

Wrestling Team Has Standouts In Class LL Championships

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Newtown High Wrestling Ron Chivinski State Championships

23

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Newtown High School's Aaron Occhipinti won the 126 pound weight division championship, and 285 pound grappler Joe Zeller was runner-up as the Nighthawks, the lone South-West Conference team in the competition, placed eighth as a team in the Class LL state championships, at Trumbull High, on February 17.

Newtown had four place finishers in all, as Nik Accousti placed third at 132, and Owen Walsh was fourth at 152.

Danbury was the top overall team, with 274 points. Newtown scored 91.

These Nighthawks will continue the season in the State Open, at Floyd Little Athletic Center in New Haven, Friday and Saturday, February 23 and 24.

Occhipinti scored a 6-3 decision over Trumbull's Jonathan Kosak in their finals round bout. Occhipinti, the top seed in his weight class, had a bye and won two matches by pin fall before winning two decisions.

"I'm very proud of both Aaron and Joe; they are peaking at the right time of year, which is the goal," Newtown Coach Ron Chivinski said. "Aaron wrestled very smart matches to win the LL Tournament. He possesses the ability to take his game to another level, which I expect him to do next weekend at the State Opens. His personal goals involve the New England tournament, so he'll need to get after it starting Friday afternoon."

Zeller lost a 3-2 decision to Staples High's George Harrington in the pinnacle round. Zeller, seeded second, had a pair of wins via pin, and came out on top in one decision en route to facing the top-seeded Harrington.

"Joe went to the ultimate tie breaker against an undefeated opponent. In fact, the Staples wrestler pinned all but two of his opponents all year. If he works hard this week, Joe could make a deep run next weekend in New Haven," Chivinski said.

Accousti won a 5-4 decision over Trumbull's David Castaldo. Walsh was pinned by Southington's Tagan Welch in 1:56.

The sixth seed in the bracket, Accousti had a bye, won a decision, then was pinned before wrestling back, winning by pin as well as earning two victories in decisions.

Walsh, the fourth-ranked grappler in his division, had a bye and won via pin before winning a trio of decisions in the wrestlebacks.

“Our wrestlers know that this is essentially a three-week-long tournament. You must bring your ‘A’ game to advance and keep wrestling each week. Owen Walsh pieced together many solid victories in a row, wrestling back to place fourth. As a team leader, I expect Owen will advance far into opens. NikAccousti avenged an early season loss to a very tough Southington opponent, then scored a crucial takedown with time running out to earn third place. He was focused and determined to advance to opens, which is the correct mindset. I think he might surprise a few guys next weekend,” Chivinski said.

The coach added that he anticipates plenty of early-round success, and for his team members to win in day one of the State Open, which features 24-man brackets per weight class.

“I expect all of our guys to still be competing Saturday,” the coach said.

Note: This is an expanded version of the article that post posted on February 17.