

Former Hatter Jack set for NCAA wrestling championships

By Richard Gregory Updated 6:47 pm, Thursday, March 8, 2018



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Former Danbury High School wrestler Kevin Jack, right, in action for North Carolina State University.

This is it.

As crazy as it may seem, Kevin Jack's stellar career with the North Carolina State University wrestling team will culminate with his final NCAA championship tournament next Thursday, Friday and Saturday in Cleveland. Four triumphant seasons on college wrestling's biggest stages have been whittled down to three days – and one last chance to finish on top.

Jack, a 2014 Danbury High School graduate and a two-time New England champion for the mighty Hatters, earned All-America honors twice for the Wolfpack, placing fifth at the NCAA championships in the 141-pound class as a freshman, and third at 141

last year as a junior. Only four N.C. State wrestlers have earned All-America honors three times. Jack could join them with a big performance next week.

"At this point in my career, I know what to expect going in," Jack said in a phone interview Thursday afternoon. "The way the season has gone so far, I'm just going to go in very open-minded, have fun, attack every position, do my best in every match and just worry about one match at a time."

The Wolfpack qualified a program-record nine wrestlers for the NCAAs based on their performances at the ACCs. Jack will be making his fourth NCAA tournament appearance. He will be the fifth seed at 141 pounds this year, his third straight year as a top-five seed at the national championships.

Jack was well on his way to winning his third consecutive Atlantic Coast Conference individual title last Saturday in Chapel Hill, N.C. He led 4-1 in the third period of the 141-pound championship match over Brent Moore of Virginia Tech. However, Moore scored an escape and a takedown to tie the match at 4 with 20 seconds remaining and force overtime. With four seconds remaining in the first sudden-death overtime period, Moore registered a takedown to win 6-4.

He hasn't lost many times in his career, dating all the way back to kindergarten with Danbury Youth Wrestling, but if his years on the mat have taught Jack anything, it was to have a short memory, particularly with losses.

"It's definitely on my mind a little bit, and I've definitely learned from it," Jack said. "At this point in my career, I have to just learn from it and move on, so that's what I've done. I had held myself back a little bit when it came to that, so I've learned there's no need to do that, and to just go into every match with everything I have."

After wrapping up his high school career by placing third in the NHSCA Senior Nationals at 126 pounds, Jack took the college wrestling world by storm by placing fifth at the NCAAs in a season he was originally slated to red-shirt. He finished his freshman season with a 31-9 record and set the school record for wins by a freshman. The following year, he won his first ACC title and posted a 26-5 record. Last year, Jack became the 23rd wrestler in program history to win back-to-back ACC titles – he was named the Most Outstanding Wrestler of the ACC tournament – before placing third at the NCAAs. This past December, Jack became only the fifth wrestler in program history to surpass the 100-win mark.

"It's crazy to see where I was at coming out of high school, and seeing where I am now," said Jack, who posted a 122-11 record at Danbury High, was one of only two Hatters to ever win three State Open titles, was named an NHSCA All-American three times and earned Super-32 All-America honors twice. "It's something I never really expected. It's been a great experience being here. It's definitely been an amazing ride."

And it's not quite over yet.

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