



## Wesley Morris receives Michael Jackson Memorial Scholarship

After wrestling an outstanding senior season this past year – a season that saw him win the 11th Region Tournament championship in his weight class – Wesley Morris was honored as the 10th annual Michael Jackson Memorial Scholarship award winner in a ceremony at the Woodford County High School library on Thursday, July 19.

In accepting the honor, Morris joined nine other former Mat Jackets who have received this award, which honors the WCHS wrestler who best exemplifies the traits and characteristics that Michael Jackson was noted for during his time at the high school.

Jackson, a two-time state champion at WCHS, was tragically killed in a car accident in 2002. In addition to his state championships, Jackson is a member of the Woodford Wrestling Hall of Fame. In his career, he had 185 wins. He also had the most pins during the 2000 season (25) and had 100 or more takedowns in a season three times.

“It's a big deal,” Morris said about receiving this prestigious award. “I grew up (in) the years I've been here watching people that have worked the hardest getting it (the award). I always thought that I had to work that hard to be where I wanted to be in the sport. And the fact that I got it (the award), and the fact that I've done some things that I've wanted to do – it's fulfilling.”

Past winners of the Michael Jackson Memorial Scholarship award include last year's winner, Curtis Graham, along with Robert Bracco, Jamison Large, John Barrett, Nick Neesseen, Rusty Parks, Steven Butler, Chad Scott and Harrison Courtney.

On hand for the award ceremony were Jackson's mother, Debbie Jackson, his uncle and board member, Randy Cotton, and board member Don Leugers. In addition, WCHS wrestling co-head coaches Joe Carr Sr. and Joe Carr Jr. were on hand, too.

At last year's award ceremony, it was Carr Sr. who best explained the type of person Jackson was and the determination and drive he showed during his wrestling career.

“Whatever it takes to get better, that's what Michael Jackson did,” Carr Sr. said. “Here's a young guy whose hopes and dreams were to be a football player. But, he was small, a 134-pounder. (So), he got stronger. He could bench 250, something like that. A little bull. But, he would do those things that would make him a state (wrestling) champion. He had the goal of being undefeated and winning the state championship his senior year and he was able to do that.”

It is through his parents, Debbie and Guy Jackson, that their son's legacy lives on through this award, which is given annually to the wrestler that best exemplifies the qualities their son possessed.

This year it was Morris was chosen for the recognition. Through his hard work and dedication in all four years of his wrestling career, Morris always worked to be the best that he could be, even if it meant some aches and pains along the way, especially in his freshman and sophomore years.

“My freshman and sophomore year, I was still kind of learning things,” he said. “My junior year, things started coming together and I started to understand how things worked and how things went together. Then, my senior year, I realized what I could do, that I had the potential to do that and I worked on refining it and getting it to where it was competition ready.”

As a result, Morris had an outstanding senior season. It was a season in which he made a number of finals at different tournaments and won his first tournament title. All of that culminated for him at the Region 7 Wrestling Tournament.

At the tournament, Morris began his day with two byes, and then defeated Zack Cooper of Henry Clay in his first contested match to advance to the championship match. Then, in a very close, strategic contest, Morris came from behind in the final to score a 3-1 overtime decision over Jose Rebolledo of Franklin County to win his weight class.

“It was pretty big,” Morris said of winning the region title, and then added, in a friendly, competitive way, “I hated wrestling that kid. I wrestled him three times this year. I was just tired of wrestling him. When I won, I was like, good, never again. ... But, winning the region was pretty cool.”

In addition, Morris's victory, combined with the great results of his teammates, helped Woodford win the Region 7 tournament title.

At the state championship a week later, things started good for Morris until he injured his leg in a gusty performance that saw him continue to wrestle to try and make the third-place match. In the end, however, he finished the day with a 3-2 record and in sixth place.

Still, with the completion of the season, Morris had showed what hard work and determination could do when an athlete puts his or her mind to it. His success is something the Woodford coaching staff will use in the future to help motivate the next classes of wrestlers.

“Wesley made a great improvement from his freshman year to his senior year,” said co-head coach Joe Carr Jr. “I think he will be a guy that we'll use in the future as a person that (we'll) talk about to help motivate kids. He will be one that we would use. ... He really showed perseverance. He persevered though all the times that he was losing, and (having) losing records (as a) freshman, sophomore; and junior year he was almost .500.

So, perseverance helped him overcome. A never-give-up attitude is really what made him special.”

Next year, Morris will be attending Lindsey Wilson College, where he is looking to work towards something in pre-law, with his ultimate goal being to study law at the University of Kentucky someday.

In terms of wrestling, he’s also starting to set some goals for that as well.

“Obviously, NAIA champion,” he said with a smile. “But, we’ll see. I don’t really know what way I’m going or anything like that; redshirting, getting the feel for the college thing, because I talked to some people and it’s a big difference between college and high school. (So), I just want to figure out what weight I want to go, what I have to do to get there and get ready for next season when I start wrestling at that level.”

While he will be heading to college, Morris will bring with him the knowledge and lessons he’s learned from his coaches at WCHS, who mean the world to him.

“I’d do anything for these guys,” Morris said of Carr Sr. and Carr Jr. “They mean the world to me, and I would do (anything) to help them, because they’ve done so much for me.”

Most of all, he’ll take with him the biggest lesson of all that he learned from the Carrs; a lesson that he believes will help him through the rest of his life.

“A work ethic, and the knowledge that, if you put your mind to anything and you’re willing to work hard at it, you can do it,” he said. “It’s not just some cliché you can say. It really can happen. It’s all about what you think you can do, and if you work hard at it, you can do it.”