

Danbury's Jack earns third All-America honor at N.C. State

By Richard Gregory Published 9:07 pm, Saturday, March 17, 2018



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

Kevin Jack buckled his headgear and marched into battle for the last time as a member of the North Carolina State University wrestling team on Saturday, his triumphant four-year career with the Wolf Pack culminating with one final NCAA tournament run.

The fifth seed in the 141-pound class, the former Danbury High School star entered the tournament in Cleveland with his heart set on winning the national championship which had eluded him in his three previous NCAA tournament appearances. His title hopes were dashed by a second-round loss to 12th-seeded Tyler Smith of Bucknell. Undeterred, however, Jack got right back up and won his next three matches on Friday to secure All-America honors for the third straight

year. He lost two close matches on Saturday – a one-point decision and an overtime decision – to finish sixth.

It may not have been the conclusion Jack had hoped for, but he went down fighting to the bitter end nonetheless.

"It's been an amazing four years," Jack said in a phone interview from Cleveland Saturday. "Coming into college, I never expected to do what I did. Honestly, I wanted to do more than I did, though it's kind of funny to think that way. I put it all out on the line. I gave this team, the coaches and myself everything I had."

As he walked off the mat for the last time Saturday, Jack left behind a winning legacy at N.C. State. He finished with the second-most wins in program history with 114, only eight behind the all-time leader, Sylvester Terkay (1990-93). Jack is one of only five N.C. State wrestlers to earn All-America honors three times, having placed fifth at 141 pounds as a freshman and third at 141 as a junior. He earned All-Atlantic Coast Conference honors the last three years, winning back-to-back conference titles as a sophomore and junior and placing second as a senior. As a freshman, Jack had set the N.C. State record for wins by a freshman with 31, and he was the Wolfpack's first freshman All-American since 1991.

"It's something I'll never be able to forget," said Jack, who is set to graduate this spring with a bachelor's degree in Sport Management and hopes to return to N.C. State for graduate school and help coach the team. "I hope that I have the opportunity to give back to this program like everything that was given to me. I can't wait to begin the next part of my life and try to help these guys reach their goals."

According to Danbury High coach Ricky Shook, Jack is the first wrestler from Connecticut to earn Division I All-America honors three times. Shook has had a ringside seat for many of Jack's biggest victories, from his humble beginnings in the Danbury Youth Wrestling Association, to his illustrious career at Danbury High, then on to N.C. State. Shook has been at the NCAA championships every year of Jack's college career.

"To be a three-time All-American is unbelievable," Shook said before passing the phone to Jack. "There were a lot of people from Connecticut there supporting him

this weekend, I'd say more than 100 people from the Danbury area. It was pretty cool."

As his high school records indicate, Jack as an accomplished wrestler before he ever set foot on N.C. State's campus. He was a three-time high school All-American, a two-time New England champion, a three-time State Open and three time Class LL state champion, and a three-time FCIAC champion. He ranks second on the Hatters' all-time list with 170 varsity victories – and he most likely would have been a four-time FCIAC champ had the 2013 tournament not been canceled because of a snowstorm.

A former Danbury High wrestler himself who went on to wrestle at Central Connecticut State, Shook understands all the sacrifices Jack made to be successful.

"He had a full-time job with wrestling and another full-time job with school," Shook said. "We're really proud of him. He's done all the right things since he was in high school."

And made all the right moves.

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