

# Watson-Castro, H-F teammates win at girls wrestling meet

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Saturday, Feb. 26, was a day of firsts. Homewood-Flossmoor participated in the inaugural girls wrestling state finals at Grossinger Motors Arena. The Vikings also got their first-ever wrestling state champion — Attalia Watson-Castro in the 135-pound class.

"I'm ecstatic," coach Scott Aronson said. "It was amazing, just an amazing weekend. Nothing like anything I've ever experienced in my life."

The Vikings had eight state qualifiers in total. In addition to Watson-Castro, Jocelyn Williams and Ini Odumosu took home ribbons. Ava Anderson (106 pounds), Nina Hamm (115), Grace Gibbs (140), Kristen Roberts (155), and Madison Skowronski (170) also wrestled in Bloomington. Six of those eight never wrestled before this season, including 235-pounder Williams.

Williams finished fourth after suffering a late pin in the semifinal round against Curie's Aaliyah GrandBerry. She rebounded to beat Oak Park and River Forest's Sarah Epshtein 2-0 in the consolation match. Epshtein beat Williams twice during the regular season.

After that match, Williams gave Epshtein a hug.

"Her face, it looked really sad. She didn't expect me to beat her so I just gave her a hug," Williams said. "It's a lot of pressure. This was the first state ever and I could tell that she really wanted to win. We both wanted to win. At the end of the day, it's hard for us females to get attention with wrestling so I was just like 'Why not? I'll just give her a hug.'"

Keira Enright from Plainfield South pinned Williams in the third-place match. She said she was disappointed



Coaches and administrators congratulate the Homewood-Flossmoor High School girls wrestling team. Attalia Watson-Castro (center with award) won the state title in the 135-pound class, and among the eight H-F state qualifiers, two brought home ribbons.

she didn't win first but was proud to be standing on the fourth-place step of the podium in the first-ever girls state wrestling meet.

"I feel we should've had a state (already). I feel like we're stronger than most men," Williams said. "We listen more and we catch on to stuff faster than most men."

Aronson calls Williams a "mighty mouse" because she has a significant size disadvantage against most of her opponents, weighing in the lower end of the heaviest weight class.

She's also dealing with a meniscus injury that leaves her in pain after every meet.

"She just goes out there and chooses not to lose," Aronson said.

Watson-Castro cruised through the early portion of her bracket, earning

technical falls in her first two matches. She took a 6-4 decision over Goreville's Alivia Ming in the semifinal to set up the championship match with Netavia Wickson of Boylan Catholic.

A couple flawed shots by Wickson resulted in takedowns. Watson-Castro earned the state title 4-0. Aronson called it a near-perfect match.

"It was more of a make or break match. It was mind over matter. Before the match, I told my coach 'I'm out of it. My body is out of it.' It was like I didn't train for this," she said. "I was even doubting myself. It wasn't the match that I planned on but I went out there and no matter what was going on, regardless of how my body feels or what emotions I'm going through right now, I knew I needed to get this win."

Watson-Castro finished the season at 17-1. Her only loss came during the early portion of the season when she was dealing with a hip injury that hampered her even during the state meet. She also wrestled up a weight class in that match.

She said since winning the title, she's been approached by little girls telling her she's an inspiration to start the sport.

"I'm proud. I'm happy. It's a lot of feelings at once," Watson-Castro said. "We've made it somewhere. That's how I've been looking at it. Girls wrestling has definitely made it somewhere."

Homewood-Flossmoor's 190-pounder Odumosu took home the fifth-place ribbon, winning a 6-4 fifth-place match with West Aurora's Brittney Moran.

Odumosu lost twice early in the bracket but recovered.

"She's extremely cerebral, constantly trying to analyze her opponent and figure out their weakness and what she can do better. I don't think she gets caught up too much in the pain of losing," Aronson said. "Her losses in the state tournament were winnable matches and I could easily see her taking the state championship next year."

Aronson and assistant coach Terri Davis have a lot to look forward to. The future is bright for the Vikings. Only two of the 18 on the roster will graduate.

Coaches expect H-F to be one of the top teams in the state next season. Other schools are already reaching out to schedule duals, seeking good competition.

"We've still got these girls for a couple more years," Aronson said. "It's a lot of power next year. I'm really excited about it."

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