

COLUMBIA - Like hitting a walkoff homer in the World Series. Like kicking a game-winning field goal in the final seconds of the Super Bowl. Like hitting a 3-pointer to win the NCAA basketball championship.

While high school **wrestling** is far from the level of the three national stages mentioned above, it can present the same feeling. **Rock Hill** 145-pounder Chase Ballard was all three of those imaginary heroes on Saturday night at Ridge View High School.

Ballard, winning the last of 14 matches, gave the Bearcats (33-2) a heart-pounding 28-24 win over the **Fort Dorchester** Patriots (25-2) for the Class AAAA duals state championship. It was **Rock Hill's** 16th overall title and first since 2000.

And it wasn't supposed to happen the way it did. **Rock Hill's** Chad Beck, the state's No. 1-ranked wrestler at 140, was upset 9-4 by **Fort Dorchester's** Seiji Borja. The loss cut the Bearcats' lead to 25-24.

Next up was Ballard, who went onto the mat feeling the weight of the entire team on his shoulders. His opponent, Rodney Scott, was heavily favored. Ballard's mom, Angela Montouri, came out of the stands and leaned against the back wall of the gym. But she was so nervous that she couldn't stand still.

"We never expect Chad to lose, but it happens," **Rock Hill** coach Cain Beard said. "Before Chase went out, I pulled him aside and told him we had to have it. And I told him to look for the cradle and go for it."

Ballard fell behind 4-1 early in the second two-minute round, but mounted a comeback that left him ahead 8-4 going into the third. And late in the period, he went for the cradle. It worked, and although Ballard missed the pin, his 11-4 decision was easily what his team needed.

"I was a big underdog," Ballard said. "He was supposed to win and I don't think anyone in here besides me and my teammates expected me to win. I've worked hard, probably harder than him. I wanted it. It was mine.

"It's the greatest feeling I've ever had, but I've never been so nervous in my life. I've never got a state championship medal or ring, but I will now. It's so great to be a part of this."

When the match concluded, it was announced that no fans would be allowed to leave the stands. Better luck next time, buddy.

Ballard's stepfather, Perry Montouri, raced to his son and picked him up near the top of his head. "That's my boy. That's my boy," he shouted. And when Montouri put Ballard down, two teammates hoisted him to their shoulders so the fans in the stands could see their hero.

A pattern was set early. The match started at 152. The Bearcats won two straight decisions and got a pin from Josh Tuck at 171 to open a 12-0 lead. The Patriots did the same in the next three, tying the match at 12 on a pin by heavyweight T.J. Walker.

Next it was **Rock Hill's** turn. Starting at 103, the Bearcats strung together four straight wins, but picked up just 13 points because the run included three 3-point decisions and a 4-point major decision by Jake Grav.

Still, it was good enough to put the Bearcats ahead 25-12, and with five matches to go, Bearcats fans could be heard wondering aloud if Beard would forfeit matches once his team got ahead enough so as not to lose.

Such thoughts were way too premature.

Fort Dorchester stormed back, winning three straight for 12 points on a decision, a major decision and a technical fall. The decision was Borja's win over Beck that set up the deciding match.

"Last year, we came down here and lost in the championship match to Summerville," Beard said. "Our kids were sitting in the same gym holding their heads down. Someone took a picture of them and I hung it on the wall in our practice room.

"After practice Friday, I reminded our kids what happened here last year. When I was finished talking, I ripped it off the wall and told them, 'That is not us.'"

n NOTES: Eastside won the Class AAA championship for a state record sixth straight year. The Eagles, winners of this year's Bearcat Classic in early January, beat Hilton Head 40-25. Eastside also handed **Rock Hill** its only in-state loss the season. Chesterfield won its third straight Class A title, crushing Bamberg-Ehrhardt 57-3. The Class AA championship was won by Abbeville, 31-22, over Loris. Until the **Rock Hill/Fort Dorchester** match, most folks were calling it the best of the day. ... **Rock Hill** fans filled up nearly one side of Ridge View's gym.

Barry Byers 329-4099

ROCK HILL 28FORT DORCHESTER 24

(Starting draw was 152 pounds)

103 - Kenny Porter (RH) dec. Brent Barfield, 8-2; 112 --Weston Beck (RH) dec. Clement Metrejan, 7-2; 119 - Seth Beck (RH) dec. Sonny Burgarin, 4-2 (OT); 125 - Jake Grav (RH) maj.dec. Alex Reddinger 12-4; 130 - Wesley Dallas (FD) t. fall J.T. Charette, 19-3; 135 - Michael Young (FD) maj. dec. Rashard Durham, 13-0; 140 - Seiji Borja (FD) dec. Chad Beck, 9-4; 145- Chase Ballard (RH) dec. Rodney Scott, 11-4; 152 - Dominique Jenkins (RH) dec. D.J.Ford, 9-5; 160 - Alan Hanson (RH) dec. Alex Burgarin, 5-4 (3 OTs); 171 - Josh Tuck (RH) pin Keyson Flores, :02; 189 --Gino Porter (FD) dec. Duran McDonald, 8-6; 215 - Adrian Stewart (FD) dec. Ruben Valasquez, 8-1; Hwt. - T.J. Walker (FD) pin Torree Fair, :11 3rd.

Copyright, 2009, The Herald, a division of East Coast Newspapers, Inc.