

State Team Tournament Preview



by Josh Lowe, InterMat



Josh Lowe

EDITOR'S NOTE: Josh Lowe is in his fourth year as the national high school wrestling analyst for InterMat. He contributed to local and national wrestling publications and websites for several years is also now a member of the audio broadcast crew at the state individual tournament on OhioWrestling.net.

Lowe is a wrestling tournament coordinator for his alma mater, Beachwood High School, including a sectional tournament. Outside of wrestling, Josh is also a licensed OHSAA baseball and fast-pitch softball official and a registered slow-pitch softball umpire. He serves as volunteer assistant soccer coach at Beachwood High School and is a Financial Analyst at the Centers for Families and Children in Cleveland, Ohio.

Lowe graduated from The Ohio State University in 2004 with Bachelor's degrees in Mathematics and Economics and will be earning an MBA in Accounting from Baldwin-Wallace University in May. He resides in Mayfield Heights.

February 4, 2013

After 75 years of Ohio deciding its state championship wrestling teams through the individual bracket tournament series, this is the debut year for an OHSAA sanctioned wrestling team tournament based on dual meets. In so doing, Ohio joins 16 other states, including seven of the eight other states with a Big Ten college in them, to have a state association sanctioned dual meet championship.

The Buckeye State has been blessed with excellent wrestling talent on a year-to-year basis, as clearly indicated by Ohio natives' success at the NCAA Division I level. Fourteen national championships have been won by Ohio prep stars in the last 11 years, including seeing at least one Ohio native winning a title in nine of those seasons. Another measure of this tradition is in the participation of Harry Lester and Andy Hrovat as United States Olympians in Greco-Roman and freestyle wrestling during the last two Olympic Games.

Now with the debut edition of the team wrestling state tournament, it will be not only the elite wrestler that gets to experience the thrill of competing in a state tournament setting, but all the members of a wrestling squad. Though many of the perennial powers as defined by success in the individual state tournament (including defending state champions Lakewood St. Edward, St. Paris Graham Local, and Apple Creek Waynedale) are in the hunt for a state team title, many of the teams in contention are new to having top finishes at the state tournament level.

A team tournament is truly a unique event compared to the individual tournament. Of the 16 teams in regional finals for Division I, seven do not have a top ten finish in the individual state tournament during the last five years. Of those seven, five have not finished in the top ten in the last ten years, while two of those do not even have a top 16 finish. Among the Division II regional finalists, one half of the field does not have a top ten finish in the last five and ten years, while seven of those do not even have a single top 16 appearance in the last ten years. From the field of teams in the Division III regional finals, only four have a top ten finish at state in the last five years, while six of those remaining 12 teams have not even finished in the top 16 at state during the last ten years.

In Division III, defending state individual tournament champion Apple Creek Waynedale enters this state team tournament as the favorite. However, missing from the field is last year's state individual tournament runner-up Troy Christian. Despite returning all of their points from the 2012 state tournament, coming from four state placers, the Eagles fell short in the first round of the regional semifinal last week against Versailles. Key wrestlers for the favored Bears include returning state runners-up Zane Nelson (138) and Dakota Stanley (170).

However, a big challenge for Waynedale will come in neighboring Massillon Tuslaw in the Region 20 final Wednesday night. The Mustangs feature excellent balance in their lineup, including three returning state qualifiers. The primary challenger to the Region 20 winner will probably be the winner of the Region 17 championship dual meet between conference rivals Delta and Archbold. Delta finished third in last year's state individual tournament and returns three of their four state qualifiers/placers from last year; while Archbold features multiple wrestlers in their lineup with state tournament experience. In their league dual meet from December, Delta won 42-34.

Also, in Division III, LaGrange Keystone represents the lowest seed remaining among the 48 regional finalists across the three divisions. The Wildcats were seeded fifth in sub-region 19A, and are one of only two teams to advance with a seed below third. They travel to Kirtland, which was seeded third in sub-region 19B for the Region 19 title.

In Division II, defending state individual tournament champion St. Paris Graham Local, winner of 12 consecutive state individual tournament titles, enters the debut team state championship as the favorite. The Falcons are led by three-time state champion Bo Jordan (160) and two-time state champion Micah Jordan (132). Other contenders include Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy, which has finished inside the top four of the state standings the last six years in either Division II or Division II; and Lexington, who finished as runners-up last year, and have finished top ten at state each of the last four years.

The most interesting regional final in Division II, which yields a fourth contender, is in Region 12 between Urichville Claymont and Steubenville. The two teams wrestled in a dual meet on January 25, which was won by the Mustangs 31-25 on a pin during the last match, to avenge a 25-24 dual meet loss on criteria in the 2011-12 season. At the state individual tournament last year, it was Steubenville finishing fifth and Claymont sixth.

Also, in Division II, Mantua Crestwood is the other squad out of the 48 remaining in the regional finals round with a seed below third in their sub-regional. The fourth seeded Red Devils travel to Perry for the Region 11 title Wednesday night.

In Division I, defending state individual tournament champion Lakewood St. Edward, which has won 15 of the last 16 such titles, enters this team state championship as the favorites. The Eagles are led by three-time state champion Dean Heil (132), two-time state champion Domenic Abounader (182/195), and two-time state runner-up Edgar Bright (145). Other contenders include Massillon Perry, which has finished second or third at the state individual tournament for ten consecutive years; and Cincinnati Archbishop Moeller, which has ten consecutive top ten finishes at the state individual tournament.

The most interesting regional final in Division I, which yields a fourth contender, is in Region 2 between Brecksville-Broadview Heights and Wadsworth. Brecksville has finished in the top ten during five of the last six years, while Wadsworth was state champion in 2010 and has 12 consecutive top ten finishes, as well as 15 from the last 16 seasons.