

The **Rock Hill** Bearcats will take on the **Fort Dorchester** Patriots for the 5A **wrestling** state championship Tuesday at 6 p.m. at Airport High School in Columbia.

This is nothing new if you've followed **Rock Hill wrestling** for the last 40 years. The Bearcats have won 18 state titles, five more than any other South Carolina school.

"We expect to be here every year," said **Rock Hill** coach Cain Beard. "That is our goal every year when we begin the season in December."

The wait to wrestle this year's dual tournament championship was longer than usual. The match was originally slated for Feb. 10, but was postponed because the South Carolina High School League had to investigate an ineligible **Fort Dorchester** wrestler. The Patriots were initially pulled from the title bout, but successfully appealed last week.

Fort Dorchester is a formidable opponent for the Bearcats. The Patriots have four returning state champions on the roster, and are solid from top to bottom.

"They do not have any holes in their lineup," said Beard. "They have a quality team. If we can pull this off, it will be one of the greatest victories in the history of our **wrestling** program."

Beard's team has lost only two dual matches all year. The coach says his team is looking forward to the challenge on Tuesday night, and he can sense that his group is ready.

"I can see the confidence in their eyes," he said. "We are not cocky, but we are confident because of what we have done this year. We have improved as the year has moved along."

The 10-day wait while **Fort Dorchester** appealed hasn't impacted **Rock Hill's** preparation much. Besides, the Bearcats had already waited a long time for this opportunity after losing last year's 5A state title match against River Bluff.

"That loss last year is still on the minds of our wrestlers," said Beard. "They have been working to win another state title all season. Their work ethic all year has reflected their desire to bring home the title."

Rock Hill's team is a blend of veterans and young performers. That is the way Beard likes it. All of his teams in the past have had that same makeup.

"We have great senior leadership this year," said Beard. "They lead off the mat with positive attitude and hard work, and they lead on the mat with solid performances and wins."

This year's senior class is led by Justin Beck, Noah Reynolds and Brandon Mills, who all won Upper State individual **wrestling** championships last weekend. Those three were part of the 2015 state championship team as freshmen. This year's team has seven seniors scattered throughout the weight classifications.

"That experience has helped us all year," said Beard. "Hopefully, it will help us on Tuesday."

Rock Hill's tradition in **wrestling** is outstanding. Anyone who has been to a match can see all of the previous state championship teams on the wall.

"These wrestlers see that tradition every day," said Beard. "They know the expectations."

Beard is just hoping this team can add another state championship team picture to the wall.