

# **2009 HIGH SCHOOL WRESTLING FORECAST**

**(38<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL EDITION)**

Written By:  
Brian F. Brakeman

January 27, 2009

## PREFACE

The production of this report from my handwritten copy is no easy job. I forget words, use weird punctuation, and my handwriting gets worse with each successive weight class. The typists who transform such material into what you are reading today deserve tremendous accolades. Chief among them is my long-suffering cousin, Nancy Dimitris, who oversees the work and her colleagues Vickie Billow and Gary Kanaga. Next time you see them thank them and re-express my gratitude for their work.

The first of these reports was written in 1972 in what was a much different world than today. Newspaper coverage in most areas of the state was spotty and inconsistent at best, and non-existent in many places. There was no Internet (which I believe has impacted wrestling, perhaps, more than any other sport) and teams generally wrestled within a few miles of their school. At that time I was in a unique position – working for a large company that had many newspaper subscriptions, working near the wonderful Cleveland Public Library that had multiple data sources, and developing many statewide contacts via the television shows. All this provided me with an information base that was difficult to duplicate, and provided resources for printing and distributing paper copies.

Today it has all changed. Now there is a constant flow of information. I am awash in data, as teams compete not only in statewide events, but in tournaments that bring together teams from many different areas of the country. I am amazed at the efforts made by many to disseminate data and the high quality of analysis at some sites. I admire the work done by:

**\*John Jaksetic and his website [www.Jakeswrestling.com](http://www.Jakeswrestling.com)--For a trifling number of dollars you get some unmatched look at the data**

**\*<http://ohiowrestlingsite.com> is a high quality site whose work I admire**

**\*[www.ohiowrestling.net](http://www.ohiowrestling.net) is another fine site that provides statewide information**

**\*<http://northwest-district-wrestling.blogspot.com> provides a totally comprehensive picture of Northwestern Wrestling—amazing amount of work provided by sender**

**\*[WWW.ovaecwrestling.com](http://WWW.ovaecwrestling.com) has fine coverage of the OVAC teams**

**and many others that are very worthwhile.**

Finally, over the years I kept copies, at first on film and then later on ¾" tape, of virtually all of the telecasts in which I took part. I have donated that entire collection to Cable Nine Television, who will serve as a non-profit repository of that material. They are working to provide an index of what is available, and, perhaps, how best it can be obtained. I am grateful for their help in this endeavor since much of the material is irreplaceable and my attic was a less than ideal storage place. The initial cost of this material was certainly more than a million dollars in current dollars, and its preservation seems important to me.

## Introduction

The object of these annual reports encompasses two basic goals. First is to acquaint everyone with the basic character of each weight class and identify the participants who are likely to play a major role in its resolution. In addition, each individual district is examined as to whom its representatives might be. Second is to stimulate interest in the whole State tournament process throughout Ohio. Naturally, accuracy is also of primary concern, so care is taken to develop the most comprehensive list possible of outstanding wrestlers, though of necessity, the evaluation of their final place is, in part, subjective. This report was written during a ten-day period ending January 25, based on the information available at that time. Because this material was written by that time (and in some cases somewhat earlier) and in the hands of the typists after that I have not included any information that may become available after that time. It's kind of a snapshot in time, with a picture that will surely change in many ways by tournament time. Certainly many of those listed at weight classes where they are currently ranked will move up or down for competitive reasons facilitated by the new rules which make it so much easier to do so. In fact, some of those moves may well be precipitated by information contained within this document.

There are several ways you can help make this report more accurate. First by sending me bracket sheets for tournaments you enter either by fax or mail – I'm especially interested in sectional and district bracket sheets this year and **any** tournaments for next year. Also, phone calls, or better yet, e-mail messages dealing with results, weight class selection, or whatever, are gratefully received. I especially appreciate coaches who provide an honest overview of their squad and superior wrestlers they've seen in competition. Already I get messages and information from too many people to name individually, but I appreciate it all.

