

CHESTERFIELD - As state championship dual meets go, they just don't get much better than Saturday's Class A team title tilt between **Chesterfield** and BambergEhrhardt.

After spotting the Red Raiders a 25-4 lead, the three-time defending champion Rams slowly scratched their way back into the contest, gained the lead, lost it, and saw its hopes of a fourth consecutive Class A team crown laid on the shoulders of a sophomore.

No problem. The Rams, for the fourth straight season, topped **Bamberg-Ehrhardt**, 33-31 to claim the team trophy - their sixth overall.

Trailing 31-27, the Rams needed a four-point major decision to tie the dual and either a five-point technical fall or a six-point pin to win.

The Rams found themselves in that unenviable position after giving up a pin at 160 pounds.

But 171-pounder Brandon Freeman gave the Rams a stunning turnaround. Aggressive from the opening whistle, he got a takedown in the first 10 seconds, got **Bamberg-Ehrhardt's** Josh Wilkerson on his back, and got the fall in just 29 seconds, unleashing pandemonium on the Ram bench and in the Ram crowd.

For Freeman, it was a matter of knowing what his team needed - and then going out and getting it done.

"I was thinking pin the whole time," Freeman said as friends, fans and family flooded the mat to congratulate the Rams. "It feels great to be the guy who clinched the win."

With wins in five straight matches, **Chesterfield** took its first lead of the afternoon at 27-25 on a crowd-pleasing pin by 152-pounder Elijah Burr.

But at 160 pounds, the Red Raiders retook the lead at 31-27, setting up the final confrontation between the Rams' Freeman and the Red Raiders' Wilkerson.

The state championship meet was moved to **Chesterfield** after Friday night's snowstorm caused a scheduling conflict at the Columbia-area high school that was originally slated to host all four state championship duals.

Chesterfield athletic director Jimmy Weatherford said the two schools agreed to come to **Chesterfield** after a neutral site couldn't be found.

Bamberg-Ehrhardt, the Lower State champion, brought a sizable cheering section, so there wasn't much of a home-mat advantage for the Rams.

For second-year **Chesterfield** coach Will Gainey, the early deficit was nothing new. The Rams have been giving up forfeits at 103 and 285 pounds all season, with no wrestler at either weight.

So that basically means that the Rams start every dual down 12-0 - a circumstance that played itself out again on Saturday.

"All season long, we've depended on our middle weights to get us through," Gainey said. "That happened for us again today."

It was an afternoon of clutch performances all the way up and down the lineup for **Chesterfield**. But perhaps none was more gutsy than that of 140-pound senior Nick Gullede.

With **Chesterfield** down 25-13 - in the early stages of the Rams' uprising - Gullede was locked in a tight match with **Bamberg-Ehrhardt's** Cody Danzler.

In the second period, while trying to turn Danzler over on his back, Gullledge felt something pop in his knee. After an injury timeout, Gullledge decided to finish the match.

"My team needed me," Gullledge said. "There was no way I was going to injury default in that situation."

Wrestling through pain, and up 2-0 going into the decisive third period, Gullledge started from the down position. He scored an escape, then a takedown to eke out the 5-0 decision and bring the Rams closer at 25-16.

"It was very painful, but I just had to block it out," Gullledge said.

The chance to be a part of a fourth straight title made it all worthwhile, Gullledge said.

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