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Being the first in anything is special. Anytime a student-athlete is first at something, it is an accomplishment that can never be duplicated or taken away.

Asheboro High School senior Lindy Otero earned a first in Randolph County history last week when her hand was raised at the The North Carolina High School Athletic Association Women's Wrestling Invitational at Carolina Courts in Concord. Thanks to three early pins and then a thrilling 13-11 victory in the title match, Otero became the first female wrestler from Randolph County to win an individual state championship. Competing in the 138-pound classification, Otero bested 15 other wrestlers for the state crown.



Lindy Otero on the podium following her State Championship win on February 8th. (L-R) Eva Keefauver (3rd), Otero, Laura Thompson (2nd), Emma Tyndall (4th).

"I felt really proud," Otero said of winning the championship with the narrow decision over Cleveland County's Laura Thompson in the finals. "My parents and coaches were there for me and they never gave up on me and I never gave up on them. I was surprised. Speechless."

Otero had breezed into the championship match with a pin over West Henderson's Hailee Orr in 36 seconds, a pin over Mallard Creek's Brenda Bayse in 14 seconds and a fall over East Henderson's Eva Keefauver in

2:48. That set up her championship match.

"She was taller than I was and I thought that would make it easier for her, but it didn't," Otero said.

Otero began wrestling in middle school with the urging of her two older brothers, who also wrestled.

"I liked the competitiveness of the sport and enjoyed it," Otero said, adding her parents may not have been thrilled at the beginning. "When I told them, they were shocked. But they asked if this is something I really wanted to do and I said yes. They have supported me."

Otero said there was a definite learning curve when it came to wrestling, especially for a girl in a boys sport.

"My first experience I used to get beat by pins, then I learned more and more," Otero said.

After middle school, Otero said she hung up her wrestling shoes for a couple of years until AHS coach Wes Berrier talked to her one day at school. It was then, during her junior year, when Otero returned to the mat, again bolstered by the backing of her brothers and parents.

And she made quite a splash at the inaugural NCHSAA championships for women when she placed third at 138 pounds during her junior year. Held in Winston-Salem, the event featured 81 female wrestlers from across the state. This year's event saw 182 wrestlers in the field.

"This year, she was one of the hardest working kids we had in the room," said Berrier. "She battled some injuries throughout the season and she still filled in at 152 because of an injury. She was beating some guys this year. She has such a big heart. She is very coachable and listens to what we say. She picks it up and she goes. Her work ethic in the practice room carries over to the matches. She is a very coachable person."

In the summer prior to her senior season, Otero enrolled in the Army National Guard and went to Boot Camp at Fort Jackson in South Carolina.

When she returned to AHS for her final season, she was no doubt stronger, quicker and loaded with confidence.

She practiced with the boys and competed in a number of matches during the season in getting prepared for the state title meet.

"It was very different wrestling boys and then girls," Otero said. "The girl's strength is just way different than the guys."

But while training, Otera was one of the guys.

"The guys treated her like any other person in the room," Berrier said. "They didn't look at her any differently. I don't know if you want to call Lindy a pioneer in Asheboro wrestling, but she's breaking barriers."

With graduation just a few months away, Otero said she is still unsure what she will do. She may not know exactly what is ahead of her after graduation, but next weekend she'll be in the Parade of Champions at the Greensboro Coliseum when the boys state championship meet is held.

It will be a parade of champions and Otero will be there, the first female in Randolph County to win an individual state wrestling crown.

Quite an accomplishment.