

HONEA PATH - Fighting for a return trip to Columbia this weekend to defend its Class 3A State title, the stage was set perfectly for the **West-Oak** High School wrestling team Wednesday night.

Unfortunately for the Warriors, Belton-Honea Path had other ideas in its home gym with the Upper State title up for grabs.

In the penultimate match of the night, Belton-Honea Path 160-pound senior Chris Smith was able to pin Cody Eller, clinching the Bears' first Upper State title in 20 years on the way to an eventual 34-30 victory.

It marked the second time in less than two weeks that No. 5 **West-Oak** (35-7) had fallen in Honea Path. But after getting shellacked by a score of 40-17 on Jan.

26, Warriors head coach Jeff Jordan wasn't feeling any shame after the performance his squad turned in.

"We talked about what happened last time we were here," he said. "We embarrassed ourselves, we really did. But tonight, we gave them a fight.

"They hung in there until the very end, and we're not a pushover.

Those kids proved they deserved to be on the mat tonight." And as the Warriors jumped out to a 16-9 advantage through six matches, the script Jordan had anticipated was playing out to perfection.

Trent Langston (195), Josh Moore (220) and Trevor Kirk (285) all picked up victories at the upper weight classes - with Moore winning by pin, while Langston and Kirk captured fiery one-point decisions - while Tim Rogers also got a major decision at 113 pounds.

The No. 2 Bears (31-2) then answered with four straight wins - including two pins - to take a 28-16 lead with four matches to go starting at 145 pounds.

And though the Warriors were at a disadvantage, Jordan was hardly discouraged.

"It was set up perfectly, and everything we thought was going to happen happened," he said.

"We knew we'd be behind going into 138, we knew that. After 145, we felt like we could make up some ground right there." A quick pin from Chris Welborn did exactly that, and Patrick James got a one-point win at 152 pounds to leave the Warriors trailing just 28-25 with just two matches to go.

But it took Smith just 40 seconds to put down Eller, setting off a raucous celebration in the Bears' gym, as **West-Oak** was mathematically finished with one match to go trailing 34-25.

"He's a first-year starter, but he's a senior," **BHP** coach Chris Strickland said of Smith. "I went to him and said, 'Hey, we've been working on you all year long.' "He's kind of given up a couple of times this year ... and he's happy he stuck it out, because he was the hero tonight." And while **West-Oak** came up short, Jordan said he couldn't have asked for anything more, as his Warriors picked up crucial road victories over Fort Mill and Greenville on the way to coming up just short of a second trip to Columbia in as many years. "I'm proud of the kids because they wrestled hard," he said. "We had a chance going into the last two matches to win it, and I'm just proud of the kids and the effort they put forth. That's all you can ask for." Belton-Honea Path 34, **West-Oak** 30 106 - J. Sherard (B) pinned A.

Rogers, 4:58 113 - T. Rogers (W) maj. dec.

Peebles, 13-3 120 - Lowe (B) pinned McIntyre, 4:21 126 - Gary (B) maj. dec. A.

Severance, 11-1 132 - Allan (B) pinned Kern, 0:43 138 - Loudermilk (B) dec. Sexton, 4-2 145 - Welborn (W) pinned Mathis, 1:22 152 - James (W) dec. Johnson, 5-4 160 - Smith (B) pinned Eller, 1:20 170 - Westbury (W) won by forfeit 182 - Withers (B) dec. T.

Severance, 5-2 195 - Langston (W) dec. Bowie, 1-0 220 - Moore (W) pinned Shuler, 3:53 285 - Kirk (W) dec. Bolton, 4-3 Note:**West-Oak** penalized one team point for unsportsmanlike conduct eric@dailyjm.com | (864) 882-2385.

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