

SPORTS

>> Contact Assistant Executive Editor Phil Nardone at (908) 766-3900 or pnardone@newjerseyhills.com

www.theprogressnj.com

THE PROGRESS

Thursday, February 13, 2014 PAGE 9

Back-to-back titles for Caldwell wrestlers

By W. L. BILL ALLEN JR.
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

WEST CALDWELL — Yes, Virginia, there are still firsts to be accomplished by the wrestling program from James Caldwell High, despite the long-and-storied history of the Chiefs mats program.

In fact, for the first time in their long-and-storied history, the locals have earned at least a share of a conference crown for the second straight season.

After tying crosstown rival West Essex Regional for the Super Essex Conference/American Division title last year, the grappling Chiefs have knotted West Orange for the 2014 SEC-American crown at 6-1 this time around, giving the Caldwell contingent its first ever set of back-to-back conference crowns.

In SEC/American outings, the Chiefs defeated Montclair High, 73-4, on Jan. 6, Livingston, 64-7, on Jan. 8, Bloomfield, 55-13, on Jan. 15, Wessex, 42-21, on Jan. 17, Seton Hall Prep, 36-35, on Jan. 29 before losing to West Orange, 33-29, on Jan. 31, before bouncing back to top Nutley, 46-29, on Feb. 4.

"It's a bit ironic," said longtime JCHS head coach Gary Garamella of his team's fortunes.

"We were supposed to face West Orange in early January, when we would have had (17-1 senior standout) Joe Galioto available, but that meet was snowed out.

"Instead, we faced them after Galioto was lost for the season, due to an injury at the county



Photo by Bill Allen

Members of the Caldwell High School wrestling team celebrate the fact that the Chiefs earned a share of a conference championship for the second consecutive season.

tournament, and we lost by four points.

"However, that said, we were still able to edge the Prep without Galioto in the lineup and that was key and we were eventually able to tie for conference (championship)."

Indeed, in the battle against SHP, the final score was 35-35,

and the result came down to not the first... not the second... not the third... but eventually the eighth, yes the EIGHTH, tie-breaker, with JCHS getting the extra point in that scenario.

The eighth tie-breaker was the team with most first points scored in each of the 14 bouts, and that was Caldwell, 8-6.

"We knew that, once we had gotten by the Prep, we had a very good chance to finish with just one loss in the conference for the second straight season and that would give us a tie for the conference championship for the second straight season and I just couldn't be prouder of our kids," said Garamella.

"After we lost Joe (Galioto) for the season during the county tournament, I reminded both the kids and the media that we still had a chance to win a conference title and a district championship and, now, we've accomplished one of those two goals."

Seeded third in the North Jersey Section 2, Group state team

tournament bracket, the Chiefs defeated Rutherford, the short-handed sixth seed, 51-7, in a quarterfinal round contest on Monday, Feb. 10, and were scheduled to travel to second-seeded Whippany Park last night, Wednesday, Wednesday, Feb. 12, in a state section semifinals round showdown.