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This report is also available on the Internet on Gary Baumgartner's website, The Ohio Wrestler, as well as Brecksville High School's website:

<http://www.baumspage.com>

<http://www.brecksvillevrestling.com>

<http://www.ohiowrestler.com>

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**And remember, my usual fee is a wrestling T-shirt – XL.  
(and that includes all you Internet readers)**

**BRAKEMAN REPORT AUDIT**

(How first choices fared)

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>
Won Title	27	27
Finished Second	9	7
Third	2	5
Fourth	3	1
Lower than Fourth	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	42	42

**BRAKEMAN REPORT AUDIT**

(Won State Title)

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>
Ranked First	27	27
Ranked Second	8	7
Ranked Third	4	2
Ranked Fourth	1	2
Ranked Lower Than 4 <sup>th</sup>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u> *
Total	42	42

\*Witt ranked 5<sup>th</sup>, Alexander 6<sup>th</sup>, Riedy 6<sup>th</sup>, and Pajestra 13<sup>th</sup>

**2008 PLACEMENT RESULTS**

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	Total	% Placing	Pts.*
Perry	4	6	4	6	6	4	3	3	36	64.3%	173
Mentor/Harding	5	5	5	3	2	4	3	4	31	55.4%	150
Darby	2	2	3	3	3	5	4	5	27	48.2%	103
Fairfield	3	1	2	2	3	1	4	2	18	32.1%	78
Firestone	3	3	5	5	6	6	5	2	35	62.5%	154
Goshen	4	4	5	3	4	3	3	3	29	51.8%	139
Fostoria	6	4	2	5	1	3	4	4	29	51.8%	138
Steubenville	1	3	2	1	3	2	2	5	19	33.9%	73
Fairmont	5	4	2	2	3	10	3	5	34	60.7%	143
Heath	2	5	4	4	7	0	6	2	30	53.6%	137
Maple Hts.	3	2	6	3	1	2	4	7	28	50.0%	114
Owens	4	3	2	5	3	2	1	0	20	35.7%	110

\*Calculated as 8 points for 1<sup>st</sup>, 7 points for 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6 points for 3<sup>rd</sup>, and so on.

**CHAMPIONSHIP ROUNDS STATE VICTORIES % ANALYSIS**

<u>2007</u>			<u>2008</u>		
1	Perry	61.5%	1	Mentor/Harding	59.3%
2	Maple Hts.	54.1%	2	Perry	57.7%
3	Firestone	53.2%	3	Ontario/Fostoria	55.1%
4	Ontario/Fostoria	52.8%	4	Firestone	53.9%
5	Fairmont	50.0%	5	Fairmont	52.9%
6	Heath	49.1%	6	Heath	52.7%
7	Goshen	47.5%	7	Goshen	50.0%
8	Fairfield	46.5%	8	Owens	46.9%
9	Owens	46.3%	9	Maple Hts.	46.9%
10	Steubenville	45.9%	10	Steubenville	40.0%
11	Mentor/Harding	45.8%	11	Darby	39.8%
12	Darby	43.9%	12	Fairfield	38.4%

**2008 STATE VICTORIES % BY DISTRICT ANALYSIS**

(Only Inter-District Bouts)

	<u>Perry</u>	<u>Marion Harding</u>	<u>Darby</u>	<u>Fairfield</u>
Championship Rounds	57.7%	59.3%	39.8%	38.4%
Consolation Rounds	<u>56.0%</u>	<u>45.0%</u>	<u>52.0%</u>	<u>46.2%</u>
Total	56.9%	53.4%	46.3%	42.4%

  

	<u>Firestone</u>	<u>Fostoria</u>	<u>Steubenville</u>	<u>Goshen</u>
Championship Rounds	53.9%	55.1%	40.0%	50.0%
Consolation Rounds	<u>56.2%</u>	<u>45.9%</u>	<u>42.7%</u>	<u>55.1%</u>
Total	55.0%	50.8%	41.3%	52.4%

  

	<u>Maple Hts.</u>	<u>Owens</u>	<u>Heath</u>	<u>Fairmont</u>
Championship Rounds	46.9%	46.9%	52.7%	52.9%
Consolation Rounds	<u>52.2%</u>	<u>41.6%</u>	<u>55.8%</u>	<u>49.5%</u>
Total	49.5%	44.6%	54.0%	51.3%

**STATE TOURNAMENT QUANTITY OF FALLS AND % OF TOTAL MATCHES**

	<u>Division I</u>			<u>Division II</u>			<u>Division III</u>		
	<u>Champ</u>	<u>Consy</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Champ</u>	<u>Consy</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Champ</u>	<u>Consy</u>	<u>%</u>
Falls in 2007	43	31	17.6%	39	46	20.2%	53	31	20.0%
Falls in 2008	40	37	18.3%	53	44	23.1%	58	41	23.6%

