

Macho Camacho: Danbury wrestler completes season of dominance

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Jakob Camacho of the Danbury Hatters celebrates his victory in the 120lb weight class during the State Open Wrestling Championships at the Floyd Little Athletic Center on February 25, 2017 in New Haven, ... [more](#)

Danbury High School wrestling coach Ricky Shook had a hunch that Jakob Camacho would become a special wrestler before he ever even reached the high school.

In fact, the Hatters' coach saw the seeds of success starting to take root in Camacho — now the seventh-ranked 120-pound high school wrestler in the country, according to FloWrestling.com, and the Hearst Connecticut Wrestler of the Year — when he was coming up through the ranks in the elementary and middle school programs with the Danbury Youth Wrestling Association.

"He was coming up, and he was talented. He had good hips and stuff, and I was talking to him when he was in fifth or sixth grade," Shook recalled. "All of a sudden, I saw weight coming off him about a year later."

And when the coach asked the young wrestler what was causing his sudden and dramatic change in physique, his answer was simple and to-the-point.

"He goes 'Oh, I run hills every day,'" Shook said. "And this is a kid who was in fifth or sixth grade telling me this. It was pretty impressive coming from a little kid, to have the drive to want to do it on his own. He wasn't cutting weight for wrestling, he just wanted to get in shape. Fifth and sixth graders don't usually say that kind of stuff."

Camacho carried that dedication and work ethic with him to Danbury High School, where he quickly made a name for himself for his quickness and aggressive style. And yet, even in a program with such a rich winning tradition, and even in a school which has seen so many talented wrestlers pass through its hallways through the decades, Camacho has emerged as a rare talent.

"He's a hard worker and he's very driven — more driven than most," Shook said. "He wants to wrestle Division I and he wants to win a national championship in college. I haven't had many like that, ever. Not many people do."

Camacho already ranks among the all-time Hatter greats — and he still has his senior year to add to his already impressive resume. His career record of 135-10 includes a 44-2 record this past season, a 44-3 mark as a sophomore and a 47-5 record as a freshman. In his first three high school seasons, Camacho has won three straight FCIAC titles; reached three straight Class LL state finals and won two titles; reached three straight State Open finals and won two titles; and placed in the top three in New England three straight years, winning a championship this past season. This past season, he also won the prestigious Eastern States Classic in Upstate New York, and received the Most Outstanding Wrestler Award for his efforts.

Camacho wrestles year-round and trains at Iowa Style Wrestling in Somers, N.Y., with coach John Degl when he's not with his Danbury teammates. Before the high school season even started, Camacho did something no other wrestler from Connecticut had ever done when he placed fourth — and earned All-America honors — at the Super 32, an elite national tournament in Greensboro, N.C., in October. Connecticut's previous

best showing in that particular tournament, according to Shook, was when Hatter great Kevin Jack placed fifth at 120 pounds in 2012.

Next high school season, provided he stays healthy and continues his winning ways, Camacho will be going for his fourth FCIAC title, which only seven other Hatters have ever done (although the postponement of the 2013 tournament prevented Jack and Johnny Garcia from likely being a part of that group); his third Class LL crown, which only nine other Hatters have done; his third State Open title, which only Charlie Costanzo and Jack have done; and his second New England crown, which only Costanzo and Jack have done. Camacho will also be in the running to break the school's individual career wins record, which Garcia set at 180.

Individual accomplishments aside, Camacho was a key member of the Danbury team which won the New England team title this past season, becoming the first Connecticut team since Windham in 1992 to capture that crown. That capped an unstoppable Hatter run through the postseason championship meets which included their 13th State Open title since 2001, their second straight and 19th overall Class LL state title, and their 30th FCIAC crown in the last 31 years. The only defeat the Hatters suffered this past winter was a dual-meet loss to perennial powerhouse Mount Anthony Union of Bennington, Vt., on Jan. 16.

"I couldn't be more proud of my teammates," Camacho said. "Everyone came together. We lost to Mount Anthony, and it was a wake-up call. After that, it was day-in, day-out work, and it all paid off in the end. It was incredible to see what we could accomplish as teammates. It was truly amazing and an honor to be a captain of that team."

Camacho opened the season by placing fifth at the Beast of the East, an elite national invitational meet in Delaware in mid-December. For most wrestlers, fifth place at the Beast of the East would be a tremendous accomplishment. For Camacho, however, it was a disappointment.

And, more importantly, it was a motivator.

"This past season was great, there were a couple little letdowns in the early stages," he said. "At the Beast of the East, I took fifth, but after that, I had my mind set and I wasn't going to let anyone beat me. That was my mind set going into the postseason tournaments."

After that, nobody did beat him.

When the high school season ended, Camacho turned his attention to the FloNationals in Indiana at the end of March. He placed second at the FloNationals, losing only to Julian Chlebove of Pennsylvania, the No. 2-ranked 120-pounder in the country.

"It didn't go how I would've liked it to end, but second is not too bad," Camacho said.

"Right now, I'm back to the learning process and starting from the ground up again. I'm just going to keep getting better and better. It's impossible to become perfect, but I strive for perfection, and that keeps pushing me every day."

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