

Strickland, Johnson Win At Appalachian Open

Written by Paul Blascovich
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Freshmen Zack Strickland (Muncy, Pa./Muncy) and Jesse Johnson (Lexington, N.C./Central Davidson) captured their first collegiate titles as Appalachian State University wrestling played host to the Second Annual Appalachian Open on Saturday in Varsity Gymnasium. In total, eight Mountaineers secured spots as place winners, having finished in the top four of their respective weights. Strickland upset top-seeded

John Lampe in the 165-pound semifinal, 7-4, to advance to the title bout. In the final, he squared off against Kenneth Radford of The Citadel, and after seven minutes of wrestling, the championship match was tied, 3-3.

After a scoreless minute in the first sudden victory, the first tiebreakers featured Strickland taking a 6-3 lead on an escape and takedown, but Radford responded in kind, sending the pair to a second tiebreaker period. In the end, Strickland triumphed with a takedown, avenging a prior 5-3 loss in November with an 8-6 title-winning victory.

Johnson captured the 184-pound crown in more routine, but no less dramatic, fashion. In his quarterfinal match, he trailed Campbell's Cody Ryba 2-6 in the second period but was able to secure a pin in 4:27. His semifinal match played out similarly, as he was down 1-4 after the first and, after UNC Pembroke's Stuart Nadeau elected to start defensively, Johnson capitalized 54 seconds later with his second fall.

Johnson opened up a 5-0 lead early in his championship bout and, though Mateo Rojas (Spartanburg Methodist) closed the gap to 5-3, the Mountaineer answered to take an 11-3 advantage en route to an eventual 16-8 victory.

Senior Weston Haney (Robbinsville, N.C./Robbinsville) was a finalist at 125 pounds but was downed 12-7 by top seed Ty Mitch of Virginia Tech.

In another Hokie-Mountaineer championship showdown, freshman 133-pounder Joe Morrison (Apex, N.C./Panther Creek) was upended by VT's Jarrod Garnett, 11-5. ASU's fifth finalist was Colin Hedash (Slatington, Pa./Northern Lehigh) who cruised to a spot in the 174-pound final as the top-seed but came up short against the No. 2 seed of Stephen Doty from Virginia, 12-1.

Appalachian added two third place finishes from sophomore Chris Johnson (Hillsborough, N.C./Robert L. Patton) (133) and classmate Riley Keen (Dunwoody, Ga./Dunwoody) (141). The Black and Gold's final place winner was Brock Durfee (Sherrills Ford, N.C./Bandys), who took fourth at 285 pounds.

The Mountaineers finished the day with eight placewinners, tied with Virginia Tech for most among the 16 represented teams. The open-meet format allowed Appalachian to enter many of its red-shirt and non-starter wrestlers, affording them an opportunity to compete in the spring semester.

Appalachian State returns to action on Sun., Feb. 5 when the team heads to Chattanooga to face the Mocs in a dual of the SoCon's undefeated teams. The match will be critical in determining the Southern Conference's regular-season dual meet champion. A fan bus is being provided for those interested in attending the 2 p.m. match.