

COLUMBIA - Chase Ballard's come-from behind triumph in the final bout of the night against Ashley Bracklein at 145 pounds lifted **Rock Hill** to a dramatic 28-24 over **Fort Dorchester** in the Class AAAA state **wrestling** championship match at Ridge View High.

Ballard, an unranked senior, may have felt the pressure on his shoulders

as he took to the mat but he never

wavered in the confidence department, even after he fell behind 4-1 early in the second period.

"I've never been so nervous in my life, knowing the whole team was depending on me to come through," Ballard admitted. "But I also knew I'd outworked everybody in this gym to be ready for a moment like this if it came around. I didn't get down when I fell behind. I just kept working."

Fort Dorchester ended the season 24-2. **Rock Hill** is 33-2.

Ballard turned the match quickly in his favor, scoring a reverse with back points. The five-point move gave him a 5-4 edge that he never relinquished. Bracklein, a transfer who placed third at state at 135 last year while at Summerville, did not score the rest of the way. Ballard's takedown with 45 seconds to go started the Bearcats' wild victory celebration.

"It's been a long time coming," said second-year **Rock Hill** coach Cain Beard. "I'm glad I had a part in bringing the championship back to **Rock Hill**. Chase did exactly what I told him he was going to do - put a cradle on him and put him on his back."

It was the 16th state **wrestling** title for the Bearcats, but the first since 2000. **Rock Hill** lost to Summerville in the state finale last season.

Until Ballard's stunning upset, things were shaping up nicely for the Patriots, who had won three bouts in a row to pull within 25-24 of the Bearcats entering the last bout. The run featured a technical fall by top-ranked Wesley Dallas at 130, a major decision by Michael Young at 135, a 9-4 decision by Seiji Borja in his 140 showdown with Chad Beck in a heated battle pitting two reigning state champions.

But, in the end, the Patriots did not cash in enough to claim their first state championship.

"It was a great match between two pretty even teams, so having it come down to little things is not a surprise," said Patriots coach B.D. LaPrad. "In a match like this you have to make the most of your opportunities (to score) because there aren't many. We didn't take enough advantage of ours, and they did with theirs. It's as simple as that."

ROCK HILL 28, FORT DORCHESTER 24

152: Jenkins (RH) d. Ford 9-4. 160: Hanson (RH) d. S. Bugarin 5-4 OT. 171: Tuck (RH) p. Flores 3:35. 189: Porter (FD) d. McDonald 8-6. 215: Stewart (FD) d. Velazquez 8-1. 285: Walker (FD) p. Fair 5:48. 103: Porter (RH) d. Robinson 9-3. 112: W. Beck (RH) d. Metrejean 7-7. 119: S. Beck (RH) d. S. Bugarin 5-2. 125: Grav (RH) d. Reddinger 12-4. 130: Dallas (FD) d. Charette 19-3. 135: Young (FD) d. Durham 13-0. 140: Borja (FD) d. C. Beck 9-4. 145: Ballard (RH) d. Bracklein 11-4.