

Danbury wins eighth straight FCIAC wrestling championship

By Ryan Lacey Updated 12:07 am, Sunday, February 11, 2018



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Danbury AJ Kovacs defeated Fairfield Warde Kris Gjinaj (Red) 17-4 in the 152 pound match of the FCIAC Boys Wrestling Championship finals at New Canaan High School in New Canaan, Conn. on Saturday, Feb. 10, ... [more](#)

NEW CANAAN — Squarely in the reload camp after winning one FCIAC championship after another, the Danbury wrestling team faced a sizable amount of adversity through graduation losses and injuries to key contributors this season.

None of that mattered when the chips were on the table for the FCIAC finals Saturday afternoon at New Canaan High. The Hatters still delivered.

Already staked to a 25-point lead heading into the finals, the Hatters won five singles titles to claim its 31st FCIAC championship in the last 32 seasons. The Hatters scored 242 points to secure the crown, while Warde finished second with 202.

"There was a lot of building that had to be done with a young team like this," said Hatters senior Gino Barratta, who claimed the 170-pound championship. "They pulled through and they know what it's like to wrestle at this level."

The host Rams took third with 168 points while Trumbull was fourth (130.5) and Wilton (116) rounded out the top five.

It was far from one-school dominance, though, as nine teams claimed a gold medal with Danbury winning its eighth straight title.

"We had some wins we didn't expect and some losses we didn't expect," Hatters coach Ricky Shook said. "We had freshmen and sophomores winning matches and losing matches. We wrestled pretty well. Out of our leaders we got what we needed to get."

Ryan Jack (120), A.J. Kovacs (152) and Ben LeBlanc (113) – two sophomores and a junior – also won titles for Danbury, which was down Jakob Camacho (flu) after the quarterfinal round.

Baratta had one of the more difficult wins of the event as he survived a 3-2 decision over Wilton's Zach Zeyher. The Warriors' man won the title last year.

"I wrestled him earlier in the season. I knew I had to pull through and he'd be ready for me," Baratta said. "At the end it just came down to heart and I just pushed through."

The tournament began Friday and concluded with semifinal matches Saturday morning before the finals. The Hatters produced the most finalists (nine) while the Eagles, Mustangs, and Rams sent four.

The Mustangs went 1-3 in finals matches as Alex Steele, who won most outstanding wrestler for lower weights, began the afternoon with a decision win over Danbury's Kyle Fields. Warde, which has finished runners-up in six of the past seven seasons, had 13 wrestlers place in the tournament.

"Overall as a team I think we did well," Mustangs coach Jason Shaughnessy said. "We would have liked to perform better in the finals. I think two of the three matches we

could have and should have won, but we didn't. I think it's going to give us the opportunity to prepare us for next week."

Kris Gjinaj, Joe Gjinaj and Izaake Zuckerman all made the finals for Warde.

"You're always chasing Danbury, and we made it a respectable result," Shaughnessy said. "They're a real good team and I think we had a good team effort to stay competitive."

New Canaan, who posted one of the top league records during the dual-meet season, gave a strong showing for the tournament. Tyler Sung claimed the 138-pound championship while Nick Kortman was a winner at 220.

"This is our best performance in years," New Canaan coach Paul Gallo said. "To get four finalists, three winners and nine guys place is a great accomplishment. We had a great season, wrestled hard and had a great tournament."

New Canaan freshman Justin Mastroianni finished off the meet with a win over Wilton's Nick Rende, scoring two points late to claim a 3-2 decision.

"He has so much experience (at the middle school level)," Gallo said. "If you combine everyone on the team besides Sung, he's had more matches in his life than everyone combined. It's not like he's going to be phased by anything."

One of the highlights of the afternoon came at 160 pounds, where Ridgefield's Simon Preston upset Zuckerman. Preston trailed 4-0 as the second period was coming to a close, but secured a pinfall as time expired.

Stamford's Garey Mendez (145), Trumbull's Bret Nutter, Wilton's Travis Longo (106), Staples' George Harrington (285) and Greenwich's Andrew Nanai (182) all won championships. Harrington upped his record to 32-0 this winter.

After extending the streak of FCIAC championships, the Hatters will look to win their third straight Class LL title next weekend.

"We have big things ahead of us and even with the setbacks, I see us winning anything we have in front of us," Baratta said.

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Team scores: 1. Danbury 242; 2. Warde 202; 3. New Canaan 168; 4. Trumbull 130.5; 5. Wilton 116; 6. Ridgefield 91; 7. Westhill 90; 8. Staples 76; 9. McMahon 61.5; 10. Greenwich 60; 10 Ludlowe 60; 12 Norwalk 54; 13. Stamford 49; 14. Darien 10.

99 pounds (exhibition): Liam Knight (Danbury) pin Matt Lucas (Danbury); **106:** Travis Longo (Wilton) dec. Tyler Johnson (Danbury) **113:** Ben LeBlanc (Danbury) pin Bradon Neri-Jacobs (Trumbull); **120:** Ryan Jack (Danbury) dec. Chase Parrott (Westhill); **126:** Justin Mastroianni (New Canaan) dec. Nick Rende (Wilton); **132:** Alex Steele (Warde) dec. Kyle Fields (Danbury); **138:** Tyler Sung (New Canaan) dec. Matt Ryan (Trumbull); **145:** Garey Mendez (Stamford) dec. Peter Murray (Ridgefield); **152:** AJ Kovacs (Danbury) dec. Kris Gjinaj (Warde); **160:** Simon Preston (Ridgefield) pin Izaake Zuckerman (Warde); **170:** Gino Baratta (Danbury) dec. Zach Zeyher (Wilton); **182:** Andrew Nanai (Greenwich) dec. Joe Palmieri (Trumbull); **195:** Brett Nutter (Trumbull) dec. Joe Gjinaj (Warde); **220:** Nick Kortman (New Canaan) dec. Montez Osbey (Danbury); **285:** George Harrington (Staples) dec. Jack Stewart (New Canaan).



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