



The Best Thing I Saw at State: Fourth Time's A Charm

Three Silver Medals, One Golden Finish for Jesuit's Michael Barnett

By Ethan W. Anderson

The *Best Thing I Saw at State* is a new column that brings to life the moments that make high school sports so meaningful. Through the stories, emotions, and details that often go unseen at the state championships, it captures what the box score can't.



Photos by Logan Clark, Jesuit High School

Bossier City, LA — After reaching the state championship match in each of his first three seasons, Jesuit senior Michael Barnett finally stood atop the podium when it mattered most, winning gold in the final match of his high school career at the 2026 LHSAA State Wrestling Championships at Brookshire Grocery Arena.

Moments after securing the state title, Barnett said in an interview with VSN, "Words can't even begin to describe...this still doesn't feel real!"

Barnett entered Saturday with a familiar resume: three state finals appearances and three silver medals.



As a freshman in 2023, he finished runner-up at 106 pounds after falling by pinfall in his first state championship match. One year later, he returned to the finals at the same weight class and came up just short again, losing a hard-fought 9–6 decision. As a junior, Barnett moved up to 113 pounds and once again wrestled his way back to the championship mat. Once again, the result was heartbreak. Facing a freshman opponent from the Catholic League, Barnett dropped a narrow 6–4 decision, marking his third straight second-place finish.

Three trips to the finals. Three times falling just short.



Photos by Logan Clark, Jesuit High School

“I felt like there was pressure involved with my performance at state,” Barnett said. “But I’d say towards the end of my career the focus became more about performing my best and wrestling every match the best that I can.”

For many athletes, three straight runner-up finishes might have been enough to define a career. For Barnett, they became fuel to just want to go out and perform his best. And he came back one more time.

For his senior season, Barnett moved up again, this time competing at 120 pounds. Entering the tournament as the No. 2 seed behind top-seeded Zane Blanchard of Southside, he methodically worked his way through the bracket. He opened with back-to-back 3–0 victories, added a 6–1 quarterfinal win, and edged the No. 3 seed in the semifinals by a 6–4 decision to earn yet another shot at a state title.

Waiting in the finals was Blanchard. The matchup felt inevitable.

Blanchard had dominated his side of the bracket, winning every match by decision with no margin smaller than six points. Already a defending state champion after claiming the 106-pound title in 2025, he entered Saturday evening looking every bit the favorite.



Blanchard struck first, scoring a takedown in the opening period to take a 3–0 lead. Barnett answered with an escape before the period ended, cutting the deficit to 3–1. The second period saw both wrestlers record reversals, and Blanchard carried a 5–3 advantage into the third.

Barnett escaped 41 seconds into the final period, trimming the deficit to a single point. With time winding down, the two battled for position, Blanchard protecting his lead and Barnett knowing one final score would change everything.



With just 12 seconds remaining, Barnett delivered the moment he had been chasing for four years. He was awarded a takedown, earning the three points he needed to take the lead. As time expired, he held control and watched the clock tick down, this time knowing he was about to be a state champion.

Four years. Twelve seconds. One finish.

Barnett jumped in celebration and fell to his back on the mat with his fist raised high, taking in a moment he had watched others experience on that same stage three years in a row.

This time, it was his.

“I was extremely focused up until the last six seconds of the match,” the senior said. “When it set in that I was going to win, my first feeling was relief, then joy when I stood up, and finally satisfaction when I sat back down.”

Barnett’s performance earned him Division I Most Outstanding Wrestler honors, recognizing the top performance across the division. As his name was announced, his Jesuit teammates erupted, and Barnett sprinted forward to accept the award with a smile that said everything. After finally capturing a state championship, the honor served as the perfect finishing touch.

Photos by Logan Clark, Jesuit High School

Jesuit entered the tournament as the three-time defending Division I team champion, having claimed titles in 2023, 2024, and 2025. While the Blue Jays were unable to fend off cross-town rival Holy Cross for the team championship this season, the program, now a 26-time state champion, still produced two individual champions.

Barnett was joined atop the podium by heavyweight Will Berry, who captured the 285-pound title with a dominant 19–3 victory in the finals.



"I'm going to miss all of the teammates, friends, and coaches in the wrestling community that made me the man and wrestler that I am today," said Barnett, reflecting on his high school career. "High school wrestling is different from all other levels because every state and region has a local community that gives the sport a personality at the high school level and provides support to its wrestlers."

For this Blue Jay, it isn't the wins, medals, or accolades he will miss most. It is the people and the community that high school sports create. That sense of community is the true essence of high school athletics.

For Barnett, it was never just about numbers, seeds, or streaks. It was about resilience. About refusing to let three near-misses define his career. And about finally earning the ending he had chased for four years.

Author's Note: *In my role as the Director of Communications, I have the unique privilege of attending nearly all sanctioned LHSAA State Championship events. Although the schedule is demanding, I have the privilege of seeing student-athletes from all walks of life, united by two things: their participation in Louisiana high school sports and their pursuit of a state championship. In my first year in this role, I've gained a deeper appreciation for high school athletics and for all the dedication that goes into making each season and event possible. Although my current role involves less writing than my previous positions, it has given me the opportunity to return to something I've always loved. While much of my work now focuses on press releases and public statements, I also have the chance to reconnect with my passion for feature writing, this time highlighting what I consider the purest form of sport: high school athletics. The goal is to highlight the best thing I saw at each state championship and share the unknown stories behind these events, capturing memorable moments for student-athletes, coaches, administrators, officials, and fans.*