

Fort Dorchester 31, Hillcrest 22

LUGOFF - Four years ago, the **Fort Dorchester wrestling** program was scraping the bottom of the **wrestling** rankings. On Saturday, the Patriots stood tall

and proud as they accepted their gold medals, signifying they were the best team in the state.

The Patriots held off a firm challenge from the **Hillcrest Rams**, 31-22, to capture the Class AAAA dual state championship in front of a crowd of about 400 at

Lugoff-Elgin High School.

"This feels great. Coach (B.D.) LaPrad came in here and did a great job with us," said senior Mel Capers, who was a freshman when LaPrad took over the program. "I'm just glad it turned around for us. In my last year we got a state championship and I'm so proud."

LaPrad was the architect of one of the quickest turnarounds the sport has ever seen. In his second year, the Patriots were led by state champion Stryker Huffman and reached the Lower State final to give the Patriots a taste of how good they could be.

"Guys like Stryker - he's the guy

who really got us started," LaPrad said. "Winning breeds winning, and we've been building on that winning attitude. They were a good group of kids. They just needed a new attitude."

LaPrad has now carved out a

special place in South Carolina **wrestling**

history. He is the first coach to win three state championships at three

different schools - Irmo, Dutch Fork and now **Fort Dorchester**.

"It was just our day," he said. "Our kids have really bought into the team concept. They are more with the team thing than they are the individuals."

Saturday's victory required help from

all sources. The Patriots picked up major

victories where they were supposed to from their highly ranked wrestlers. Gerald Jenkins (125 pounds) and Daunte Nixon (215) earned technical falls, Robert Quinn (285) picked up a major decision and Capers (160) got a decision.

Ron Milligan, who had been sidelined

Patriots capture title

until recently with a broken foot, began the day at 119 with a major decision.

"He probably hasn't wrestled five matches all year," LaPrad said.

Hillcrest was down 13-3 when some lineup strategy worked to its advantage when the Rams swapped their

wrestlers at 140 and 145 and picked up two victories instead of splitting the matches.

From there, they went on a run of wins, culminating with Sean Gaffney pinning Dawayne Scales at 189 for a 22-16 lead with four matches left.

"I saw the state championship in front of us," said Quinn, who combined with Nixon to put the Patriots back on top, 25-21.

"Everybody was working hard, trying to pull it out."

Then, the improbable happened. Perhaps the biggest performance of the night came from the smallest wrestler on the team as 103-pounder Rodney Scott, barely even ranked, upset No. 1 Colin Horgan, 6-3.

"On the sideline, one of the coaches was telling me to stay strong and go hard," Scott said. "I still have to get that through my head (that I won) because he's the No. 1 guy in the state."

Hillcrest was going to need a pin in the final match to even the score, but **Fort Dorchester's** Sonny Bugarin took control of his bout with Zach Moore with a near fall in the third period and a 5-3 decision.

AAAA STATE DUAL CHAMPIONSHIP

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103 - Scott (FD) d. Horgan; 112 - Bugarin (FD) dec. Moore; 119 - Milligan (FD) maj. dec. Garrett; 125 - Jenkins (FD) tech. fall Cotton; 130 - Pettry (H) dec. Borja; 135 - Dallas (FD) maj. dec. Taylor; 140 - Martin (H) dec. Gotter; 145 - M. Devita (H) maj. dec. LaChance; 152 - Lance (H) dec. Tucker; 160 - Capers (FD) dec. Ma. Devita; 171 - Parker (H) dec. Johnson; 189 - Gaffney (H) pin Scales; 215 - Nixon (FD) tech. fall Ledford; 285 - Quinn (FD) maj. dec. Broad.

Note: Matches began at 119.

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