

St. Valentine's Day could end in either heartbreak or celebration for the **Fort Dorchester Wrestling** team.

At 2 p.m. Feb. 14, the Executive Committee of the South Carolina High School League will consider an appeal by **Fort Dorchester** that it be allowed to participate in this year's Class AAAAAA **wrestling** state championship match. The committee is scheduled to have the meeting, where it will also hear from officials representing Lexington High School, in the high school league office at 121 Westpark Boulevard in Columbia.

The meeting is open to the public.

**Fort Dorchester** officials found out last week their **wrestling** program had been booted from the playoffs, at least temporarily.

The high school league issued a press release Feb. 9 stating "After a comprehensive investigation by members of the South Carolina High School League staff, the **Fort Dorchester** High School **wrestling** team will not be allowed to compete in the AAAAAA State **Wrestling** Duals Championship due to an ineligible wrestler. The AAAAAA Championship Match (originally scheduled for Saturday, February 10, 2018) is postponed until further notice."

Under league guidelines, if an athlete is found to be ineligible then the team he or she competes for must forfeit all contests that athlete participated in during the school year. However, FD officials decided to appeal the forfeiture.

Once the appeal process is complete, the 5A state title match will be rescheduled.

"Accusations presented to the SCHSL must provide probable cause for an investigation to occur and be found valid after a detailed inquiry," league Commissioner Jerome Singleton said. "The SCHSL regrets the schedule change for all student athletes and coaches involved."

**Fort Dorchester** defeated River Bluff 40-26 in the 5A Lower State semifinal of the duals playoffs Feb. 7 to originally advance to the state finals. Unless the ruling is overturned Wednesday, River Bluff will represent the Lower State in the state title match against **Rock Hill**, which defeated Byrnes 44-18 in the Upper State semifinal.

Against River Bluff, **Fort Dorchester** won five weight classes by pin and another by technical fall. The Gators earned two pins and a technical fall.

"We started making strides toward this the end of last season," **Fort Dorchester** coach Andrew Young said immediately following the River Bluff match. "This is our ultimate goal and what we strive for every day."

Patriot heavyweight Qumari Jackson pinned his opponent in only 20 seconds. Also earning a pin for the Patriots were Dazjon Casto (170-pound class), Joseph Brown (120), Jordan Aluyan (126) and Tyler Mallory (138).

"At 138, with Tyler Mallory, that was huge for the team," Young said. "He is a great kid who has gotten better and better every day and it showed tonight. I couldn't be more proud of him. Tonight I feel like the places where we won, that is where we were banking on winning."

Chandler Amaker (106) won by technical fall. Phaizon Myers (182) and Joseph Negron (113) claimed decisions for the Patriots.

The match closed with two of the more interesting pairings of the evening. River Bluff's Benjamin Emery, the top-ranked 5A wrestler at 145, defeated **Fort Dorchester's** Drew Parker, the top ranked wrestler at 160, with a 5-3 decision. Then Parker's brother Johnathan took River Bluff's William Butter, the No. 4 wrestler at 160, into

overtime before losing 7-5 on a takedown.

The last time the Patriots made it to a state championship match was three years ago, when it fell 45-24 to **Rock Hill**. The Patriots do have two state **wrestling** championships in school history, which were earned during the 2006-07 and 2009-10 school years under the leadership of head coach B.D. LaPrad.

**Rock Hill** has 17 **wrestling** state championships. The last time **Rock Hill** advanced to the state finals was last year, when it fell 31-30 to River Bluff in the first 5A state title match.

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