

COLUMBIA — After nearly two full weeks of frustrating delay prompted by snow, protest, appeal and legal wrangling in the courts, **Woodruff** and **Loris** finally got down to the business of determining the 2A state wrestling championship Thursday at Ridge View High School.

The outcome on the mat was as bizarre and convoluted as the circumstances leading up to the season finale.

Loris, the team granted a second chance by having their loss to Hanahan in the Lower State championship match overturned by ruling of High School League commissioner Jerome Singleton, made the most of the opportunity with a 31-30, criteria decision for its third state title in the past four years, its fifth overall.

The match ended with both teams scoring 30 points. **Loris**, by virtue of eight wins in the 14 bouts, was given the tie-breaking point.

As it turns out, a big loss in the last duel of the night made the Lions big winners.

Loris sophomore Nick Mari was totally outclassed at 125 pounds by **Woodruff** senior Jeremy Phillips, losing to the three-time state place finisher by a 17-0 score. But by denying Phillips a pin, Mari emerged as the hero.

"After he made his first few shots, I knew I had no chance to pin him and knew what I had to do," said Mari.

"As I was warming up, I knew what was at stake. I was so nervous I almost threw up. It's a pretty great feeling knowing I helped my team win a state championship even though I lost."

Woodruff coach Daniel Westmoreland tried to keep things in perspective after the crushing defeat.

"Jeremy was definitely in a bad position when he went out there, but I'm proud of his effort because he gave it everything he had to help us win," he said. "He put (Mari) on his back several times, but it just didn't happen. Ultimately, I felt there were five toss-up matches, but not enough went our way."

Woodruff fell behind 20-7 when **Loris** went on a 6-0 surge between 135 and 171. The Wolverines forged ahead, 25-23, on a run of pins by Chris Henry (189), Jacob Grandy (215) and Akierrian Gilliam (103).

The Lions responded with a key 9-8 win at 112 by Malcolm Griffin on a takedown with nine seconds remaining and a 13-2 major decision at 119 by Jamar Gore to take the lead back, 30-25.

"It was a great state championship match, and someone had to win," said **Loris** coach Thomas Britt. "I knew it was going to be a dog fight, and I have a great respect for the **Woodruff** kids and their coaches. They battled us right to the end."

Loris finished with a 40-7 record, while **Woodruff** closed at 24-7.