

For a veteran core of six senior **Chapin** wrestlers, the 2011-12 season has been challenging even though they have earned a shot at redemption.

The Eagles put their latest state championship bid on the line today at Dreher against **Belton-Honea Path** in the Class 3A final.

**Chapin** lost stars Stuart Hope and Nate Polly to graduation, spent the entire offseason stewing over a bitter 31-27 loss to West-Oak in the 2011 state championship match and was greeted by another new coach - its third in three seasons - when drills began in November.

Longtime Midlands coach Ken Wilson was hired to replace Logan Kubik with the idea of creating stability at the top. Wilson brought an impressive resume with him. He was a two-time All-America wrestler at Syracuse and,

according to scmat.com, compiled a 390-131 dual-match record during a coaching career than began in 1983. He spent more than 10 years at Spring Valley after being hired from Lancaster and took over at Dutch Fork when B.D. La-Prad moved to Fort Dorchester.

There never was a question about Wilson's **wrestling** pedigree, but the transition at **Chapin** did not always go smoothly.

"The seniors on this team have been together a long time, and I was an outsider with a new way of doing things," Wilson said. "I understood that it was going to take some time for me to earn their trust, and, eventually, they saw that I was here for them. We're one team now, with one goal."

That goal is winning a state championship - which would be the program's first since 1998 and the first for Wilson as a coach in South Carolina. His 2003 Spring Valley team fell to Dutch Fork and LaPrad in the 4A title bout in his only previous trip to the final.

Senior Chase Owens, a two-time state qualifier, said things began to change in January after **Chapin** hosted the U.S. Navy Duals.

"By that time we had adjusted to coach Wilson's style and we finally had a full lineup in place," said Owens, who is ranked No. 2 at 152 pounds. "It's not that we didn't like coach Wilson at first, it was just that he brought an entirely different practice style to the one we were used to and it took us some time to get comfortable with it. • It took a lot of patience by us and coach Wilson to get it worked out. The bond, the trust is there now."

Owens and fellow senior standouts Scott Swindell (state champion at 152 last year), Devin Lawrence (runner-up at 171), Cody Brundage, Brandon Owens and Adam Taylor are zeroed in on winning a title.

"Ever since we won a middle school state championship, we've been after one at the varsity level, but we haven't quite got it done," Owens said. "We've been close. • Our goal since then has been to correct the mistakes we made in the past that kept us from winning."

BHP, 31-2 and ranked No. 2, has reached the final for the first time in the dual-match playoff era.