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Wrestling

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BOONE, N.C. — With seven App State wrestlers making either a first career start or first dual start at his current weight, the 26th-ranked Mountaineers opened the 2023-24 season against an opponent that JohnMark Bentley said was potentially the best team he's faced in 15 years as a head coach.

No. 3 NC State won 40-3 on Friday night in front of 1,000 fans in a packed Varsity Gym, with App State's Ethan Oakley claiming a 4-2 decision at 133 pounds against three-time NCAA qualifier Jarrett Trombley.

With N.C. State's roster having a higher-ranked wrestler at all 10 weight classes — the Wolfpack has six wrestlers with top-10 national rankings and three returning All-Americans — consecutive close matches at 165 and 174 pounds also had fans from both sides on their feet on a night when wrestling began at 149 pounds.

"I think (tonight) kind of showed us where we're at, the things we need to fix and the things we need to work on," Bentley said. "We just never really got going tonight, and there wasn't a lot of positive momentum in our direction, but we had some guys battle hard. I don't want to totally downplay that that's a really, really good team. I'm going to give them credit. They're ranked third, and they may be the second-best team in the country, especially in a dual meet. They just don't have any weaknesses."

The rosters for NC State and App State each have two 133-pound wrestlers with NCAA Championships experience, and Trombley got the nod Friday for NC State instead of fifth-ranked Kai Orine, who had lost in overtime to App State's Sean Carter last year before ending the season as an All-American. Oakley stepped into a starting role following a season-ending injury to Carter last year, went unbeaten in SoCon duals, won a match at the NCAA Championships and opened this season with an impressive result.

Oakley recorded a three-point takedown 40 seconds into Friday's match, took a 4-2 lead on an escape with 1:20 remaining in the third period and fought off an attack from Trombley in the closing seconds.

"I just tried to get whatever points were there," Oakley said. "I train in a lot of those positions and try to stay in the positions I'm comfortable in. It's really good to get a test against a tough opponent. I get excited for every opportunity I can to wrestle the best."

Ranked No. 33 at 165, NC State's AJ Kovacs overcame a first-period takedown from Will Miller and didn't allow an escape after a final-minute takedown to win 5-4 against App State's returning NCAA qualifier. The next match at 174 went to overtime before 22nd-ranked Alex Faison produced a takedown to win 6-3 against App State's Luke Uliano.

Miller is wrestling at 165 after competing at 174 last season, and Uliano has moved to 174 after wrestling at 184 last season. They made their first career dual starts at those weights, as did Cody Bond at 149, and four other Mountaineers made the first dual starts of their careers at any weight: Chad Bellis (125), redshirt freshman Kaden Keiser (141), true freshman Tomas Brooker (184) and redshirt freshman Hunter Adams (197).

Miller delivered a three-point takedown midway through the first period and moved ahead 4-2 with an escape 12 seconds into the third period. Kovacs took a 5-4 lead on a takedown with 48 seconds remaining and stayed on top for the remainder of the match.

After a scoreless first period, Uliano rode out the second period and officially took a 1-0 lead (with two minutes of riding time on his side) as Faison conceded an escape to open the third. Uliano was essentially tied at 3-all by following Faison's takedown with 53 seconds with an escape five seconds later. A scramble late in regulation netted no points, and Faison's takedown 45 seconds into the first overtime period produced a 6-3 victory.

#3 NC State 40, #26 App State 3

149: #7 Jackson Arrington (NCSU) def. #25 Cody Bond (APP), 19-3 tech fall

157: #5 Ed Scott (NCSU) def. #20 Tommy Askey (APP), 13-6 dec.

165: #33 AJ Kovacs (NCSU) def. Will Miller (APP), 5-4 dec.

174: #22 Alex Faison (NCSU) def. Luke Uliano (APP), 6-3 dec. (SV-1)

184: #29 Dylan Fishback (NCSU) def. Tomas Brooker (APP), fall (1:30)

197: #5 Trent Hidlay (NCSU) def. Hunter Adams (APP), 19-4 tech fall

HWT: #8 Owen Trephan (NCSU) def. Jacob Sartorio (APP), fall (2:08)

125: #12 Jakob Camacho (NCSU) def. Chad Bellis (APP), 19-3 tech fall

133: Ethan Oakley (APP) def. Jarrett Trombley (NCSU), 4-2 dec.

141: #9 Ryan Jack (NCSU) def. Kaden Keiser (APP), 20-6 maj. dec.

Attendance: 1,000

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