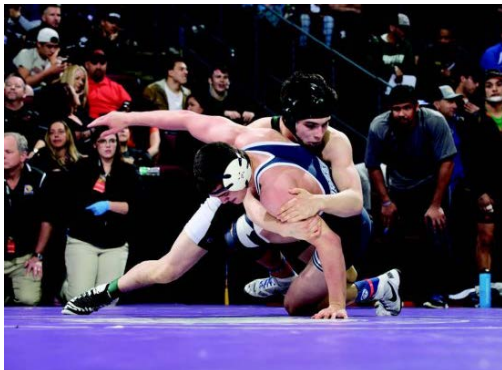


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Wright reaches state finals for academically-gifted Mats wrestling team

By Karl Buscheck



Skyler Wright in his state match against Dillon Cravens, #5 Central Section Senior from Bakersfield Photos provided

wrestlers on the roster, making the program the NCS CIF Scholastic Championship Team for 2016-2017.

The feat impressed, but didn't surprise the head coach.

"I'm extremely proud," Herrera said. "But again, being in this community that I'm in as a coach, that's kind of the standard and almost the expectation of every student to kind of overachieve and anything but the highest (level) is unacceptable."

At the NCS meet, held on Feb. 24 and Feb. 25, Wright placed in second in the 152-weight class, earning an automatic bid to the state finals.

"He was one of the top 32 wrestlers in that weight class in the state of California," Herrera said. "And the state of California has over 1,000 wrestling programs, so he's considered in the top two, three percent of athletes in the state."

At the state championship - hosted at Rabobank Arena in Bakersfield on March 3 and March 4 - Wright advanced to the second round of the competition before exiting the tournament. Wright took down Dillon Cravens of Bakersfield - the No. 5 overall wrestler in the Central Section - before losing to Ed Bilezekchian of Santa Ana in his second match.

The loss brought an end to Wright's wrestling tenure with the Mats and also capped his second consecutive season in which he'd been the top 152-pound athlete in the the league.

When asked to explain Wright's success with Miramonte, Herrera pointed to the standout's relentless motor.

"His hard work, his dedication and ultimately his internal drive and motivation to not let his family and friends down," Herrera said. "The guy has a heart of gold. So, part of his motivation is not to let anyone down in any way shape or form. And that translates to school work, wrestling and everything he does. He's just that kind of special guy."

With Wright's high school career complete, his next step will be to compete at the junior college level before eventually transitioning to a four-year program. Herrera said that while Wright has drawn interest from colleges, the junior-college path is the best option for the back-to-back league champ.

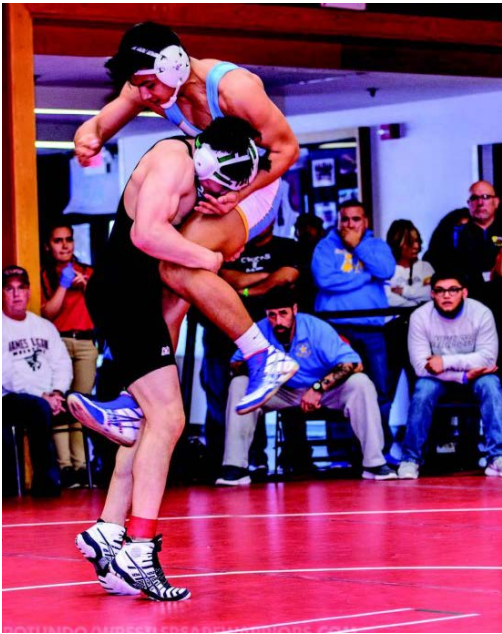
"The sky's the limit," Herrera said. "No pun intended."

It was during Skyler Wright's sophomore season that Jose Herrera, the head coach of the Miramonte wrestling program, began to grasp just how talented a wrestler he had in his midst.

That spring, Wright, who started working out in the weight room as a fifth grader and wrestling as an eighth grader at Orinda Intermediate School, secured an NCS spot and went onto topple the No. 3 seed in the tournament.

"From the very first sight ... (I could tell) he was just a fanatic," Herrera recalled of the senior star, who took off in the spring of 2015 when he learned to master the technical side of the sport.

This spring, Wright anchored a Mats team that not only claimed third place at NCS, but that was also the most academically successful in the region. Miramonte posted the highest GPA for any team with at least seven



Wright grapples Heritage in his qualifying match at NCS.



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