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## HS Athlete of the Week: Anthony Valles -- A small but powerful package

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### Opponents of South Windsor High freshman wrestler Anthony Valles will tell you he's of sound mind and body. His rivals figure to know that because he's pinned most of them.

As for Valles' heart, that may well be in an area of Pennsylvania that's a hotbed for wrestling. Valles was born and raised in Connecticut. He has lived in South Windsor for most of his 15 years. But Valles' talents, likes, and interests and what he wants to do with his life are much different than the goals his Connecticut classmates and friends may have. Valles doesn't seem to be a typical South Windsor teenager. He likes to hunt and fish for recreation and his passion for wrestling is unheard of in these parts.

His wrestling talent is also special. The 103-pound Valles has very few peers in the nation in his age group. Last year, he won the Eastern Regionals held at Penn State and went on to claim the USWA Cadet (14-under) National championship at 91 pounds in a tournament held in Fargo, N.D. "It was grueling," said Valles, the Journal Inquirer Athlete of the Week. "It was two days long and we had seven matches. There were about 100 people in my weight class. It was a great experience going out there." Valles' freshman year at South Windsor has been dominating. Valles has won the Plainville Tournament, Greater Hartford Invitational, Eagle Classic, and Rodney Smith Classic. He is undefeated and there are very few in Connecticut or New England who are capable enough to pin that first loss on him. "When you see the way he wrestles, it is at a different level," South Windsor coach Jude Knapp said. "He wrestles with the style of a Division I college wrestler. There are few doing that in high school. It is something special for a kid his age to separate himself like that." The 4-foot-11 Valles honed his skills at his father Jon's fitness club in South Windsor. Jon Valles, a 1976 East Hartford High graduate who wrestled

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collegiately at Central Connecticut State University, erected a wrestling room four years ago and the room has become a hot-spot for local wrestlers. Jon Valles runs wrestling camps out of that room and it is also home to a wrestling school run by Jon Knapp, Jude's brother.

Young Anthony would spend hours in the room working on technique and wrestling with friends, including his best friend, Manchester High freshman Chris Krisatis.

Valles started wrestling seriously when he was in middle school and began competing in many youth tournaments. He started to get to know his competition and they all seemed to come from the same area - Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania.

Wrestling is the main sport in the Lehigh Valley where thousands attend the matches, not to mention the two cable channels that cover many of the high school matches. A wrestler of Valles' caliber would be celebrated in the Lehigh Valley and the competition is stiff.

After a couple of years of making the trek down to those youth tournaments a simple thought came to Valles' mind: Why don't we move down here?

That is what Valles and his father did. For his eighth grade year, Valles and his father moved down to Nazareth, Pa., where he enrolled in an area middle school where wrestling is king. Valles' mother and sister remained in South Windsor. The Valles have no relatives or ties to the area, but when he was there, Anthony Valles felt right at home. He completed his season with a third-place finish in the Pennsylvania championships at 94-pounds for ages 14-under.

"That is the place to go," Valles said. "That is where the toughest wrestling is. I would rather live down there because it is much better wrestling and it gets you ready for the big tournaments."

It was the perfect place for him.

"Wrestling is really popular down there and we got close to a couple of families," Jon Valles said. "It helped him tremendously because he is on the small side and there isn't a lot of competition in Connecticut. It is the sport in Pennsylvania."

Valles moved back to South Windsor to begin his high school career, but his re-appearance on the wrestling scene in Connecticut will be short-lived.

"I will be moving back next year," Valles said. "Either to Blair Academy in New Jersey or Nazareth."

Blair Academy, in Blairstown, N.J., is one of the top wrestling prep school programs in the country and is less than 40 minutes from Nazareth. Valles will be taking an entrance exam soon. If he doesn't end up enrolling at Blair Academy, then he'll set his sights on Nazareth.

That makes this season at South Windsor a one-shot deal for Valles. He has high goals for the rest of his freshman campaign and is targeting the Class LL, State Open, and New England championships to round out his Connecticut career.

The Class LL championships are set for Feb. 19 with the remaining championships the following two weekends.

Valles is also looking beyond his scholastic career. He visited NCAA power Iowa last year and already has his heart set on wrestling there. He wants to be an NCAA champion and also wrestle internationally.

It is a dream that many wrestlers in the Lehigh Valley have, and Valles is going to fit right in.

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