

Feb. 5 JoJo's Tavern/Fish4Scores.com Athlete of the Week

After winning MCT championship, Nunez proved he was a worthy champ

By Ken Weingartner

Fish4scores.com

Feb. 5: Jancel Nunez found winning the Mercer County Tournament title to be exciting. Proving it wasn't a fluke was satisfying.

Nunez, a senior at Nottingham High, won the MCT championship as the No. 3 seed at 182 pounds on Jan. 28 at Robbinsville. On Thursday, Nunez pinned Hightstown's Joey DeCristofaro in 91 seconds to help lead the Swamprats to a CVC Valley Division-clinching victory over the Rams.

The win over DeCristofaro, though, was significant for more than the valuable points it provided Nottingham in its 38-27 triumph. Nunez had defeated DeCristofaro, 11-10, in the MCT semifinals by rallying with a takedown and three backpoints in the final 20 seconds. The pin five days later was a statement.

"When I wrestled Joey, you could say the last time I had some luck with getting the backpoints," Nunez said. "When I was going to wrestle him again, I wanted to prove I was the better wrestler, and not that I won by luck. I wanted to show I was the better wrestler. I wanted to prove I was the true MCT champion."

If Nunez needed any addition motivation, he received from Nottingham coach Jason "The Rock" Marasco, who prior to the dual match against Hightstown told Nunez he had DeCristofaro beating him on paper.

"He was being realistic; it's true, (DeCristofaro in the MCT) was kind of beating me up in the beginning. I was down 6-0," Nunez said, laughing. "But that fired me up even more. I remembered how he wrestled; it was fresh in my mind. I knew the things he liked to do and I used them to my advantage."

For his efforts, which also included beating No. 1 seed Matt Apuzzi of Lawrenceville Prep in the MCT championship and pinning in 43 seconds in a dual-meet victory over Robbinsville, Nunez is the JoJo's Tavern/Fish4scores.com Athlete of the Week for the week ending Feb. 3.

Nunez wrestled only two matches as a junior because he suffered a knee injury in Nottingham's season-opening tournament. He was 14-16 as a sophomore.

This season, Nunez is 24-3. Two of his losses came by two points and the other came against undefeated Steve Nelson of Haddon Township, who finished fourth in the state at 160 last year.

Two more goals he would like to achieve this season are setting the school record for wins in a campaign and reaching the state tournament. It is likely that if he accomplishes one, he will accomplish the other. Nunez is within 11 victories of the record, which was set by Erik Dickerson in 2008.

"He was Marasco's last state qualifier; I want to be the next one," Nunez said, noting he sees Dickerson's record on display in front of the Nottingham gym.

"I want my name to be there," he said. "Every day I look at that and it motivates me and I work even harder in practice. All the hard work is paying off right now."

It is exciting, and satisfying.