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## Wrestling Jack key to NC State wrestling title hopes

Drew McNatton, Correspondent Nov 5, 2017



Junior Kevin Jack lunges around a Duke wrestler for a takedown. The NC State wrestling team beat Duke 34-6 in the ACC opener at Reynolds Coliseum on Jan. 11.

Logan LaBo

Senior Kevin Jack has accomplished a lot in his college wrestling career so far: he's a two-time All-American, has two ACC championships, was awarded the ACC Championship most outstanding wrestler and a three-time NCAA qualifier.

What's left for Jack to accomplish? In his eyes an NCAA championship for himself and his team.

“Personally I accomplished a lot more than I expected,” Jack said. “But actually my goals are a little higher than that, I actually want to become national champ individually, and as a team, I want us to accomplish a little more. I want us to win the ACC title this [year], the dual ACC championship and place in NCAA as a dual as well.”

After finishing third last year and fifth two years ago, Jack is certainly on a good trajectory to accomplish that goal. Jack is also just the ninth player in school history to earn two All-American labels and the 23rd wrestler in school history to win back-to-back ACC titles.

Jack has 92 career wins at NC State, ranking seventh all-time, and is just 30 wins shy of tying Sylvester Terkay from the 1990's, who has the most victories in Pack wrestling history with 122. Jack finished last year with a record of 35-2 including a 29-match win streak which led him to a third-place finish in the NCAA tournament where he went 6-1.

“I think he's capable of winning that many matches, but it's just whether we wrestle him that many times,” head coach Pat Popolizio said. “Our main focus is winning the national title, and I think that record is more important than most wins in NC State wrestling history. Because if you look, Nick Gwiazdowski is way more known cause he won two national titles not how many wins he has.”

Jack has spent the majority of his collegiate career wrestling at 141 pounds and finished last year as the third-ranked 141-pound wrestler after winning both the Wolfpack Open and the Midlands Championship. Jack's 35 wins a year ago are his career high, and with 26 wins in 2015-16 being his lowest season win total, his 30-win total is possible if he wrestles enough to get that many wins.

“I think that would be a pretty cool to be able to look back on,” Jack said. “To be able to see my name as number one in wins at NC State would definitely be something I could always look back at if I do reach that point and be proud of myself for.”

Jack is also growing as a leader for this team and in many aspects of his life and his wrestling career while here at NC State. The two-time New England high school champion is as motivated as ever and wants to use his skills to push the eighth-ranked Wolfpack program to a national championship.

“I think I’ve just grown mentally and physically,” Jack said. “When I first came here I was a little childish and goofed around a little more but over the years I’ve grown to take the practices and the matches a little more seriously, and bring my focus 100 percent towards practice every day and better myself every single day.”

A lot of the other wrestlers on the squad look to Jack as leader because of his outstanding record and list of achievements in three years at NC State. The No. 2 ranked wrestler in the country has continued to impress against other top-ranked opponents going 7-1 against top-10 ranked opponents last year.

“Anybody who wins is always a leader,” Popolizio said. “People like to be surrounded by winners so he’s a leader, he’s improved tremendously. His skills to communicate and his skills to motivate other guys and his positive attitude is what separates him from year one, two and three to this year. He’s very positive about everything we’re doing embracing the training so yeah I consider him a huge part of the success of the program and he’s someone you define as a leader for sure.”

Jack and the wrestling team will look to get off to a good start in Princeton at the NWCA All-Star Classic and are trying to go for the ACC Championship and NCAA Championship of March next year.