

'The best team ever'

CCC WRESTLING TEAM SETS NEW NJCAA RECORD WHILE WINNING THEIR THIRD NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP



Clackamas Community College's wrestling team celebrates winning the NJCAA Wrestling Championship on March 2 in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

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Clackamas Community College wrestling captured their third team NJCAA National Championship in school history in dominating fashion. The Cougars outscored second place Northeastern Oklahoma A&M by 24.5 points and set a new NJCAA scoring record for national championship weekend with 176.5, 10 points more than the previous record.

"This is the best team ever in the history of junior college wrestling. You can't quantify that and when I say it, it seems surreal, but the record shows this is the best to ever have done it," Head Coach Josh Rhoden said about Clackamas setting the new team scoring record.

Clackamas came out of the national meet with two individual champions, 141-pounder Elijah Ozuna and 174-pounder Trajan Hurd.

Ozuna defeated Ellsworth Community College's Zack Donathan 3-1 in the championship match. Donathan scored first, earning one point for an escape, but Ozuna evened the score with an escape of his own, then scored two points on a takedown with three seconds remaining in the match.

Hurd met Iowa Central's Ashton Eyler in the 174-pound final. Hurd scored six points early with a takedown and a near fall. Eyler was never able to catch up as Hurd won by a major decision 11-3.

"It was honestly one of the best experiences I've had in my life," Hurd said of winning a national championship. "The fulfilling of a dream I had as a kid and to be able to grab it and do it in a big way. It set my mind into a bigger perspective on what I can do in my life and how far I can take this sport. I'm just glad to have the opportunity to wrestle for such a program."

With the two individual national championships, the Cougars also had eight of their 10 wrestlers chosen as All-Americans. Ozuna and Hurd made first-team, 157-pound Joel Romero and 197-pound Joey Daniel won second-team honors, 125-pound Zeth Brower and 165-pound Mason McDaniel were third-team All-Americans and 133-pound Jason Shaner and 184-pound Trevor Senn both received honorable mention spots.

"I'm super proud of what they do and how they represent the school," said Athletic Director Jim Martineau. "It'd be one thing if they were winning a lot and not graduating kids, but we all keep it in perspective in the sense that we're here to graduate kids and help them move on and the fact that they do that and still win is what I'm most proud of."

Romero and Daniel both finished as national runners-up. Romero was defeated by Iowa Central's Tyree Sutton 6-2 and Daniel was beat by Iowa Central's Ethan

Karsten in a major decision 17-5.

Clackamas ended up placing nine out of 10 wrestlers and Rhoden credits that to helping the Cougars clinch the national championship.

"Those guys cared so much for each other that they battled back. Only two of them really got what they wanted personally, but every single one of those guys ended with a win in the medal round," Rhoden said. "So we got seventh instead of eighth, we got fifth twice instead of sixth, we got third twice instead of fourth. Those guys fought for their buddies and it was clearly communicated that that's what they were doing. 'It's not about me anymore' several of them said, 'it's about the team now.'"

Martin Margolis III missed out on placing or getting All-American honors, but Rhoden feels like the grit he showed wrestling with a dislocated shoulder exemplifies the drive of the team.

"[Margolis] dislocated his shoulder and still tried to wrestle. He had no shoulder that worked, literally, I'm not just playing this up, it's not like for the movie or something like that," Rhoden said. "His shoulder wasn't going to work and he taped it and said 'what am I supposed to do we want 10 All-Americans and no one's ever done that before.' He went and wrestled in what we call the 'blood round' 30 minutes after dislocating his shoulder and then he

dislocated it twice during the match trying to win it for his team."

Clackamas celebrated the school's third national title with a team dinner at Texas Roadhouse paid for by Mason McDaniel's grandfather.

"He said 'I want to take everyone to dinner, where do you want to go?' He was trying to ask me all weekend and I was saying 'Are you sure Mr. McDaniel? You don't need to do that' and he said 'No, no, I want to take them out,'" Rhoden said.

The Cougars downed steaks and sodas, yes sodas, as they watched the UFC fights.

"The guys were eating steaks like they were kings or something, steaks and sodas is what they wanted real bad," Rhoden said. "They cut out soda for so long trying to maximize their cardio so they were just smashing as many sweet rolls and sodas as they could."

Once dinner was done the team returned to the hotel banquet room where stories and memories were swapped.

"It was a special night that I definitely won't ever forget for the rest of my life," Rhoden said. "That's what it's about, when you think about it, all this other stuff goes away, we were blessed to get to intersect our lives with these kids and it's the memories we get to take away that are going to stay with me until I'm gone."