**2008 STATE CHAMPIONSHIP ROUNDS ANALYSIS**

	First Round			2nd/3rd/4th Round			Overall		
	W-L Record	%	Rank	W-L Record	%	Rank	W-L Record	%	Rank
Marion Harding	38-18	67.9%	1	29-28	50.9%	6	67-46	59.3	1
Massillon Perry	33-23	58.9%	4	31-24	56.4%	5	64-47	57.7	2
Fostoria	28-28	50.0%	5	26-16	61.9%	1	54-44	55.1	3
firestone	35-21	62.5%	2	20-26	43.5%	8	55-47	53.9	4
Fairmont	28-28	50.0%	5	26-20	56.5%	4	54-48	52.9	5
Heath	35-21	62.5%	2	24-32	42.9%	9	59-53	52.7	6
Goshen	25-31	44.6%	8	24-18	57.1%	3	49-49	50.0	7
Owens	21-35	37.5%	11	25-17	59.5%	2	46-52	46.9	8
Maple Hts.	28-28	50.0%	5	17-23	42.5%	10	45-51	46.9	9
Steubenville	24-32	42.9%	9	12-22c	35.3%	12	36-54	40.0	10
Darby	23-33	41.1%	10	12-20c	37.5%	11	35-53	39.8	11
Fairfield	18-38	32.1%	12	15-15	50.0%	7	33-53	38.4	12

**TOTAL STATE VICTORIES % BY DISTRICT ANALYSIS**

(Championship and Consolation Rounds)

<u>2007</u>			<u>2008</u>		
1	Perry	59.0%	1	Perry	56.9%
2	Firestone	55.8%	2	Firestone	55.0%
3	Maple Hts.	51.3%	3	Heath	54.0%
4	Mentor/Harding	51.2%	4	Mentor/Harding	53.4%
5	Heath	50.5%	5	Goshen	52.4%
6	Ontario/Fostoria	50.0%	6	Fairmont	51.3%
7	Fairmont	49.2%	7	Ontario/Fostoria	50.8%
8	Owens	48.9%	8	Maple Hts.	49.5%
9	Goshen	47.5%	9	Darby	46.3%
10	Steubenville	46.1%	10	Owens	44.6%
11	Fairfield	45.1%	11	Fairfield	42.4%
12	Darby	44.0%	12	Steubenville	41.3%

### Robert's Rules For Reading Wrestling Reports

Robert "Bob" Berg is a Cleveland native who moved to Atlanta, Georgia and, once there, began to write a wrestling preview organized like this one. It was bright and funny and about as accurate as these things can ever be. He decided this year to leave the forecasting business, but his legacy, at least a small portion of it, bears on this document as well. I am formally and alliteratively naming them Robert's Rules for Reading Wrestling Reports and am reproducing them below.

One word about the "rankings," as they are often times misunderstood. If it turns out that our #17 wrestler beat our #8 wrestler during the year, there may be several explanations as to why we have the winner at #17 and the loser at #8:

- a) We may not have that particular result in our database. Our bad, but even in this era of incredible technology and information flow, we just don't have all the results, so we operate with something less than full information. As Hyman Roth said in *Godfather II*, "this is the business we've chosen."
- b) We may have known the result, but discounted it (a very important technique in the prognosticator's bag of tricks – if a result appears to be aberrant or we don't like it, we just ignore it!) for any number of reasons, including injuries, weight issues, conditioning issues (e.g., for those wrestlers coming out after football season), SAT forfeits, etc.
- c) We may have known the result, but trumped it based on each wrestler's full body of work, rather than just that one result. As we've all come to learn, the transitive property of inequalities (if  $A > B$ , and if  $B > C$ , then  $A > C$ ) may work in algebra, but "if A beats B, and B beats C, then C will beat A" is a formula for disaster in the wrestling prognostication business.
- d) Similarly, we may know the results but, especially if it was prior to the first of the year, we may believe that the loser of that particular bout has improved substantially and would win the rematch.
- e) Or, finally (and, in all probability, most likely), we may just have gotten it wrong. To paraphrase Forest Gump, "stuff happens." That's ok, we will live with our mistakes, hope they are infrequent and, most importantly, continue to understand that, ultimately, the outcomes of wrestling contests are determined on the mats, not on the pages of this report.

