

Bristol Eastern climbs to No. 2 in The Bulletin State Wrestling Coaches' Poll

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Bristol Eastern is breathing some rarefied air.

The Lancers ascended to the No. 2 spot in The Bulletin state wrestling coaches' poll this week.

While Bristol Eastern has been as high as No. 4, most recently on Jan. 27, 2015, it's the first time this century that the Lancers have cracked the top three.

"It's a little unexpected, but I knew we were deep this season," Bristol Eastern coach Bryant Lishness said.

Danbury is still entrenched at the top of the poll.

The Hatters received all 15 first-place votes.

"They are still the cream of the crop, everybody is chasing them," Lishness said.

The Lancers just forged ahead of New Milford, which slipped back to No. 3, on the strength of a very good week.

Danbury easily won its own Ryan Sabbagh Holiday tournament with 321 ½ points. Bristol Eastern, however, finished second with 199 ½ points, ahead of New Milford which finished with 185 points.

Bristol Eastern then defeated Newtown, 39-36, in a dual match.

Despite that win and the success in Danbury, Lishness still believes New Milford, the four-time defending Class L state champ, is the team to beat in the division which both occupy.

His Lancers, who have not won a state title since 1996, are catching up.

"We're a pretty young team, but we have deep sophomore and junior classes and some quality seniors," Lishness said. "The sophomores and juniors have been together since they were young wrestling for the Gladiators (wrestling club) and they expect to win. They have a confidence about them. They don't wrestle defensively, they try to figure out their opponents and what they can do against them."

Lishness said even his most inexperienced wrestlers have season records above .500, which he considers to be a strong indicator of good things to come.

Newtown, which was missing one of its key wrestlers in the loss to Bristol Eastern, remains in the No. 4 spot while Fairfield-Warde dropped two spots to No. 5 after an eighth-place finish in a tournament in Lowell, Mass.

Trumbull has moved up a spot to No. 6, taking the spot occupied by Xavier. The Falcons fell back to No. 7 after they lost to New Milford, 43-21, on Saturday.

The first local team is again Windham at No. 8.

Despite having lost nine wrestlers from a year ago, the Whippets are off to a 10-0 start.

"The five that we had coming back gave us a better nucleus than a lot of other people," Windham coach Pat Risley said. "I knew we could be a solid team, but we had the potential for some holes. We still have some young, inexperienced kids out there that we have to bring up to speed. I have us right there in the bottom half of the top 10. We could may be in the top 15. We have yet to prove anything, but I'm tickled pink at the growth."

The Whippets survived a close encounter with Killingly, 38-32, Wednesday and then won their own Whippet Duals.

Southington enters the top 10 for the first time since the final 2013 poll. The Blue Knights come in at No. 9, just ahead of Ledyard which slipped a spot to No. 10.

Ellis Tech, for the first time this season, dropped out of the top 10 after a third-place finish in the KSA tournament at Disney World in Florida last week.