

Hatter wrestlers primed for another big season

By Richard Gregory Updated 11:17 pm, Tuesday, December 5, 2017



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Andrew Ward's Anthony Zarlenga and Danbury's A.J. Kovacs wrestle in the 145 pound class in the high school wrestling meet between Fairfield Ward and Danbury high schools, on Wednesday, January 25, 2017, at ... [more](#)

DANBURY — Even for a program which has become as accustomed to winning as the Danbury High School wrestling program has, last season was special.

The mighty Hatters won their first New England title since 1990 in March to cap another banner year in their storied history. And they did it dominating fashion, winning by 47 points and essentially blowing the doors off the best competition New England could offer.

That came one week after an even more dominating performance at the State Open, where the Hatters — who had already won their second straight Class LL state

championship and their 30th FCIAC crown in 31 years – won their 13th title since 2001 and outscored the rest of the state by more than 100 points.

Even for a team with so many championship banners and so many star wrestlers, last season stood out among the best ever – which raises the question: What will the Hatters do for an encore this year?

That question will ultimately be answered when the championship portion of the season rolls around in February, but this much is already certain: the Hatters have quite a few key wrestlers back from last year's team.

More Information

DANBURY HIGH SCHOOL WRESTLING

2017-18 schedule

Dec. 16, Beast of the East tournament
(Newark, Del.)

Dec. 20, at Warde, 5 p.m.

Dec. 22, at Ridgefield, 4 p.m.

Dec. 27, vs. Darien, Norwalk, Staples,
10 a.m.

Dec. 30, Ryan Sabbagh Holiday
Tournament (Danbury High), 10 a.m.

Jan. 3, vs. Stamford, 5 p.m.

Jan. 5, SWAT Tournament (Sanford,
Maine)

Jan. 10, vs. Trumbull, 5 p.m.

Jan. 12, Eastern States Classic (Loch
Sheldrake, N.Y.)

Jan. 15, vs. Mount Anthony Union, 6
p.m.

That includes senior Jakob Camacho, who won the 120-pound New England title last year and won the 126-pound title at the Super 32 national tournament last month.

And it also includes sophomore Ryan Jack, who placed second in New England and first at the State Open at 106 pounds last year as a freshman.

And 126-pound State Open champ Kyle Fields.

And sophomore A.J. Kovacs, who placed second at the State Open and third in New England at 138.

And senior Gino Baratta, who took fifth at the State Open and sixth in New England at 160.

And junior Ben Leblanc, who took second in Class LL at 113.

Jan. 17, at Greenwich, 5 p.m.

Jan. 27, vs. Timberlane (N.H.), Xavier,
Nashoba Valley Tech (Mass.), 10 a.m.

Jan. 31, vs. Westhill, 5 p.m.

Feb. 3, at New Milford, 2 p.m.

Feb. 9-10, FCIAC championships at
New Canaan

Feb. 16-17, Class LL state
championships at Trumbull

Feb. 23-24, State Open championships
at Floyd Little Field House, New Haven

March 2-3, New England
championships at Providence Career
and Technical Academy

All in all, that's not a bad core
around which to build a team — a
powerhouse team.

"I'm confident in our team this year,"
Camacho said. "Of course, every
year you lose a few seniors who are
important, but that's that's when it's
time for the new kids and the kids
who have been there to come in and
pick up the slack. If we put the work
in, if we're confident and if we
believe in ourselves, we can do
anything we say we will."

As memorable as last season was,
that's all it is now: a memory. It's
time to start all over with some new
faces in new places.

"It's kind of like closing a book, and now we have to open a new one," Camacho said.

"We have to write some new goals, and even if they're the same as last year, there are
always certain things to improve on."

Graduation losses from last year include Michael Gaboardi, who placed fourth in New
England at 285; Jake Constantine, who won the 182-pound State Open crown; Andrew
Marquis, who won the 220-pound State Open title; Shaun Williams, who took fifth in
Class LL at 132; and Peterson Souza, who placed fifth in Class LL at 145.

Hatters coach Ricky Shook will now search for replacements for those graduates and
try to cobble together another contender.

"Dual meets might be a bit of a challenge for us," Shook said. "I think we might be more
of a hard tournament team."

Speaking of hard tournaments, the Hatters have four on their schedule right out of the
gate: the Beast of the East in Delaware on Dec. 16, their annual Ryan Sabbagh Holiday

Tournament at DHS on Dec. 30, the SWAT Tournament in Maine on Jan. 5, and the Eastern States in Loch Sheldrake, N.Y., on Jan. 12.

Add those to non-conference dual meets against Mount Anthony Union (Vt.) on Jan. 15, Timberlane (N.H.) and Nashoba Valley Tech (Mass.) on Jan. 27, and in-state rival New Milford on Feb. 3, and that's one blockbuster of a regular-season schedule – before the championship meets even start.

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