

Danbury wrestlers eager after competing in Beast of the East Tournament

By Jon Chik

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What better way to get ready for your regular season than with a trip to Delaware for the Beast of the East Tournament against wrestlers from all over the country?

Six members of the Danbury High wrestling squad (junior captain and All-American Jakob Camacho, freshman RJ Jack, sophomore **Ben LeBlanc**, sophomore **Kyle Fields**, freshman AJ Kovacs and junior Gino Baratta) got to do exactly that, and all of them captured at least one victory at the two-day event over the weekend.

Danbury coach **Ricky Shook**, who was only allowed to bring six wrestlers to the special-invite tournament, referred to it as the “hardest tournament in the country during the season.”

“I brought guys that wrestled in the offseason that want to wrestle in college,” said Shook, whose team finished tied for 63rd place out of 110. “It wasn’t really per se my six best guys; it’s just six of the guys that I thought would benefit. It was our first competition and we wrestled great.”

Wrestling in the 120-pound weight class, Camacho enjoyed a memorable romp through the tournament, winning six matches and placing fifth.

“It was a tremendous experience being out there competing against some of the best wrestlers in the country,” Camacho said. “Different states have different styles. Different teams have different styles. It’s really cool to wrestle kids that are very diverse and vary in their technique.”

Jack and LeBlanc each went 2-2 and Fields made it to the second day and was one win away from placing.

“Without a doubt (the tournament got everyone ready for the season),” Camacho said. “A nice little wakeup call to everyone saying ‘all right, this is where we are and we’ve got a lot of work to do to be where we want to be at the end of the year.’”

Now the Hatters shift their attention to Wednesday’s 4:30 p.m. home clash with Norwalk, the regular-season opener.

And for a team that has captured 29 of the last 30 FCIAC Championships, most of us can probably figure out what one of the Hatters’ top goals will be this season.

“We talk about tradition the first day and after that it’s a done deal,” Shook said. “We don’t talk about it until we get there and we worry about it then. We take every week as a new week and every tournament we go to is a new tournament. Right now we’re focusing on this week and then the holiday tournament next week.”

More importantly, the wrestlers themselves expect nothing less.

“We just expect to win it every year and it’s kind of been embedded in our brains ever since middle school that we’re supposed to win this (FCIAC) tournament,” senior captain **Andrew Marquis** said.

A season ago, Danbury placed a remarkable 14 wrestlers on the FCIAC First Team, FCIAC Second Team or FCIAC Honorable Mention Team, and exactly half (Camacho, LeBlanc, **Solomon James**, Marquis, **Peterson Souza**, Michael Gaboardi and **Jake Constantine**) are back in the fold to lead this crop of Hatters into the campaign.

<http://www.newstimes.com/sports/article/Danbury-wrestlers-eager-after-competing-in-Beast-10807228.php>

"We've got a good young core coming up right now and we've got a bunch of seniors who are looking to bounce back from a season that we thought we should have won the State Open," Marquis said. "We're eager to get that going again."

Danbury also enters the season having won four state championships (two Class LLs, two Opens) in the last four years, so expectations are perhaps as high as ever for the perennial powerhouse.

"We're going to take it step-by-step," Souza said. "First, we're going to worry about the Holiday Tournament, which we believe we should win. Then we'll go on to Eastern States and take it tournament by tournament. Leading up to FCIACs, we should be ready."

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