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Wrestling

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BOONE, N.C. — When the last-second call was upheld, an emotional Ethan Oakley rocked his neck back and covered his face with both hands.

When he put his hands down, tears were visible in his eyes.

The drama was just starting, even with App State Wrestling well on its way to a dominant victory at the SoCon Championship tournament Saturday in the Holmes Center.

The Mountaineers repeated as tourney champs with five individual champions among the 10 weight classes, highlighted by final-second victories from Oakley at 133 pounds and true freshman Tomas Brooker at 184 pounds. Cody Bond (149 pounds), Tommy Askey (157 pounds) and Will Miller (165 pounds) also won individual titles to clinch automatic NCAA Championships bids for Kansas City as every App State starter posted a top-four finish.

Whether it was a combined nine pins and several other decisive wins leading to bonus points, or determined efforts in consolation brackets, it was a total team effort from the five champions, fellow finalist Jacob Sartorio, a pair of third-place finishers in Luke Uliano and Carson Floyd, plus fourth-place finishers Chad Bellis and Ike Byers.

The 24th-ranked Mountaineers totaled 114.0 points, 16.5 more than runner-up Campbell, which also had six finalists. SoCon Coach of the Year JohnMark Bentley guided App State to a fourth conference tournament title and an 11th league title overall, counting regular season races.

The second-seeded Oakley trailed 4-2 against top-seeded Dom Zaccone from Campbell in the closing moments before getting in on a shot with 25 seconds remaining and completing the takedown with one second left in a 5-4 victory.

His victory followed Bond's 2-0 finals victory against The Citadel's Jeff Boyd to give the seventh-year senior his second career SoCon title and Miller's 8-3 decision against Campbell's Dom Baker. Askey repeated as a SoCon champ with a 9-2 decision against Davidson's Tanner Peake.

App State had clinched the team title by the time Brooker, a true freshman, took the mat against Campbell's Caleb Hopkins, a three-time SoCon champion who had quickly pinned Brooker in their regular season meeting.

Starting the third period on top with a 3-0 deficit, Brooker was still on top when Hopkins was penalized a stalling point for the first time with 26 seconds remaining. Brooker tried to cut him loose immediately but brought him back down too quickly for an escape/takedown combo to be scored. Hopkins refused to return to his feet as Brooker tried to cut him loose again and was penalized again for stalling with five seconds left to make the score 3-2.

Hopkins returned to his feet, finally recording an escape 115 seconds into the period, and Brooker immediately went in for a takedown that he finished in the final second for an improbable victory. When the win was confirmed, Brooker walked to his corner and was lifted off his feet by assistant coach Randall Diabe while Bentley enthusiastically patted the unlikely champion on the back.

It was App State's final victory in a day full of them.

App State went 9-1 in the quarterfinal round with four major decisions, one tech fall and four pins — from Bellis, Oakley, Askey and Floyd.

The Mountaineers then went 6-3 in their semifinal matches with one pin from Brooker, who followed a quarterfinal tech fall with a fall against Presbyterian's Caleb Roe, who had an opening-round pin to stun second-seeded Jha'Quan Anderson from Gardner-Webb.

Oakley trailed 4-2 in a ranked semifinal against Chattanooga's Blake Boarman before taking the lead on a takedown with 46 seconds left and finishing on top in a 5-4 victory. Bond turned defense to offense on a tiebreaking takedown with 1:25 left and finished on top, getting two back points in the process, to prevail 7-1 against Campbell's Justin Rivera in their semifinal showdown.

Wrestling for the first time since hurting his knee significantly during an injury default on Feb. 18, Sartorio reached the heavyweight final with a pair of major decisions before losing to top-10 opponent Taye Ghadiali in the championship round.

Once the consolation rounds began, the quartet of Byers, Bellis, Uliano and Floyd went a combined 5-0 (with three pins) in the consolation first round and consolation semifinal matches. Bellis, Uliano and Floyd advanced to third-place matches with pins, while Byers followed a major decision with a big 4-3 overtime win against Campbell's Wynton Denkins.

The match went to overtime at 2-all thanks to matching escapes and third-period point penalties for stalling. Both wrestlers got escapes in the 30-second TB-1 periods, but Byers had to be aggressive after taking longer to escape, and he was able to push Denkins out for a second stalling point.

