

New Canaan Rams ready to rumble at FCIAC wrestling championships

By [Dave Stewart](#) on February 9, 2018 in [FCIAC](#), [High School Sports](#), [Sports](#), [Sports Lead](#) · [1 Comments](#)



Ram freshman Justin Mastroianni en route to a pinfall win against Stamford's Jack Higgins in Tuesday's regular-season finale at NCHS. — Dave Stewart photo

Every winter, the top wrestlers from the FCIAC converge on New Canaan High School for the annual Joe Sikorski Wrestling Championships, a competition which has featured many thrilling moments over the years.

The way things are shaping up, the hometown Rams could be starring in some of the biggest matches at this season's tournament.

With a 12-3 dual meet record and at least six or seven wrestlers who have a legitimate chance at reaching weight class finals, New Canaan is in the midst of one of its best seasons.

The Rams are tournament-tested, especially young stars Tyler Sung and Justin Mastroianni, and nine wrestlers have double-digit wins, including seven with 19 or more victories.

"It all depends on what kind of match-ups we have and how well we wrestle," head coach Paul Gallo said. "It's the FCIACs and this is as hard as the state tournaments. There are a lot of quality guys. You just have to wrestle hard the whole time because if you make a mistake, you're out.

"There are no second chances here."

The tournament will be held over two days beginning at 4:30, Friday, Feb. 9. Matches will run into the evening and will then resume at 10 a.m., Saturday. The 15 weight class championships, 99 pounds through heavyweight, will be held at approximately 4 p.m., Saturday.

The HAN Network will carry tournament action on both days, with coverage starting at 4:30 p.m., Friday and 4 p.m., Saturday. All the weight class finals will be shown live. You can watch at NCAAdvertiser.com, FCIAC.net, and han.network, as well as on Frontier Communications' Vantage Sports Network (Chs. 600/1600-HD).

The Rams wrapped up the dual meet season with a 62-18 rout of the Stamford Black Knights on Tuesday at NCHS. New Canaan won 11 weight classes, including five via pinfall.

New Canaan has had a remarkable winter, and has participated in a few more tournaments than in prior seasons.

The Rams were second at the Lawless Invitational in Nonnewaug, earning three weight class championships, and took third place at the Shoreline Scuffle in Branford two weeks ago, with four wrestlers winning titles. They also had six wrestlers place at the Ryan Sabbagh Tournament in Danbury earlier this season.

Sung and Mastroianni, who were third and fifth, respectively, at the Eastern States Classic, are well in tune with tournament wrestling, but the Rams' schedule this season helped gain experience for the entire lineup.

"For Sung and Mastroianni, it's not a problem — they're tournament-tested," Gallo said. "Some of the other guys aren't used to that as much, but we wrestled a lot of tournaments this year to try to get ready for this and hopefully, we are."

"We should have some good seeds and if we wrestle to our seeds, we're going to have a good tournament."

Sung has continued a remarkable start to his career this season and figures to be a top seed in the 138-pound weight class this weekend. He's 31-4 as a sophomore after a 40-8 freshman campaign during which he finished third in the FCIAC and second in Class L and the State Open.

"Tyler will face the Trumbull guy (Matt Ryan) who he beat 5-3 and he's very good," Gallo said. "And there's a new guy from Danbury who just came in from Hotchkiss, AJ Caba, and he's a quality guy."

Mastroianni has burst onto the scene in much the same way Sung did last winter. The freshman, who will wrestle at 126 pounds, is 28-4 and will also be a high seed in a loaded weight class.

Mastroianni's biggest challenge will come from Danbury's Jakob Camacho, a senior who won FCIAC, Class LL, State Open, New England and National championships last year. Camacho, who will wrestle at North Carolina State

next year, missed much of the season with a leg injury and only recently returned to the mats.

“Justin has Camacho in his weight class now, and he’s ranked second in the country,” Gallo said. “Justin’s job is to get into the finals and give him a good match. (Camacho) lost to (New Milford’s Mel) Ortiz and he’s not in tournament shape, so he might be beatable right now. If he was in tournament condition and he’d been wrestling, no, but right now he’s vulnerable. This is the time you want to get him.”

New Canaan is in great shape in the heaviest weight class, where senior Nick Kortman and junior Jack Stewart are strong contenders for championships.

Kortman was the FCIAC runner-up at 220 pounds last season and is 24-3 in that class this year, while the 6-foot-5, 275-pound Stewart is a likely No. 1 seed with a record of 19-1 in the heavyweight class.

“My heavyweights are really wrestling well,” Gallo said. “Both Kortman and Stewart should do really well at this tournament.”

Junior co-captains and brothers Nate and Christian Sibbett will wrestle at 145 and 152 pounds, respectively, and they give the Rams two more high seeds.

Nate Sibbett is 20-3 this season and although he’s missed the last two weeks with a shoulder injury, he’ll be ready to rumble for the postseason after finishing third in the FCIAC last year.

Christian Sibbett is 23-4 this season and will be bidding for a trip to the finals and a possible showdown with heavy favorite A.J. Kovacs of Danbury.

“Kovacs is going 152 for this tournament, so that means Christian is trying to get into the finals to face him,” Gallo said. “(Kovacs) is the best in New England, so Christian may not win everything, but he’s got a good chance to get there. We’ll see how Nate does at 145. With Kovacs going up, he’s got a few guys who are tough, but he has a chance to do well.”

Senior co-captain Luigi DeRubeis has had a stellar senior campaign, and is a likely top three seed at 132 pounds. DeRubeis carries a record of 22-3 into the postseason and his weight class is challenging with Danbury’s Kyle Fields and Warde’s Alex Steele in the way.

Outside of those seven, the Rams have had a few other wrestlers put together winning seasons, including freshmen Joey Bucci (16-10) at 106 pounds and Dylan Kortman (13-10) at 120; junior Sergiy Babenkov (6-4) at 182 pounds; and senior Josiah Jones (7-1) at 195 pounds.

Now, it’s time for New Canaan to make its mark in its own gym against the best the FCIAC has to offer.

From the Gallo’s perspective, the goal is simple: “We just have to wrestle to our full potential.”