

STATE WRESTLING PREVIEW 2013

By Brian Brakeman

One of the defining features of the 76th Ohio High School State Wrestling Championship will be the quest of a special group of exceptional competitors to reap further individual honors. This year eight wrestlers, the most in tournament history, will seek either a third or fourth state title. In the vanguard of this assault on the record book are three highly decorated seniors looking for a fourth state crown.

For example, Bo Jordan (St. Paris Graham), now at 160 pounds, has crafted three undefeated seasons—losing only once his freshman year—in compiling a 179-1 overall record and three state titles. He has not had to wrestle the full six minutes in any of his state bouts since his freshman year and has been ranked #1 in the nation at his weight class the past two years. Arguably one of the five greatest wrestlers in Ohio high school history, Jordan is an overwhelming favorite to win his fourth championship. At nearly the same level is 120-pounder Nathan Tomasello (Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy), who has also produced three undefeated seasons and a 174-5 career mark. A three-time Ironman Champion, Tomasello has consistently wrestled the best in the country at his weight class and come out on top. Recognized the past two years as the premier lightweight in the nation, he will join Jordan at Ohio State next year. Dean Heil (Lakewood St. Edward) has moved up four weight classes to 132-pounds since his freshman year, but it has not prevented him from winning three state titles to date. He would become the fourth wrestler from his school (as would Jordan) to win four state titles, and like the other two is a heavy favorite to do so. A fearsome and tenacious competitor, Heil is currently at 122-7 and headed for Oklahoma State. He has had some minor injuries this year, but he has always been at his best at tournament time, and has had all first-period falls (none longer than 71 seconds) at the sectional and district competitions.

Two of the wrestlers competing for a third state title are senior teammates at Solon High School. Anthony Collica, now at 152 pounds, and Brandon Thompson, at 120 pounds, will attempt to join Kevin Hardy as three-time champions from their high school. Collica, most recently ranked #2 in the country, has generated a 168-15 record, but is likely to face a state final rematch with either the very tough Markus Scheidel (Lakewood St. Edward) or Tony Dailey (Massillon Perry) in what would be one of the premier match-ups on Saturday night. He will join Heil at Oklahoma State next year. The often under-appreciated and under-publicized Thompson has built a 169-13 record with a solid offense and a fabulous defense – in his eight state bouts to date he has given up a total of just six points. He faces, perhaps, the most difficult road to a state title with defending state champion David Bavery (Massillon Perry), who he defeated for his first state championship, and two-time placer and undefeated Artem Timchenko (Olentangy Orange) as major obstacles. Also in line for a third state crown is senior 182-pounder Domenic Abounader (Lakewood St. Edward), bringing to Columbus a perfect 2013 record after having lost but twice the previous two years. A Michigan recruit, Abounader has been dominant this year and will be a heavy favorite to repeat as champion at this weight class—although pin-happy Gunner Lay (Loveland) can never be overlooked. In one of those happy coincidences, Abounader's state title win over state champion Michael Baker last year was his 99th career victory and produced Lakewood St. Edward's 99th individual state champion. His lifetime record is now 131-8.

Two sparkling juniors, both from the Southwest District, will also be seeking a third state title. A Division III stalwart, Jacob Danishek (Dayton Christian), is now at 145-pounds and has already posted a 139-5 lifetime mark in just three years of competition. Runner-up at the prestigious Ironman Tournament, Danishek has already proven to be one of the top juniors in the country at his weight class. Micah Jordan (St. Paris Graham), now at 132 pounds, has made a quantum jump this year including two hard-fought wins over Dean Heil. Sure to be heavily recruited next year, he already has a 135-9 lifetime record, losing only once this year and has unlimited potential. Should he and his brother Bo win, it would give the Jordan clan (beginning with Congressman Jim) a total of 21 state titles.

