

February 9, 2025

By Dennis Garcia
SportsTone.net

GREENSBORO - Different coach, different opponent, same result.

The Uwharrie Charter Academy wrestling team captured their third straight 1-A dual meet state championship with a 48-15 victory over Mount Airy Saturday at the Novant Health Fieldhouse at the Greensboro Coliseum.

After winning back-to-back state championships by topping Avery County under the guidance of veteran coach Chris Waddell, Hayden Waddell led the Eagles to their third straight title with a win over the Granite Bears.

It was the sixth straight state 1-A Dual Meet Championship appearance for the Eagles and their fourth state title overall.

"It's unbelievable," said Hayden Waddell, who is in his first year at the helm after experiencing a state dual meet championship as a wrestler in 2019. "It's completely different than as an actual wrestler. As a competitor, when you are wrestling, you have to rely on yourself, do your part. As a coach, you have to rely on 14 wrestlers to do their part. It's nerve wracking. I trust my guys. I've been telling them all year long to trust the training, trust yourself and trust God and they did that and went out there and did what they were supposed to do."

The Eagles started the six-year run back in 2019 with a win over Robbinsville. After a loss to Avery County in 2020, there was no tournament in 2021 because of Covid. UCA advanced to the finals but lost to Avery County in 2022 before defeating Avery County in 2023 and 2024.

UCA breezed through this year's tournament, defeating Lakewood 78-6, Union Academy 53-30, South Davidson 58-24 and North East Carolina Prep 54-24 before Saturday's win. This was Mount Airy's first appearance in the dual meet state championship.

"We did way better than I thought we would do," said UCA's Caden Bond, who was named the meet's most outstanding wrestler after his 11-5 win at 175 pounds



First year head coach Hayden Waddell.

pushed the Eagles lead to 21-0. "I thought Mount Airy would give us a way better run than they did."

Starting at the 144-pound weight class, the Eagles won the first five bouts with Brandon Jordan winning by an 8-2 decision, Caden Thorne winning by a 6-4 decision, Aiden Foster winning by pin at 157, Lorenzo Alston receiving a forfeit win at 165, and Bond capturing his win at 175.

After a loss at 190 narrowed the UCA lead to 21-6, Michael Shropshire earned an 8-3 decision to up the Eagles' lead to 24-6. Losses at 285 and then 106 pulled Mount Airy to within 24-15, but Paxton Kearns earned a key 3-1 win at 113 to regain momentum. UCA won the final five weight classes to run away.

"My mindset going into this match was, I had to go out there first and foremost have fun and have the confidence to win and don't let anything put me down through the entire match," said Kearns, a freshman who is ranked third in the state, on his narrow win over fourth-ranked Jason Collins. "Be strong, tough and smart with everything you are doing and do it for the team."

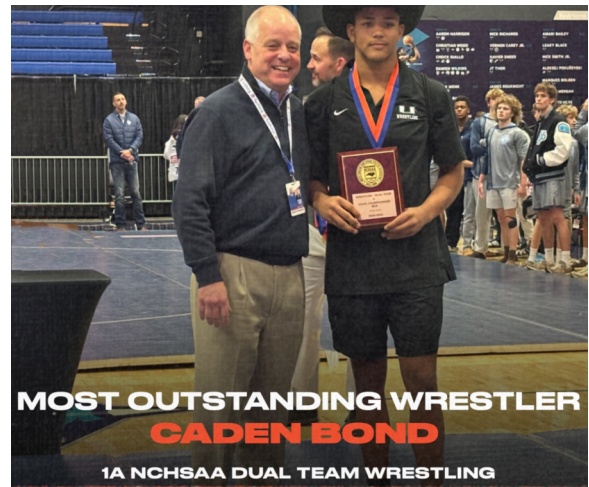
Kearns is definitely another special wrestler at UCA.

"Paxton is a dog," Waddell said. "He has the pace a lot of kids can't match. He's not your typical freshman. He gets out there and he's ready to go."

AJ White's 8-2 decision at 120 gave UCA a 30-15 lead and Caleb Saldana clinched the state championship when he recorded a third-period pin at 126. Saldana was up 11-1 before securing the fall.

"It was always a goal set for our team to three-peat," Saldana said. "We can do this, we will do this."

The Eagles, who had four seniors, five juniors, two sophomores and three freshmen in the starting lineup, closed the match with pinfall wins by Brandon Worrell at 132 and Rick Riccardella at 138.



Most Outstanding Wrestler Caden Bond with Dr. Stephen Gainey, President of the NCHSAA Board of Directors.