## Division I

### 103 #

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: KORY MINES (MAPLE HTS.)**

#### Top Contenders

2	Ralston (Lorain Southview)	15	Labry (Twinsburg)
3	DiCamillo (St. Ignatius)	16	Marsico (Pickerington North)
4	Gray (Wadsworth)	17	Griffith (Medina)
5	Ague (Fitch)	18	Victor (Mentor)
6	Hauser (Brush)	19	Windsor (Wayne)
7	Terry (Butler)	20	Lyon (Massillon Perry)
8	Selmon (Princeton)	21	Moore/Barber (St. Edward)
9	Zingale (Mayfield)	22	Campbell (Harrison)
10	Garcia (Clay)	23	Strope (Lancaster)
11	Baran (Brecksville)	24	Fox (Western Brown)
12	Dillon (Boardman)	25	Hauber (Central Crossing)
13	Murdock (Coffman)	26	Fiorucci (Olentangy)
14	Clolinger (Amelia)		

I'm getting a little worried about the situation at 103#. Mines, as of this writing, still hasn't made 103# and it looks like it is a much tougher cut than anticipated. Still, I expect him to compete at this weight class and, once there, he remains the favorite. A two-time state placer (6<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>) he has the combination of strength, speed, and experience that most younger 103-pounders will find difficult to overcome. Last year he was 43-2 losing to Sako in the finals by a deceptively large 9-1 score. That was a bout that hinged on some mat management decisions that failed to take into account Sako's strengths. Mines has, in the past, already defeated many of the best returning 103's (Ralston, Gray, Ague, etc.), but they were often relatively close battles. With this weight issue Mines may be vulnerable early in tournaments so he'll need to be alert to this possibility. He and Ralston should be in different half-brackets at Columbus which could work to Mines' advantage. This year at 112# Mines has lost twice - - outmuscled by Robinson in a dual and to Westfall at Kenston. The Northeast District has won six consecutive titles at this weight class. Mines should make it seven.

Ralston heads what amounts to a two-man district at Mentor and should be Mines' fiercest challenger for the title. He was a state semi-finalist last year, but then dropped a 6-4 decision to Mines. He quickly snapped back with shutout wins over Boehm and Manley to clinch 3<sup>rd</sup> place. He has been at 103# all year and won at Riverside, Southview, and Fairfield –generally, winning handily though Dronzek and Graham kept it close. With district titles he and Mines will be seeded apart setting up a possible Saturday night confrontation. The second top contender here is the freshman DiCamillo. A junior high state champion he has been a force from the start. He placed at the Ironman and then won titles at Brecksville and the CIT. He is a small 103-pounder—a problem likely to become exacerbated by the weight allowances – but has tremendous technique. His lengthy youth experience has provided excellent mat management skills making him tough to defeat. I think the powerful Garcia will have the best shot at the third qualifying berth, but that 6<sup>th</sup> place finish at the

GMVWA is worrisome. However, he did win two district bouts at this weight class last year. The last qualifier could come from almost any direction. I'm looking at Victor as a strong possibility along with the fast improving Moore or Barber from St. Edward.

Unlike Ralston, Mines exits a very deep and strong district at this weight class. I count ten quality candidates meaning there will be sharp district struggles from the very first round. Gray has been outstanding. He was 6<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman and 3<sup>rd</sup> at Brecksville and was very good at the Ohio Duals. He was one bout from States last year. Ague was a state qualifier last year, but is still getting use to the weight cut. He has been better on second days of tourneys, but he'll have to be sharp from the "get-go" to qualify. He was 7<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun as he rounds into form. State alternate Zingale was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Brecksville, but only 5<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun (despite beating Ague). Zingale, a senior, is not as athletic as some of the other top boys are, but he knows how to win, and given a lead he nurses it beautifully. Hauser is out of the limelight, but he is very, very good and should capture a state berth. A "mystery man" to me is state junior high champ Dillon. I have not seen him and there are wildly divergent views as to his ability. I need help here since he may be way better than I have ranked him. That leaves Baran and Labry - - the finalists at the Dies - - probably looking forward to next year, though they would have solid chances for Columbus if they were at the Mentor District. I like Griffith, but he and Lyon will have to pull off two big upsets to qualify. This is a brutal district and the four survivors will be battle-hardened for States.

