

The **Ashley Ridge wrestling** team opened the season as an underdog but finished as the top dog.

"Our kids stayed focused even when our backs were against the wall," **Ashley Ridge** coach Stacey Woods said. "They fought hard all season and our team was united throughout."

The Swamp Foxes only lost one duals match all season and avenged that loss on their way to claiming **Ashley Ridge's** first team state **wrestling** championship.

"We have a very close group of wrestlers both male and female," Woods said. "Myself along with the entire coaching staff feel blessed just to be part of this special season and very exciting time for ARHS. The entire team stepped up during the championship run and everyone did their part."

Ashley Ridge entered the season ranked fourth in Class AAAAA. **Hillcrest** and Summerville, which battled in the championship match the previous year, were ranked first and second at the start of this season. Northwestern was third.

After beating Cane Bay and Fort Dorchester, the Swamp Foxes moved up to third in the rankings in December. In January, they jumped ahead of Summerville at No. 2.

But on Jan. 20, Summerville beat **Ashley Ridge**, 32-29, and received a higher playoff seeding, which made **Ashley Ridge's** path in the playoffs more difficult.

The Swamp Foxes shrugged it off and followed a 65-6 win over Goose Creek in the first round of the playoffs with a 35-30 win over Carolina Forest and a 40-26 win over Lexington to advance to the Lower State championship match. There, they faced the Green Wave again and this time claimed a 34-24 victory in a highly contested match in front of a packed house.

With only one team standing in its way, **Ashley Ridge** made the trip to Dreher High School Feb. 12 to take on defending state champion **Hillcrest**. The Swamp Foxes fell behind and had to rally, but gutted out a 27-26 win over the Rams.

Ashley Ridge trailed by 11 points with only three bouts remaining, but earned a major decision in the 113-pound, 120-pound and 126-pound matches to edge out **Hillcrest**.

"We fought back to win this so I'm just so excited for our kids," Woods said after the match. "**Hillcrest** is amazing. They are always winning state titles and they always battle. Win or lose, we could have walked out of here with our heads high, but our guys wanted to finish as state champion and we did."