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Boyd and Chanó then came through with pivotal wins in their third-place matches, with Chanó recording his second straight pin and App State's ninth pin of the day to help App State lead 99.0 to 84.5 over Campbell going into a finals session in which each team had six entries — with the Camels as considerable favorites at the heavier weights.

Like in his low-scoring regular season matchup with Boyd, Bond wasn't able to finish any takedowns, but a second-period rideout and third-period escape were enough to post his 2-0 victory in the 149-pound final. Bond used some strong defense in the third period to clinch his second automatic NCAA Championships berth — the seventh-year redshirt senior won a SoCon title at 157 pounds in 2021.

Miller used a three-point takedown, followed by three near-fall points, in the last 15 seconds of the first period to move ahead 6-0 in an 8-3 victory during the 165 final. Miller rode out the second period and allowed a late takedown while attempting to secure a bonus-point victory.

He will head to the NCAA Championships for the second straight year, after being an automatic qualifier as the SoCon runner-up at 174 pounds during his first year as a starter in 2023.

The NCAAs run from March 21-23 in Kansas City, Mo. The 2023-24 season is presented by Hungry Howie's and Penn Station.

125: #2 Chad Bellis, App State

QF: W (Fall, 0:52) vs. #7 Enis Ljokovic, Davidson
SF: L, (Dec, 5-2) vs. #3 Brayden Palmer, Chattanooga
Conso semi: W (Fall, 1:21) vs. #Malik Hardy, The Citadel
3rd-place match: L (Dec, 14-10) vs. #1 Anthony Molton, Campbell

133: #2 Ethan Oakley, App State

QF: W (Fall, 5:48) vs. #7 Hale Robinson, Davidson
SF: W (Dec, 5-4) vs. #3 Blake Boorman, Chattanooga
Final: W (Dec, 5-4) vs. #1 Dom Zaccone, Campbell

141: #3 Ike Byers, App State

QF: L (Dec, 4-2) vs. #6 Patrick Jordon, VMI
Conso: W (MD, 17-4) vs. #7 Joshua Viarengo, Davidson
Conso semi: W (Dec, 4-3 in TB-1 OT) vs. #4 Wynton Denkins, Campbell
3rd-place match: L (Dec, 5-2) vs. #4 Jacob Silka, The Citadel

149: #1 Cody Bond, App State

QF: W (MD, 13-1) vs. #8 Trenton Donahue, Presbyterian
SF: W (Dec, 7-1) vs. #4 Justin Rivera, Campbell
Final: W (Dec, 2-0) vs. #2 Jeff Boyd, The Citadel

157: #1 Tommy Askey, App State

QF: W (Fall, 4:06) vs. #8 Josh Yost, VMI
SF: W (Dec, 8-2) vs. #4 Lincoln Heck, Chattanooga
Final: W (Dec, 9-2) vs. #2 Tanner Peake, Davidson

165: #1 Will Miller, App State

QF: W (MD, 17-4) vs. #8 Caleb Chandler, VMI
SF: W (MD, 12-3) vs. #4 Bryce Sanderlin, Davidson
Final: W (Dec, 8-3) vs. #2 Dom Baker, Campbell

174: #4 Luke Uliano, App State

QF: W (MD, 12-2) vs. #5 Brodie Porter, The Citadel
SF: L (Dec, 10-8) vs. #1 Austin Murphy, Campbell
Conso semi: W (Fall, 5:38) vs. #7 Samuel Mora, Gardner-Webb
3rd-place match: W (Fall, 5:22) vs. #2 Braxton Lewis, VMI

184: #3 Tomas Brooker, App State

QF: W (TF, 19-4) vs. #6 Toby Schoffstall, VMI
SF: W (Fall, 6:19) vs. #7 Caleb Roe, Presbyterian
Final: W (Dec, 5-4) vs. #1 Caleb Hopkins, Campbell

197: #2 Carson Floyd, App State (Third place)

QF: W (Fall, 5:45) vs. #7 Josh Evans, VMI
SF: L (Dec, 14-10) vs. #3 Patrick Brophy, The Citadel
Conso semi: W (Fall, 2:00) vs. #5 David Harper, Chattanooga
3rd-place match: W (MD, 12-3) vs. #7 Josh Evans, VMI

HWT: #2 Jacob Sartorio, App State

QF: W (MD, 13-1) vs. #7 Morvens Saint-Jean, Presbyterian
SF: W (MD, 11-3) vs. #3 Ben Stemmet, The Citadel
Final: L (Fall, 5:40) vs. #1 Taye Ghadiali, Campbell