In stark contrast there is very little depth at Darby. Murdock would seem to be the best following his 8<sup>th</sup> place result at Medina, but that was not an overly strong weight class. The younger Marsico has had some successes while Hauber won at Franklin Hts. This district may well be beefed up at this weight class by the addition of southwestern boys like Terry or Windsor, but that remains in the future. Perhaps, Tiffin champ Strobe or Fiorucci will make a difference.

It will not be an overpowering field at Fairfield, but there are some solid contenders. State qualifier Terry is back at this weight after finishing 4<sup>th</sup> at Fairfield last year. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the GMVWA losing only to Brascetta and defeating Selmon, 8-5. Tack in the win at Fairmont and he probably is the best here. Selmon, the SWOCA winner, is a potential district finalist with strong pinning ability. He has made rapid progress (e.g. losing by fall to Terry last year compared to 8-5 this year). Fox, a 6-5 loser to Terry, Clolinger and Campbell are other real possibilities. Campbell was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Mayfield Big 8 and the SWOCA, but was swamped by Clolinger. Windsor, 4<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA and 1<sup>st</sup> at Xenia could also be a threat. With good state draws we could see a couple of low placers out of this group.

**112 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: GUS SAKO (ST. EDWARD)**

Top Contenders

2	Robinson (St. Ignatius)	14	Birr (Mayfield)
3	Squire (Wadsworth)	15	Higgins (Central Crossing)
4	Inchaurregui (Lorain Southview)	16	Adelman (Hoover)
5	Manley (Holland Springfield)	17	Wright (Lima Senior)
6	Boehm (Watkins Memorial)	18	Caston (Sandusky)
7	Polley (Maple Hts.)	19	Keeling (St. Xavier)
8	DiSabato (Davidson)	20	Frehmeyer (Parma)
9	MacVeigh (Moeller)	21	Turek (Madison)
10	Martin (Toledo St. Francis)	22	Nein (Reynoldsburg)
11	Young (Mentor)	23	Schultz (Elder)
12	Regan (Miamisburg)	24	Vinas (Twinsburg)
13	Artrip (Mason)	25	Sarnecki (Loveland)
		26	Boyd (Marion Franklin)

I anticipate a fierce four-way battle for top honors at this weight class - - a battle that will be exacerbated by the geography of the participants. Let's first take a look at this top quartet and then sketch out some of the strategic implications.

Sako, now a junior, was behind Jamie Clark his freshman year (although he probably had state placement potential) and then won it all last year at 103#. He did so easily ripping through districts and states with 5 falls or tech falls, two majors, and one convincing four point victory. It was a very impressive and dominating performance. It has not been nearly so easy this year at 112#. One often finds that the nine pound jump to bigger and, often older, boys a significant hurdle. He has lost twice to Robinson, by one and two point decisions, and once to Squire, again by one point. He was 7<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman and 1<sup>st</sup> at Medina at 119#, a relatively pedestrian weight class. Still, this is a smart, canny wrestler who knows how to win when it counts. He'll be making the adjustments needed to win and it's a question of their success that will determine the outcome. If so, it will not nearly be as easy as last year.

Robinson, also a junior, has made a marvelous comeback after essentially a year wasted by injury and illness. As a ninth-grader he was a brilliant 3<sup>rd</sup> at 103# - - winning five bouts by big scores and losing only that highly controversial bout to Jamie Clark in the quarter-finals by one point. Then last year, as mentioned, he wrestled infrequently, struggled at 112#, and moved to 119# where he showed flashes of brilliance before losing his first two bouts at States. This year he has been exceptional. He beat Sako and Squire at the Ironman while finishing 4<sup>th</sup>, defeated Sako and Mines in duals, and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Brecksville - - losing an overtime tiebreaker to state champ Stieber in the semi-finals and defeating state champion Mitch for 3<sup>rd</sup>. He looks so strong and confident that he will be difficult to beat.

Squire is another one of those terrific youth wrestlers that Wadsworth so regularly showcases. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the last two Junior High States, both times competing in sensational weight classes - - so everyone knew how good he was going to be. He was 6<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman, losing three excruciatingly close bouts including one to Robinson, and defeating Mitch, and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Brecksville again beating Mitch, but losing to Stieber. His victory over Sako won the state dual meet tournament, and he seems to have the steepest learning curve of this quartet. He'll win state titles.

Inchaurregui is the least well known of this group. A junior high place winner two years ago he stepped right into Southview's difficult schedule with 40 + wins and a 7<sup>th</sup> place state finish at 112#. He has lost only once this year and has dominated a wide selection of competitors. One significant issue is that he has not wrestled any of the other top contenders. That could prove to be a real negative in the battles to come.

