

COLUMBIA - The **West-Oak** High School **wrestling** team is Class 3A state champion for the second time in the last three years.

The Warriors defeated **Battery Creek** on Saturday at Dreher High School in Columbia, 34-24, to earn the title. Before the match, the Warriors were ranked No. 2 in 3A, and the Dolphins No. 1.

At the state final, however, **West-Oak** proved itself to be the best of the best.

"We're super excited for our kids. This was a complete team effort," **West-Oak** head coach Greg Brewer said after the match. "All through the playoffs, we've had our solid kids that have been steady all year long, and then we have people that just step up huge - tonight it was Thomas Rowland."

After the Warriors started the match with a pin from Jared Smith in front of an excited crowd that must have made it feel like a home match for **West-Oak**, the Dolphins outscored them 15-6 and the Warriors found themselves down 15-12. In stepped Rowland, who Brewer said wasn't initially planned to wrestle on Saturday, but because of the wrestler **Battery Creek** went with, Rowland was the best choice to counter.

That decision paid off.

"I just thought of a win, went out there and wrestled my best," said Rowland, whose win tied the match at 15 with six matches remaining.

"I tried to keep my emotions to myself and not let it get the best of me. I just focused on the match and went and wrestled."

**West-Oak** and **Battery Creek** last met on Jan. 21, with the Dolphins eking out a 37-33 win.

Rowland said with a smile that it made this state title, his second as a member of the team, a bit sweeter as the Warriors were able to redeem themselves.

In all, Rowland, Jared Smith, Ben Martin, Damien White, Gavin James, Jordan Lee, Justin Smith and Matt Williams all won their matches on Saturday, with Jared Smith, Justin Smith and Lee winning by pin.

**West-Oak** was trailing 18-15 with five matches remaining when heavyweight James stepped on to the mat.

His battle with **Battery Creek**'s Cooper Kaminsky went down to the final seconds of the third round, as James scored two points with the clock expiring - another pivotal win for the Warriors.

"We showed the will to win," James said. "After tough matches, being down in points, we fought back. I'm just so, so proud of my team and everything we've accomplished."

After James' win and a **West-Oak** forfeit, Lee, Williams and Justin Smith won the last three matches to secure the state title.

"There's not a better collective group of wrestlers in the state than Jordan Lee and Justin Smith and Jared Smith and Matt Williams," Brewer said. "It's just wonderful to have those guys on our team."

Now with two state championships in the last three years, Brewer credited everyone who came before him and his team at **West-Oak** for building the **wrestling** program up to what it has become today, and he said he hopes it continues to grow and excel in the future.

Both Rowland and James were a part of the team that won the 2015 state title, and they each said they are grateful to be a part of this **West-Oak** team that has reached the pinnacle of the sport twice.

"It's a once in a lifetime thing for people to even have one (championship), and for me to have two, it's amazing," James said. "It's something I'll never forget. These guys I wrestle with, we'll never forget each other. I'm thankful to be back here. We got the job done - at the end of the day we got the job done."

With a big smile on his face and a championship medal around his neck, Rowland summed up his feelings on his team's second state championship with two simple words that say everything

"Two rings." 3A State Championship **West-Oak 34, Battery Creek 24**

132: Jared Smith (W-O) pin Syncere Atkins (BC)

138: Tyrus Singleton (BC) dec. Lake Alexander (W-O), 8-3

145: Omar Daniels (BC) forfeit

152: Ben Martin (W-O) dec. Zacheus Magwood (BC), 11-4

160: Damien White (W-O) dec. Marcel Porackey (BC), 4-2

170: Turhon White (BC) dec. Ian James (W-O), 10-8

182: Ahman Smalls (BC) dec. Tate Capps (W-O), 5-0

195: Thomas Roland (W-O) dec. Kevin Bryant (BC), 10-8

220: Khalil Chisolm (BC) dec. Cameron Hamby (W-O), 5-4

285: Gavin James (W-O) dec. Cooper Kaminsky (BC), 5-3

106: Obadiahou Wilson (BC) forfeit

113: Jordan Lee (W-O) pin Tommy Bearden (BC)

120: Justin Smith (W-O) pin Bison

Frazier (BC)

126: Matthew Williams (W-O) maj. dec. Nate Torres (BC), 14-1

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