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Four seasons ago, Gardner-Webb finished near the bottom of the Southern Conference wrestling standings. In the year that followed, a new group of student-athletes enrolled at the University and embarked on a journey together on the mat, with the guidance of new coach Daniel Elliott.

Many of those wrestlers are now upperclassman leaders on a team that will hold a place in the GWU program's history. The memories from an outstanding 2015-16 Gardner-Webb wrestling campaign will include a share of the regular season Southern Conference championship, the first in the program's history, as well as school records for conference wins and overall dual team victories, and several NCAA national qualifiers.

"This group of leaders is my first recruiting class of four-year seniors and redshirt juniors, and it's been awesome to see the growth of what you can accomplish over a long-term process," Elliott shares. "We've taken our lumps over the past four years, but we've continued to commit to the overall journey. Seeing them come together, believe in themselves and believe in what we're doing is the most gratifying thing to see."

GWU wrestled victories away from nationally-ranked Duke and Appalachian State universities in a nine-day stretch in January and February. "Beating Duke was big, but it was maybe even bigger beating Appalachian State because they're in our conference," reflects Ryan Mosley, a redshirt junior from Stone Mountain, Ga. "We hear the name App State so much and about how their team and Chattanooga are the only contenders for a Southern Conference title. Beating them was an amazing feeling."

With all of the success, the season wasn't without its adversity. Following a pair of difficult defeats in road matches against Buffalo and Bucknell in December, coaches and wrestlers gathered for a team meeting. Boyce Cornwell, a redshirt junior from Conyers, Ga., recalls the events that followed the get-together.

"Everybody realized we had to change our efforts to bring our team together," Cornwell recounts. "We came in for a home match against Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, had a great crowd on our side, wrestled great and clicked from that point. We needed the meeting we had to refocus."

As teammates rallied around each other, wrestlers thrived on the support they felt during competition, adds Tyler Ziegler, a senior from Cincinnati, Ohio. “Having your team cheer you on is important. You feed off each other,” he explains. “Looking up and seeing the faces of your teammates helps more than actual words. It’s been amazing to earn respect from other people through what this team has accomplished.”

In addition to achievements on the mat, the GWU wrestling program has also registered outstanding classroom performances in recent years. Gardner-Webb posted top-five NCAA Division I team GPAs multiple times the past several seasons, finishing among Harvard University and other institutions known for elite academics.

“It all puts Gardner-Webb on the map and gets the University’s and program’s name out there a little more,” Elliott related. “This team has built on the foundation set before they arrived. Expectations are higher, and we will build on the success.”