Division I

One of the most memorable state tournaments occurred in 2010 featuring the epic battle between Wadsworth and Lakewood St. Edward for the Division I team title. There, the string of 13 consecutive team titles by Lakewood St. Edward was snapped by a talented and courageous Wadsworth squad. This year may again see more of that action as state dual meet champion Lakewood St. Edward will once again face off with upset-minded Massillon Perry. The former qualified 11 wrestlers this year, including five district champs. They have been led all year by multi-state champions Dean Heil (132) and Domenic Abounader (182), returning state runners-up Edgar Bright(145) and Markus Scheidel (152) and state placer Colin Heffernan (138). While this year's edition does not feature the depth of last year's team, it still has plenty of firepower in search of a third-consecutive team title and their 28th overall. A key element is Bright, who has twice lost overtime state final bouts, and while the favorite this year, must contend with the tough Jake Ryan (Olentangy Liberty) in a likely semi-final matchup. Massillon Perry qualified nine out of the Mentor District including state champions David Bavery (120) and Jo Jo Tayse (195). Also in the mix is "move-in" New York state runner-up Jose Rodriguez (106), state placer Ivan Bast (145) and Tony Dailey (152). Last year Massillon Perry became the first squad in tournament history (in any classification) to have four state champions and not win the team title. They have crowned 22 individual champs (all since 1989) and have produced the most champions for a school that has yet to win a team title. Other powerful teams include Cincinnati Archbishop Moeller (early favorites with Massillon Perry for 2014?) with nine qualifiers and a bevy of excellent participants at the upper weight classes—including state placers Dakota Sizemore (160), Chalmer Frueauf (220) and Jerry Thornberry (195). Brecksville also qualified nine wrestlers, including the former state runners-up Assad brothers at the first two weight classes and a strong group of potential placers throughout the brackets. Putting this tournament in historical context, the second champion crowned at 160-pounds this year will become the 2,000th in Ohio history dating back to the first tournament in 1938.

As is always the case, there are any number of weight classes that promise late round excitement. At 138 pounds, for example, the final outcome may have a major impact on the team race. In a crowded field, state placers Noah Forrider (Marysville) and Colin Heffernan (Lakewood St. Edward) were early favorites, but Casey Sparkman (Massillon Perry) has recently caught fire, including an upset of Heffernan. In an unlikely turn of events, they are all in the same half-bracket, while two-time placer Nick Montgomery (Madison), who missed virtually the entire year with an injury, is in the other half. Madison has never crowned an individual champion despite having seven finalists—the most in Division I without a titlist. At 113 pounds, three-time place winner Aaron Assad (Brecksville) has gone (3-2-3), but must again face long-time rival Armando Torres (Elyria), who he has already defeated four times this year— by a combined total of five points. Waiting in the wings is last year's third-place winner Dakota Riley (Mt.Vernon), who could meet Torres in the semi-finals. Finally, at 195 pounds, defending state champion Jo Jo Tayse has state place winner Adam Kluk (Medina Highland), a ferocious pinner, and undefeated Kyle Conel (Ashtabula Lakeside) as major obstacles to a second title. There are seven undefeated wrestlers in Division I, with three of them in the 285-pound class. Included in this very unusual bracket are defending state runner-up Travis Gusan (Hilliard Davidson), Truman Gutapfel (Harrison) and Marquise Moore (Toledo Whitmer).

Division II

As has been the case for over a decade, there is very little suspense with regard to the Division II team title. Powerful St. Paris Graham has already won the state dual meet championship and features a very young, but still potent squad. They will be competing for their 13th consecutive team title, which would tie the all-classification record currently held by Lakewood St. Edward (1997-2009), and have scored over 180 points for six consecutive years, extending their own record. Leading the way are the incomparable Jordan brothers with five state titles already in hand and state placers Eli Stickney (106), the Ironman Champion, and Eli Seipel (113). Two exceptional freshmen—seven-time grade school and junior high state champion Alex Marinelli (152) and junior high state titlist Brent Moore (120) qualified as district champions—along with a pair of other contenders. Starting only two seniors, they are still a young team that may not reach the 180 point level this year.

There are a number of outstanding teams in Division II, but none appear to have the up-top firepower to deny St. Paris Graham their 15th overall team title. Certainly, state dual meet runner-up Uhrichsville Claymont has exceptional talent with two-time state runner-up Cody Burcher (126), Tyler Warner (106) and Dustin Warner (113) all with finalist possibilities, and backed by three other qualifiers. Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy has developed another exceptional team with significant depth as they also qualified eight. They are led, of course, by the transcendent Nathan Tomasello (120), but also feature state placers Ryan Bennett (113), Josh Decatur (126), and Jeff Hojnacki (145). Add in former state alternates Andy Dobben (132), Tyler Maclellan (170), and Nick Havener (195) and there is enough depth for the runner-up trophy. Also strong contenders are always tough Clyde High School with six qualifiers, Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary, also sending six to Columbus, and Perry.