The brackets should be interesting. Sako and Inchaurregui exit the same sectional and then meet up with Robinson at the Mentor in what will be a brutally tough district (especially if state placer Manley remains at this weight class). Should they finish in the top three spots then the champion will have a 67% chance of being away from the other two and Squire at the state meet. That would be a significant advantage. Still, I see Sako better than Inchaurregui and beating Squire the next time they meet (no more big moves). Robinson has beaten him. That is true, but like Lenhard years ago against Pflug, I think he will get him when it counts.

We've already discussed Sako, Robinson, and Inchaurregui at Mentor, but there is even more talent there. Manley, 4<sup>th</sup> last year at 103#, will also head in that direction and should get that fourth qualifying berth. Sako beat him 17-2 at last year's district so there is a gap between them. Manley was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Medina (Sako at 119#) losing only to Boehm. Also back are state qualifier Frehmeyer and state alternate Caston. I don't see either of them challenging the top trio, but they could well unseat Manley. State qualifier Wright is something of an enigma - - he can be brilliant and then not nearly as good the next time. Last year he won four consolation bouts, including the critical one over Caston, to qualify. He is a long-shot to do it again this year. I also like the short, powerful Young who has been a consistent placer this year including wins at Solon and North Coast. He is just at the wrong weight class this year. Long term watch for Martin, a junior high state runner-up last year who finished second to Isaac Jordon and ahead of Squire. He will likely be a huge factor next year.

There is not nearly this depth of talent at Perry. Squire leads the way with state qualifier Polley probably next best. Polley looked huge as a 119-pounder at Hudson so he will be a mammoth 112-pounder. He had a difficult state meet last year losing to the excellent Herrington in that ultimate overtime and then after a victory losing to McNulty. He has been at 119# all year finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at Hudson (to Mitch) and 3<sup>rd</sup> at Kenston. Birr, 8<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville, has suddenly gotten hot finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Big 8 and Top Gun. Still, I remember Young beating him decisively at Brecksville. Adelman won at North Canton but lost to Birr at the Top Gun. That gives us Turek and Vinas as other possibilities.

There are three returning state qualifiers at Darby all of whom have low placement potential. Boehm is still on top after winning last year's district at 103# and finishing 6<sup>th</sup> in Columbus. He defeated Manley, 3-2, to win at Medina and the only loss I've seen was to his old workout partner, Spencer Pierce. He'll have to hustle to place higher than last year. I rate DiSabato about even with Boehm (he lost to him 3-2 at last year's district). He failed to place at Brecksville defeating Vinas but losing to

Mitch and Birr. Higgins was 7<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville losing to Robinson and Young but beating Birr. The fourth berth will be a battle with Nein, last year's state alternate, the favorite with Boyd and Hunter (Pickerington Central) in pursuit.

There are no returning placers at Fairfield, but there are three wrestlers with past state experience. Regan, Artrip and Keeling all went 1-2 in Columbus after strong district performances at both Fairfield (the latter two at 103#) and Darby (Regan at 112#). While this trio has a leg up on a return trip to States I think state alternate MacVeigh may have moved ahead of them. He was 1<sup>st</sup> at the SWOCA defeating both Artrip and Keeling, and finished 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT. Regan was 3<sup>rd</sup> at GMVWA (losing to Jordan) and 2<sup>nd</sup> at North Canton (to Adelman). Two other possibilities here are Schultz' and Sarnecki who met for 5<sup>th</sup> place at last year's district. Schultz won three bouts at Brecksville and placed at the SWOCA and is probably moving ahead of Sarnecki.

### 119 #

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: JAMIE CLARK (ST. EDWARD)**

#### Top Contenders

2	McNulty (Mayfield)	14	McSorley (Edgewood)
3	Corrill (Moeller)	15	Urias (Clay)
4	Bolger (Strongsville)	16	Long (St. Ignatius)
5	Farber (St. Xavier)	17	Kocol (West Carrollton)
6	Hannan (Massillon Perry)	18	Marcial (Southview)
7	Gray (Wadsworth)	19	Smith (Mt. Vernon)
8	Jones (Beavercreek)	20	Bable (Firestone)
9	Riegle (Springboro)	21	Williamson (Miamisburg)
10	Pasquale (Boardman)	22	O'Conner (Toledo St. John)
11	Feller (Hoover)	23	Cochrane (Troy)
12	Kunzi (Watkins Memorial)	24	McMahon (Cuyahoga Falls)
13	Jordan (Teays Valley)	25	Flaglor (Hayes)

