

## Hunterdon/Warren/Sussex Tournament - Wrestling

Star-Ledger, January 14, 2012 7:35 p.m.

By Bob Behre

Phillipsburg had climbed up to No. 9 in The Star-Ledger Top 20 on the strength of its balanced lineup.

The perennial state power exhibited that balance yesterday when it nailed down two individual championships, one third-place finish and three fourth-place finishes on its way to its second straight team championship at the Hunterdon-Warren-Sussex Tournament at Hunterdon Central in Flemington.

The Warren County team's big boys, 220-pounder Brandon Hull and heavyweight Anthony Pare, won championships and Pare, who pinned all three of his opponents, was in the running for the tournament's Most Outstanding Wrestler Award. That award eventually went to Delaware Valley's 126-pounder, Mike Pongracz.

Pongracz won perhaps the most entertaining final-round bout when he edged a returning champion, Matt Benvenuto of Lenape Valley, 6-5.

Benvenuto took Pongracz down to his back early in the bout to take a quick 5-0 lead. But Pongracz, the Region 5 champion at 119 pounds a year ago, rallied with reversals in the first and second periods and a takedown with 1:15 remaining in the third to win it.

Voorhees, ranked No. 19, was second in the team scoring and boasted two champions in Ronnie Honickel (145) and Jadaen Bernstein (160). Warren Hills, ranked No. 20, was third with 158.5 points, unranked Kittatinny (154), which had a tournament high four finalists, was fourth, No. 13 North Hunterdon (136) was fifth and No. 18 Delaware Valley (126) was sixth.

Phillipsburg, as it has in its dual meets, managed to press the opposition with its depth.

"Our kids love to be doubted," said Phillipsburg coach Dave Post. "There was some talk out there that we couldn't win this. All that did was put a fire under our guys."

The tournament had plenty of fire and some impressive freshmen, too boot.

Two freshmen tangled at 103 where Lenape Valley's Peter Lipari edged Warren Hills' Max Nauta, 8-3. Lipari had just dropped down to 106 from 113 pounds.

"It was my first time down," said Lipari, who looks awful strong at 106. "I worked hard all week."

Lipari scored two takedowns and hit a pair of reversals on the way to his decision over Nauta.

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Sophomore Dylan Nace of Hunterdon Central, nipped freshman Ryan Pomrinca of North Hunterdon, 3-2, at 113 pounds on the strength of a takedown in the second period. The two are sure to meet against at District 17 and Region 5.

Beau Vrancken of North Hunterdon had a takedown in the third period to help secure a 4-3 victory over Clarke Moynihan of Kittatinny at 152 pounds. Vrancken, the 2011 Region 5 champion at 152 pounds, picked up career victory No. 100 with the victory. Moynihan won his 100th career match in the first round via a fall over Scott Anderson of Hackettstown.

Jadaen Bernstein of Voorhees was a technician in his 12-5 decision over Kieran Gerrity at 160. The state tournament runner-up at 160 last winter registered six takedowns. Bernstein weighed about 185 pounds during football season and just got down to 160 on Thursday.

"It's good competition here," said Bernstein. "I like seeing the Sussex County schools because we really don't see them otherwise. I'm just working hard trying to win a state title."

Bernstein lost, 3-2, in the state final last year to Ryan Harrington of Mendham.

Pare was easily among the truly impressive wrestlers. Seeded second, Pare took top-seeded Jon Gemeinhardt of Vernon and picked up two near fall points to build a 4-0 lead through one period. He scored two more takedowns in the second to boost his advantage to 8-1. He turned Gemeinhardt in the third for a fall in 5:27.

Pare has shown substantial improvement from a year ago when he was the District 1 runner-up at 189 pounds and lost in the first round of the Region 1 tournament. Pare is up to about 230 pounds this year but remains light on his feet and exhibits unusual athleticism for a big man.

"Coach (Josh) Haines does a good job throwing me around the room," said Pare about his practices with the Phillipsburg assistant coach. "He works me out pretty good. Plus I've just gained a lot of experience."