from last season and

this year was a real test to see where we were going to be and I'm just so proud of the way these kids have responded."

New Fairfield is in the same boat as a number of young wrestlers have helped third-year coach Paul Musso turn things around after a 5-18 season a year ago. Wednesday showed that New Milford is the better team right now, but there is still a lot of wrestling to go this season.

"Bottom line is they are the better team," Musso said. "I thought we had a good shot at it at the beginning but we weren't ready for it. We had nine freshmen wrestle tonight and they wrestled like freshmen. We are pretty good but they are just a little more experienced than us."

The experience Musso is talking about comes from wrestling in big matches like Wednesday.

"We got our butts kicked today but a lot of good things came out of it too," Musso said. "They won nine matches and we won five, last season we won zero. I'm very excited and we're not out of this yet, we have a shot at this in the tournament. Do we have enough guns to do it? We're going to find out."

Musso thinks he may have enough to get an SWC title but Piel seems to know it and has designs on bigger prizes as well.

"This win puts us a little ahead entering the SWC tournament and we're going to try and put a state championship banner up on the wall, we're making a run and the (Class) L's," Piel said. "We have some tough competition ahead of us but if we keep wrestling like we are and peak at the right time, I think we'll be alright."

New Milford 47, New Fairfield 26 (at New Milford) 106: Kyle Lindner (NM) major dec Alec Opsal 15-0  
113: Halim Bourjeli (NM) pinned Shelby Simpson 1:43; 120: Taylor Shay (NF) major dec Bryan Rojas 20-6; 126: Niko Stefanatos (NM) won by forfeit; 132: Zach Arnold (NM) pinned Dan Amorando 5:13;  
138: Brett Leonard (NM) pinned Tyler Cerlich 3:49; 145: Louis Alhage (NM) dec. Tyler Burlinson 2-1;  
152: Kam Bradshaw (NM) won by forfeit; 160: Andrew D'Amico (NF) major dec John Ceconi 9-0; 170: Mikey Amorando (NF) pinned Jorge Arcuri 1:23; 182: William Hess (NF) pinned Denzel Phillips 1:59;  
195: Thomas McIlveen (NM) pinned L.J. Quartaro 2:20; 220: Robert Tozzi (NM) dec. Ryan Tharas 7-6; 285: Shawn Graves (NF) pinned Jomar Orejuela 1:36.