After his pair of titanic struggles the last two years Jamie Clark should have a far easier time winning a state title this year. Two years ago he lost to Sammy White in a controversial overtime title bout at 103# and then last year at 112# beat White, again in overtime, on a penalty point. In both these bouts Clark was by far the more aggressive wrestler with an internal engine that never seems to sputter or tire. Last year he won his first three state bouts by a combined score of 60-17 with most of the opponents' points coming on give-up escapes. This year he remains undefeated - - winning at the Ironman, but missing Medina due to injury. There are six wrestlers at this class who have placed at the state level. They're all good, solid competitors, but I think Clark is at least six points better than any of them.

The Mentor District appears to be particularly weak at this weight class. There are no returning state qualifiers (except for Clark) and I'm thinking that if I was one of those excess 112's I'd have to

consider a move up. I'm guessing Urias, Marcial, Long, and O'Conner might be possibilities, but without an infusion of talent from either 112# or 125# this will be a weak contingent.

The opposite problem, an excess of excellent 119's, confronts us at Perry. There are four returning state place winners and another quartet of serious challengers. McNulty, who I see as best here, had a great freshman campaign winning over 40 bouts and finishing 5<sup>th</sup> at Columbus. At the state meet he had some big wins over Farber, Polley, Inchaurregui, and Bolger. He has had some injury problems this year and missed both Brecksville and the Top Gun. How this time off will impact him is unclear. Bolger has also had injury issues after his 6<sup>th</sup> place finish at Columbus last year. He was injured in the Solon finals and has just recently returned. That places uncertainty very much in the mix at Perry. Pasquale was 8<sup>th</sup> two years ago while Hannan duplicated that feat last March. Hannan was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina while Pasquale was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Top Gun - - although at a relatively weak weight class. That provides something of a dilemma - - the two top choices have had injuries and the next two haven't yet been dominating. That leaves Feller, injured at the Top Gun, and state alternate Gray as real possibilities with the onrushing Bable and McMahon also in the mix. I think McNulty and Bolger move on to Columbus with Hannan and Gray also qualifying.

The Darby District is an amalgamation of three Columbus area sectionals and one from the Dayton area. The Dayton area actually has two sectionals and so coaches choose in some arcane manner whether they want to compete at the Fairfield or Darby District. My guess is that those with reasonable 119's will want to head to Darby. At the moment there are no returning state qualifiers from the Columbus area which leads off with state alternate Kunzi and follows up with Jordan, Smith, and Flaglor. Kunzi was 5<sup>th</sup> at Medina and last year was a district semi-finalist at 112#. However Flaglor pinned him at Elgin in the finals roiling the waters. Jordan won the Porter, St. Clairsville and Franklin Hts. and went 1-2 at last year's district. Smith won two district bouts last year and won at Mt. Vernon. I expect that a couple of the good 119's from the Southwest (who we'll discuss in the next paragraph will be at Darby).

I think there are eight state caliber 119's at Fairfield (or Darby). It seems that two-time state qualifier Corrill has stepped up to take the top spot. He was 7<sup>th</sup> last year at 103#, but easily won at the SWOCA beating both Farber and Jones by seven. He was 7<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman including some big wins, but was decked by Clark. Farber is a two-time placer (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>) who was also 7<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville and 4<sup>th</sup> at the SWOCA. I've always seen him being near the top of the state podium and it's his last chance this year. McSorley, Kocol, and Riegle are all returning state qualifiers who went a combined 1-6 last year. I think Riegle might be the best of this group with both McSorley and Kocol at risk. Jones was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the SWOCA and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun and I would rate him above this trio. Other possibilities are Cochrane and Williamson, but they have to be very good (or at Darby) to have much of a chance.