There are seven state champions in the Division II field scattered rather randomly throughout the weight classes. One of the most dominating returnees from last year's state meet is the powerful Josh Lehner (Lexington). He won all four of his state bouts by technical fall—a feat most recently accomplished by four-time champion David Taylor (St. Paris Graham). He returns at 195-pounds this year facing a field replete with past state placers and qualifiers anxious to provide a far sterner challenge this year. The 126-pound weight class has to be one of the most intriguing in Division II. Included in this bracket are a former state champion Michael Rix (Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary), two outstanding state runners-up, Anthony Tutolo (Mentor Lake Catholic) and Cody Burcher (Uhrichsville Claymont), and several other state placers. Two of this group exited the Alliance District evening out the bracket and guaranteeing superior match-ups from the very first round. Two other returning state champions are Chris Moore (Clyde) defending his 170-pound crown and Cameron Kelly (Bellbrook) moving up to 113-pounds. Both have produced excellent seasons, but have suffered at least one late season upset. Moore has had some late season injury issues, while Kelly was just one of two freshman champions in all classifications last year and the only one to return to Columbus. A key match-up could also be forthcoming at 285-pounds featuring Connor Sharp (Beloit West Branch) and Billy Miller (Perry) who were third and fourth last year, and head a strong field in a weight class that generates more upsets than any other. Should this duo meet it will be for the fourth time in the last two years with Miller holding a 2-1 edge. Should Miller win, it would Perry's first-ever individual title after seven losing finalists and 26 state placements.

Division III

The competition for the team trophy in Division III should be a fascinating three-way struggle with team depth matched up against individual brilliance. Troy Christian, three-time champs from 2007 through 2009, wrestled a brilliant district and qualified a surprising six wrestlers, including four who have finalist potential. State champs Jordan Marshall (152) and B. J. Toal (182) are joined by state runner-up Jarred Ganger (113) and state placer Garrett Hancock (120) to form a formidable tournament team. Last year this quartet scored 81.5 points, certainly the minimum target for any aspiring team titlist, and they could well better that mark this year. Defending state champion Apple Creek Waynedale qualified four returning state placers (including a pair of runners-up) and a brilliant freshman district champion, but lost a state placer at the tough Garfield Hts. District. In addition, state runner-up Brenden Stanley (170) may have been injured in his district semi-final win by disqualification. Still they return 68 points and with three potential finalists and the ability to score bonus points—they did it 15 times in last year's state meet—possess substantial upside. State dual meet champion Delta qualified five out of the difficult Bowling Green District and cannot be overlooked. Led by state runner-up Tyler Fahrer (145) and state placers Kyle Keller (120) and Jared Mattin (160), they return 48 team points with additional possibilities well in hand. That should come from sensational freshman and junior high state champion Jake Spiess (106) and Dustin Marteney (126), and this could be a team poised to win if the top duo falters even slightly. A dark-horse contender could well be Dayton Christian with five qualifiers including the solid trio of two-time champ Jacob Danishek (145), two-time placer Christian Clary (113), and exciting freshman Hunter Bray (106). Two schools with rapidly emerging programs placed the most wrestlers in the Division III brackets. Amanda-Clearcreek qualified eight wrestlers (including six underclassmen), but drew difficult first-round pairings for its six fourth-place finishers. Upper Sandusky qualified six wrestlers out of Bowling Green with five underclassmen, but none with previous state experience.

In a night of milestones, the 106-pound champion will become the 500th champion crowned in Division III since its inception in 1976. Last year saw seniors dominating many weight classes, and there are only five returning champions competing. At 120-pounds junior Sammy Gross (Beachwood) will look to capture a second state title, but faces a representative field that features state placer Garrett Hancock (Troy Christian), Dion Perez (Tuslaw), and Chandler Minnard (Bloom Carroll). Defending champions and teammates Jordan Marshall (Troy Christian) and B. J. Toal (Troy Christian) both face solid opposition with the former likely to face the redoubtable Alex Quinn (Shadyside) in the final and the latter wrestling in the only weight class with four top three placers. On the opposite side of Toal's bracket are state runner-up Kevin Stock (Garrettsville Garfield), state third-placer Sam Groff (Magnolia Sandy Valley), both whom he defeated by a 3-2 score in the final two rounds of last year's state tournament, and state runner-up at 170-pounds Armani Robinson (Jamestown Greeneview). Stock missed the entire season recovering from a personal family tragedy, but returned for sectional action and sparkled at the Garfield Hts. District. One of the most interesting competitions will be at 170-pounds. There, defending state champion Zach Mays (Nelsonville York) will have to defeat both state runner-up Brenden Stanley (Apple Creek Waynedale) and powerful third-place finisher Travis Linton (Rootstown), who fell to him in last year's semi-finals, 4-3. State runner-up Aaron Yonker (Garrettsville Garfield) was also scheduled to compete at this weight class, but missed virtually the entire season with injuries. One competitor to watch is the fine 195-pound wrestler from North Baltimore, Dalton Ishmael. A third-place finisher last year, Ishmael earlier this year broke the state record for falls in a career—and continues to extend his own mark that now stands at 152. As I said, watch for him, but do it quickly, as the vast majority of his pins occur within the first 90 seconds.