

Wrestling: Calo wins back-to-back New England titles

by [jgoralski](#) • March 7, 2018 • [0 Comments](#)



Paul Calo fell short in the finals at the state open and Class LL championship, above, but the 170-pounder captured the New England title last weekend.

By BRIAN JENNINGS

STAFF WRITER

The third time's the charm. After falling short in his bid for Class LL and state open titles, Paul Calo finally won when it counted the most. With a 9-0 major decision in the 170-pound final, Calo became the first Southington wrestler to win two regional titles.

On Saturday, March 3, Calo's weekend culminated in a victory over Sam Anderson (Sanford) in the championship bout. Calo was one of four Blue Knights at the New England Championship, held at the Providence Career and Technical Academy, Providence, R.I.

"It's an impressive accomplishment, for sure," said Southington coach Derek Dion. "He's lining himself up for a possibility of three."

Calo earned a four-point lead with a pair of takedowns in the first and second periods. Anderson received a caution warning with two minutes remaining in the bout before Calo pulled away with five points from a reversal and near fall.

Dion said Calo wrestled Anderson during the preseason and won with a technical fall, feeling pretty confident in the match.

“Paulie handled the match really well,” said Dion. “I think being there before helped him calm his nerves a little bit. He wrestled a smart match...maybe more smart than dominant.”

Calo advanced to the final with a 17-1 technical fall in the round of 32, a pin (5:05) in the round of 16, a 14-3 major decision in the quarterfinals, and a 6-3 decision over Dan Curran (Conval) in the semifinals. The match was knotted at 2-2 entering the third until Curran took a one-point lead from an escape midway through the period. Calo rallied back with four points on a takedown and near fall with seconds remaining.

“The kid was so strong that Paulie was really having trouble with him,” said Dion. “But we ended up figuring him out, turned him over, and beat him.”

This year’s road to back-to-back New England titles took a similar route as last year’s. Calo fell to Ryan Devivo (Xavier) in the 160-pound final of last year’s Class LL Championship by a 4-2 sudden death victory and state open by a 5-3 sudden death victory, only to avenge his losses with a 5-1 decision at the New England Championship. Calo fell to Gino Baratta (Danbury) by a 2-1 ultimate tiebreaker at this year’s Class LL Championship and, again, fell to Devivo by a 6-4 decision a week earlier at the state open.

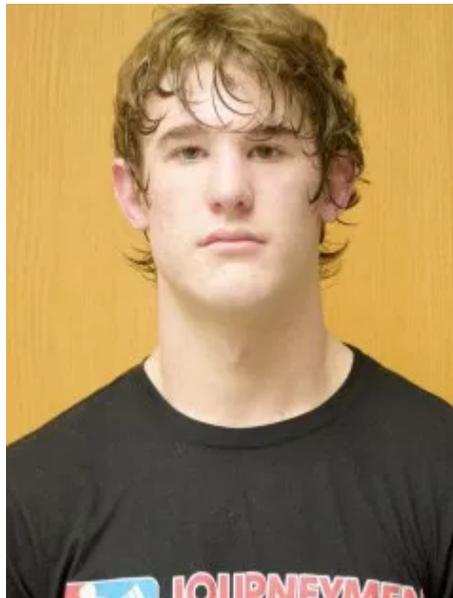
Both Calo and Southington coach Derek Dion stated that he would meet up with Devivo again in Saturday’s final following his loss to the Xavier wrestler at the state open, but Devivo advanced as far as the quarterfinals where he fell by a point in a 6-5 decision to Joe Vecchione (Chelmsford). Baratta fell in the quarterfinals as well on an 8-1 to Curran.

“I was shocked that they didn’t make it, but we were just trying to focus on Paulie and get him ready for the matches of whoever came,” said Dion. “I think it made our road a little bit easier because these guys didn’t have Paulie scouted out.”

If Calo had met up with Devivo in the final of the regional tournament, Dion said that Calo still would have been crowned New England champion.

“I think if Paulie just wrestles a smart match, I think he could beat any of those kids,” said Dion. “Whoever we got, we could have had the same result.”

Dion said that it would be strange if Calo losses in next year’s Class LL and state open finals to go on and win his third-straight New England title, but a third-straight New England title would erase any earlier losses. Dion also said



Paul Calo has yet to win a divisional or state title, but the junior is the first Blue Knight to win two New England championships.

that he would be very surprised if Calo lost any matches in New England next season.

“It would be a strange oddity, but nothing else,” said Dion. “If a guy losses a match in the NCAA Tournament and then goes on to win the National Championship that year, no one says anything about that loss. I kind of see it the same way.”

Shaun Wagner, Jacob Cardozo, and Tagan Welch also represented Southington at the regional tournament. Like Calo, Wagner also graced the podium by defeating the Class LL champion, Matthew Ryan (Trumbull), for a third time now with a 3-1 decision to finish fifth in the 138-pound weight class.

Dion said that Wagner went out there and proved that he’s on the same level as all the wrestlers in his weight class.

“It was a loaded weight class with tons of talent,” said Dion. “For him to lose in that first match, which is tough, and wrestle back all the way is pretty impressive.”

Cardozo and Welch advanced as far as the round of 32 in the championship bracket of the 126 and 152-pound weight classes.

As a team, Southington placed eighth out of 176 teams with a score of 47.5. Ponaganset (83) edged Mount Anthony (80) by a few points to win the regional title. Danbury (75) placed third as the top Connecticut team.

Calo is expected to wrestle at the 29th annual NHSCA high school nationals, which is scheduled to be held from Friday, March 23 to Sunday, March 25 at the Virginia Beach Convention Center.

For more in depth coverage, see our weekly print edition. To contact sports writer Brian Jennings, email him at BJennings@SouthingtonObserver.com.