

Warriors win historic first-ever NCS championship on the mats

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The Del Norte Warriors are bridesmaids no more.

After placing second at the North Coast Section Division-2 Redwood Empire Wrestling Championships in each of the past four seasons, the Warriors finally got over the hump with a championship-winning performance at Eureka High School on Saturday (Feb. 3).

“We finally got it,” Del Norte head coach Clinton Schaad said. “It was an exciting day.”

Even more gratifying was the fact they beat Ukiah in the final, the same school that had edged the Warriors in each of the previous four section finals.

And to make matters even more exciting, the final went down to the last match of the day, with Del Norte’s Reynaldo Martinez securing the team victory in thrilling fashion.

“Rey had to go out and wrestle his best, and as long as he didn’t get pinned we would win,”

Schaad said. “And he didn’t.”

The NCS dual meet championship was one of two for the H-DNL this postseason, with the Hoopa Warriors also winning their first-ever section crown in the Division-3 tournament.

Remarkably, the seven-team H-DNL took home two of the four NCS dual meet titles.

The section has been holding the dual meet championships since 2005 and the H-DNL had won one just once before, with McKinleyville winning a D-3 crown in 2014.

“It’s great to have (two) section titles come to the H-DNL,” Schaad said. “It speaks of the level of wrestling we have here.”

The Del Norte Warriors were seeded No. 2 in their 10-team bracket and won all three of their matches, getting the better of No. 7 San Marin in the quarterfinals (72-11) and No. 3 Windsor in the semifinals (58-21), before edging top seed Ukiah by just two points (35-33).

And afterwards Schaad paid tribute to his entire program, including everyone involved with the team this year.

“It was a complete team effort, and not just the wrestlers competing,” the longtime head coach said. “The entire squad was cheering us on. It was a complete team effort from top to bottom, from freshman to seniors and coaches, and it was really, really exciting.”

Del Norte had to overcome adversity on the way to victory, but the Warriors answered the call to secure the historic breakthrough championship.

The final against Ukiah was a back-and-forth affair, with the Warriors trailing 24-9 at one stage before rallying for the win.

The team championship was particularly gratifying for the program after the Warriors suffered their first H-DNL dual meet regular-season loss in seven years just 10 days before when they fell to Arcata in a loss that saw their league championship hopes fade.

After that defeat the Warriors didn’t know if they would even qualify for the big section tournament.

“We knew we had a chance to win it all, but when we dropped that match to Arcata we weren’t even sure we’d even get in,” said Schaad, whose team received an at-large berth. “We corrected some issues we had in the league dual meets and we came through with the big win today.”

The Warriors will now turn their attention to Saturday’s H-DNL championships, which will also be held at Eureka High.

The Warriors are the defending league champions after winning four individual titles a year ago and seeing seven other grapplers place second.