

Liberty High School senior grappler Jacob Rogers delivered a clutch pin to propel the Red Devils to a tough 40-35 win over Andrew Jackson for the Class A-AA Upper State **wrestling** championship on Wednesday night in **Liberty**.

AJ, bidding for its first berth to the Class A-AA state championship round, held a 35-34 lead going to the final match, and Rogers came through with the pivotal fall at the 126-pound weight class to lift the Red Devils to the five-point win and a bid to the state title round Saturday at Airport High School in Columbia.

The seesaw match saw the Region IV-AA champion Vols and Red Devils each win seven weight divisions, with Rogers, a defending individual state champion, posting the decisive fall.

"It was close all the way," AJ **wrestling** coach Rob Tomalis said. "If one or two matches go another way, we win. It set up well for **Liberty** with a state champion wrestler like Rogers in the key match.

"Each team won seven matches, and **Liberty** had six pins, and just a few more quality points to get the win," Tomalis said. "We competed well and our effort and toughness were there. We matched up well and battled all the way."

The Vols, who finished a school-record 28-11 in only their sixth season of prep **wrestling**, posted four pins, a technical fall and two decisions.

"It was a tough loss and I'm proud of the effort and what this team has accomplished this season," Tomalis said. "The effort was there."

Daniel Barfield (106), Dalton Mackey (120), Luke Phillips (132) and Hunter Haven (170) each had a pin. Matthew Kirk (113) posted a technical fall, while Tyleik Elder (152) and Kalab Haven (182) each had a decision.

"Our season is something to build off for next year," Tomalis said. "We have no seniors, so the future is bright."

AJ won the Region IV-AA championship and advanced to the Class A-AA Upper State title match.

Liberty, 27-5, advances to face Lower State champion **Bamberg-Ehrhardt**, 41-9, for the Class A-AA state title Saturday, 11 a.m. at the Airport High gym in Columbia.

Bamberg-Ehrhardt defeated Marion, 64-18 to repeat as the Class A-AA Lower State champion. Cheraw, which fell to AJ this season, defeated **Bamberg-Ehrhardt** for the 2017 Class A-AA state **wrestling** championship.

The Vols will now focus on the Class A-AA individual state title matches, Feb. 16-17 at **Liberty** High School.

"I expect a lot of individual success from our team in that tournament," Tomalis said.