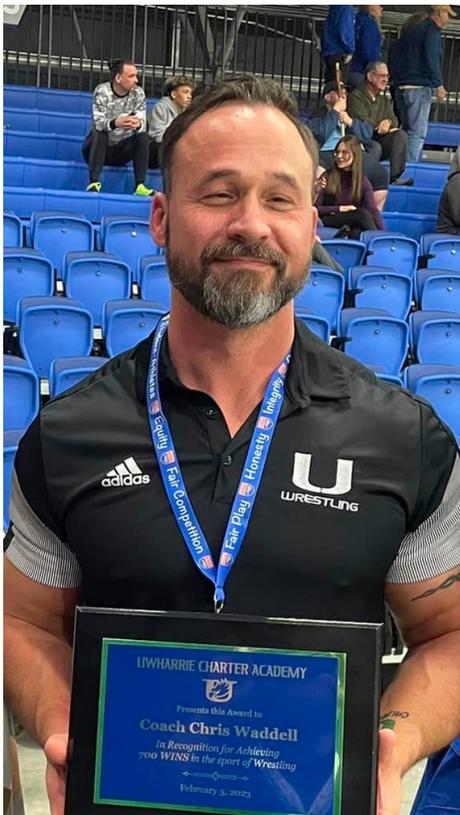


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By Dennis Garcia
SportsTone.net

GREENSBORO - A familiar matchup had a different outcome Saturday and that is exactly what the Uwharrie Charter Academy wrestling team had been working hard all season to accomplish.



Head wrestling coach Chris Waddell. Photo provided.

Having lost to Avery County in the championship match of the NCHSAA 1-A state dual meet the past two seasons, the Eagles used a key fall from senior Aldo Hernandez and a clinching fall from Jaden Maness to record a 39-36 victory at the Greensboro Coliseum. The victory left UCA a perfect 36-0 on the season, avenged a pair of losses to Avery County in the championship round and gave UCA head coach Chris Waddell his 700th career coaching victory.

Quite a day for the Eagles, who won their second dual team state championship after finishing second to Avery County last season and in 2020. There was no Dual Team Championship in 2021 due to Covid 19.

"It's special," said Waddell, the only wrestling coach UCA has ever had. "We talked all year and I kind of put it in their head that the only team who could beat them was them."

The Eagles rolled through the tournament, defeating Pender 66-18, Carolina Prep 49-28, Pamlico 51-9 and Thomasville 51-27 to set up the third straight battle with Avery County for the state title. Avery County finishes the

duel meet season 27-8.

"We had a pretty good idea how things were going to go," Waddell said. "We took a loss where I didn't think we would and that changed things a little. They do all the work. I just tell them what to do."

Hernandez was selected as the 1-A most valuable wrestler, pinning Grant Reece in the 132-pound division in just 1:08. Hernandez, a two-time individual state champion, dropped to 132 pounds to set up the top bout of the afternoon, facing off against defending 1-A champion Reece. Reece scored an early takedown, but Hernandez escaped, quickly got Reece onto his back and earned the pin.

"Aldo getting that pin at 132 was really big," Waddell said. "They were both state champions and to get that pin in 1:08 was really big."

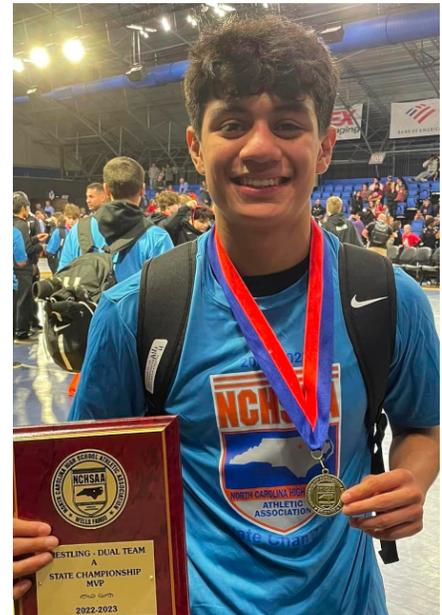
The meet started at the 285-pound category with UCA's Caden Bond (34-8) pulling out an 8-0 major decision win for a 4-0 team lead. After a loss by pin at 106 that gave Avery a 6-4 lead, Ethan Hines (46-6) earned a technical fall win at 113 pounds for a 9-6 UCA lead.

Two falls by Avery County wrestlers pushed AC back in front 18-9, but Hernandez (51-2) followed with his key pin and Jack McArthur (43-6) pinned his opponent at 138 as UCA jumped back in front at 21-18.

A loss at 145 pounds tied the team total at 21-21 before UCA's Lorenzo Alston (52-2) recorded a fall at 152 for a 27-21 UCA lead. Avery County earned a 5-0 decision to make it 27-24, and then Avery County forfeited a match to highly-regarded Grayson Roberts (50-4) to set itself up at 182. After Avery County earned a pin at 182, UCA led 33-30 heading into the final two matches of the night.

It was in the 195-pound category where Maness (24-5) earned the clinching win with a fall at the 3:20 mark. That gave UCA an insurmountable 39-30 lead and the title. UCA forfeited the 220-pound match since it had no bearing in the final outcome.

"I just remember when Jaden won his match, everyone went crazy on the bench," Waddell said.



Aldo Hernandez, Most Valuable Player in the 1A Championship match. Photo provided.



1A Dual Team Wrestling Champion Eagles. Photo provided.

The 700th career win for Waddell, who coached at South Davidson, Wilmington Laney, Hoggard and then Southwestern Randolph, where he built a local wrestling powerhouse, is a crowning achievement for a coach who has won everywhere he's been..

"I think it's consistency, with always stressing to have a good dual meet team," Waddel said. "That goes back to high school (East Davidson) when we won two state titles and we were always in it."

The Eagles will next compete in the individual regionals, which they will host beginning Friday. They are expected to have a number of individuals qualify for the state tournament.

If things go as planned, the celebrations this season certainly aren't over for the Eagles.