

WEST COLUMBIA - The **Bamberg-Ehrhardt** Red Raider **wrestling** team overcame an 18-point deficit to claim a 44-33 win over the **Liberty** Red Devils to clinch the 2017-18 Class 2A Duals State Championship at Airport High School on Saturday morning.

With the win, the Red Raiders saw their record finish at 42-9. The Red Devils ended at 27-6.

The title for B-E head coach Jake Stewart's team is its first since a 48-22 win over **Liberty** in the 2013 finals. The championship match also marks the sixth consecutive year either the Red Raiders or the Red Devils have wrestled for the Class 2A duals state title.

After dropping three straight matches in the 138, 145 and 152-pound weight classes to start the match, the Red Raiders' first points came in the 160-weight class in a 12-5 decision by B-E's Isaiah Washington over **Liberty's** Dustin Krout, cutting the Red Devils' lead to 18-3.

B-E senior state champion James Gainyard (170-pound class) followed with a pin at the 50-second mark of the third period over Ajah Young.

B-E senior state championship Kohl Gagum's (182-pound class) pin of **Liberty's** Noah Kelly at the 45-second mark of the third period further cut the Red Devils' lead to 18-15.

The Red Raiders took their first lead of the match when B-E All-American junior (195-pound class) KeSean Brown pinned **Liberty's** Lucas Bates with 5 seconds showing on the second-period clock, giving B-E a 21-18 lead.

Stewart, who recorded his second state championship since taking over the helm of the B-E **wrestling** program, said there was no panic in his team getting down 18 points early.

"They got us at our weakest point; we didn't really panic because we knew we had strong (competitors) coming up later on," Stewart said. "But, we lost a couple we didn't expect to lose and the freshmen did a great job."

After suffering losses in the 220 and 285 weight classes and going down 30-21 to the Red Devils, B-E's Jackson Stembridge (106-pound class) came through with a badly needed pin over Caleb Courville, cutting the Red Devils' lead to 30-27.

B-E's Colby Hiers' (113-pound class) pin of **Liberty's** Shyann Oglesby gave the Red Raiders the lead for good at 33-30.

B-E's Donovan Price's (120-pound class) 13-0 decision over Nathan Hellams increased the B-E margin to 38-30.

Determined to fight until the end, the underdog Red Devils came back with a pin to cut the B-E lead to 38-33.

The Red Raiders' Tyqueze Stuckey (132-pound class) closed out the B-E scoring with a pin at the 32-second mark of the second period of his match, making the final score 44-33 and igniting a celebration on the B-E bench.

As for where his **wrestling** program has come since he's been at B-E, Stewart said, "we're always a work in progress. We continue to improve and we'll continue to try to get better."

Stewart has coached state championship teams at both **Bamberg-Ehrhardt** and Berkeley.

"We'll miss the ones we lose and we've got some good ones coming back," Stewart said.

On winning the state championship, B-E co-captain Brown said, "it's a good feeling. We came a long way.

"We had to just work hard because we were stacked. Our team is stacked a lot."

Gagum, a B-E senior state champion and co-captain, said the championship was the culmination of a lot of hard work.

"We've been working hard all week and all season and we finally put it all together," Gagum said. "Coming in, we didn't think there was anybody in 1A or 2A that could stop us in the team division and we did it."

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