

It all came down to Saturday's competition at Airport High School.

Defending South Carolina High School League Class 2A state champion **Bamberg-Ehrhardt** had tied its finals opponent, **North Central**, 39-39 earlier in the season, and actually lost to the Knights on tiebreakers.

But, with a second consecutive state title on the line, the Red Raiders (24-5 final record) came through on Saturday, rallying from an early points deficit to defeat **North Central** 39-31.

The win marked the fifth **wrestling** state championship for the B-E program, while ending the Knights' bid for their first title. In the most recently posted scmat.com standings for Class 1A/2A teams in the state, **North Central** was ranked No. 1 and B-E was ranked No. 3.

The championship match was missing one of **North Central's** top wrestlers, Paula Velez, a Limestone College women's **wrestling** signee who was out with a collarbone injury.

Even so, the Knights jumped ahead to a 25-8 lead after wins by Kyle Lesso, Cameron Hoffman, Jordan Small, Hunter Haven and Kaleb Haven. But the Raiders won the next three matches, two by pin and one by forfeit to lead 26-25.

In a swing match at heavyweight, NC had to forfeit after Noe Herrera suffered a head injury, giving B-E a 32-31 lead. The Raiders made it 36-31 with Zymire Chisholm's win at the 113-pound class and won the final match at the 120-pound class with Jackson Stembridge defeating Zach Roberts.

North Central posted its best season in program history, finishing with a 34-4 record.

"We had a fabulous season and the kids grew from day one," coach Jason Brazzell said of his Knights team. "It is one step at a time. We've just got to take it one more step. We had a few things happen today that usually don't happen and we weren't able to pick back up from them."

Bamberg-Ehrhardt knew it was in for a challenge. But, the program found a way to endure struggles both on and off the mat this season, ultimately finishing on top once again.

"I told them we were (probably) going to be down and face adversity; told them the match isn't over just because a few matches didn't go our way," B-E interim coach Mark Moody said, having taken over as the Red Raiders' coach for Jacob Stewart in January.

Stewart resigned from the post after allegedly assaulting a student. Moody led the team from there.

"I told them to dig in and do what we needed to do, and that is win state," Moody said.

Moody was the middle school **wrestling** coach a season ago. He credited the team for sticking together through tough times and focusing on bringing home another trophy.

"It shows the dedication to the guys who stuck with us after our coach left," Moody said. "And it just showed the heart and dedication they put in the program."

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