

Danbury finishes No. 1 in Bulletin's H.S. coaches' wrestling poll

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Danbury has been No. 1 in the state throughout the high school wrestling season.

This weekend at the State Open wrestling championship in New Haven, the Hatters left no doubt that coaches voting in The Bulletin State Wrestling Coaches' Poll have been correct.

Danbury, the Class LL state champs, set State Open records for points (212.5), winning margin (122.5) and by having six wrestlers take home individual championships.

It was quite a performance.

"I've never seen anything like it in 30 years of coaching," veteran Danbury coach Ricky Shook said.

The Hatters finished off the in-state wrestling season on Monday by being voted the unanimous No. 1, capturing all 16 first-place votes, in the final poll of the season.

It's the fourth time in five years that the Hatters finish No. 1 in the state.

Last year, New Fairfield surprised everyone and won the Open, but it was Danbury who finished No. 1 in the poll.

Danbury owned No. 1 in The Bulletin poll from 1997-2010 before Bacon Academy broke its run in 2011. Newtown was voted No. 1 in 2015.

It was the first State Open title in three years for Danbury.

"I think it was more for the seniors and juniors that hadn't won it," Shook said. "I've won State Opens. This is our 14th. These guys that are seniors and my junior (Jakob Camacho) hadn't won an Open as a team. We'd talked about it all year."

While coaches voting in the poll were solid with Danbury in the top slot, everything else was up for grabs.

The second through sixth slots in the poll were separated by all of 18 points.

New Milford received 223 points to retain second in the poll followed by Newtown (218), Xavier (211), Bristol Eastern (210) and Southington (205).

The top local team was Class M state champion Ellis Tech, which finished fifth at the State Open but seventh in the poll.

"Am I happy that the program is top five (at the Open)? Yes, but I know that we could have wrestled better," Eagles coach Rafael Calixto said. "I'm a little disappointed overall. It's bittersweet. I know we left some points on the mat. I know we could have wrestled better. We had a bad Friday. The other side of that coin is we have three guys going to the New England championship next weekend."

Rounding out the top ten in the poll were Fairfield Warde, Trumbull and Ledyard.

Despite a sixth-place finish in the Open, Montville was left outside of the top 10.

The coaches voting in the poll played both sides of the coin.

Some placed a large value on where teams finished at the Open, while others chose to put less stock in that and look at the year as a whole. The format of the Open allows for teams to prosper with the presence of just several very good wrestlers.

Danbury has more than that.

The Hatters will bring eight to the New England championship.

"It's very hard to get out of this state because it's very hard to get out of this tournament with numbers. Eight is the most we've ever had. Out of 14 guys, that's pretty good," Shook said.

With those kind of numbers, the veteran coach is hoping that Danbury can do something that no Connecticut team has done since Windham in 1992: win a New England championship.

"We have that goal every year but it never happens. Hopefully we didn't lose everything here (at the State Open) ... I don't think so, these guys seem ready," Shook said.