**125 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: SAMMY WHITE (MASSILLON PERRY)**

Top Contenders

2	Lawrence (Westlake)	14	Bucca (Brecksville)
3	McCombs (Marysville)	15	Weiskittel (Oak Hills)
4	Vanderhoff (Marion Harding)	16	Huffman (Maple Hts.)
5	Shivener (Springboro)	17	Walker (Northmont)
6	Hammer (Moeller)	18	Carlone (Mayfield)
7	Wenger (Wadsworth)	19	Marzec (Toledo St. Francis)
8	Marsico (Pickerington North)	20	Seiple (Coffman)
9	Cobos (St. Edward)	21	Egnor (Elyria)
10	McIntire (Lakota West)	22	Pickleheimer (Glen Este)
11	Speelman (Mansfield Madison)	23	Rich (Davidson)
12	Skilton (Mentor)	24	Irwin (Anthony Wayne)
13	Pitts (Darby)	25	Brunner (North Olmsted)

Like the previous weight class this is one that should be dominated by a single wrestler - - former state champion Sammy White. I never agreed with the move last year that had White drop to 112# to battle Clark when he was wrestling so brilliantly at 119#. Meaning absolutely no disrespect to Garrett Henry who wrestled wonderfully at Columbus, I think White would have been the solid favorite had he remained at 119#. This year should see his second state title though I'm nagged by his lack of aggressiveness against top-rated foes. In both his battles with Clark he was strangely passive and waiting to react rather than attack---costing him, in the end the fatal stalling point. This year at the Ironman he won two of his earlier bouts 3-1 and 3-2 and in the final Neibert did most of the attacking. It looked like wrestling he was in that "not to lose" mentality, ironic, when he has so many weapons at his disposal. While I did not see Medina my understanding is that the aggressive Sammy White showed up. That will not be news that will thrill the rest of this field.

White should have few problems at Perry. No one here has ever reached Columbus so the last three berths will be filled by state newcomers. I look for Wenger (yes, I know it's a tough cut) to have a breakout tournament and qualify rather easily with Bucca and Huffman as two other possibilities. Carlone has really picked up the pace and he must be considered. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Big 8, 5<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun, but finished behind Bucca at Brecksville. Again, we may see some migration from the crowded fields at 119# and 130# in this district.

There are a lot of interesting possibilities at Mentor. The key player here is state runner-up Nick Lawrence. I think he is the best 125-pounder in Division I not named Sammy White, but he may feel he has a better shot at 130# where there is no dominant player. I'll rank him here knowing that he and White would be seeded apart, and where he has far less chance of falling victim to an upset. State placer Vanderhoff has had another fine year (one loss) and should qualify again at this weight class. He won at Marion Harding and Brookhaven and is good in close bouts. State placer Cobos returns and he needs to bounce back from a 1-2 performance at the Ohio Duals---losing to Wenger and Hammer. Skilton and Speelman are right on the periphery. The former won at North Coast (over

a three-time Georgia champion) was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Solon, and 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville. The latter took the Gorman easily and won at North Canton as well. Add in Marzec, Irwin, and Egnor and it's a very solid weight class. It looks like Lawrence and Vanderhoff, for sure, with, maybe, Cobos and Speelman sneaking past Skilton for the last two spots.

McCombs has been red-hot for Marysville. Undefeated this year he continues to win by a lot of different methods. He was 8<sup>th</sup> last year---losing early and late to Fuller, but squeezing two wins in the middle. At Brecksville he won big---tech falling Skillton 16-1--- and he won little beating Skonieczny, 4-3 in the finals. McCombs was clearly not his best in that latter bout as Skonieczny did all the attacking, but McCombs' masterful defense preserved the victory. He will not, however, want to wrestle like that very often. He also won by technical fall over his strongest rival in Columbus, Travante Pitts. Pitts, also a returning state qualifier, had a terrible state draw getting Genetin and Harger back-to-back. Also returning is state qualifier Marsico who upset Vanderhoff at Wapakoneta. That is easily his biggest win of the year and vaults him into placement consideration. Add in Seiple, Rich, and, maybe, somebody from the Southwest and this will be a strong competition.

I've felt that Shivener had super potential after watching him win a junior high state title two years ago. As a freshman he won the Darby District and went to the state meet with a 38-1 record. However, it was a quick "two and out" at Columbus. He has missed much of this year, but he is such an outstanding talent that shouldn't be much of an issue. State alternates Hammer and McIntire are also here with the former winning the SWOCA over the latter. Hammer has been solid all year defeating Cobos, for example, and should qualify. McIntyre will have to contend with Weiskittel - - 2<sup>nd</sup> at the GMVWA and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the SWOCA - - and Walker who can be a scoring machine. He won at Troy and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the GMVWA. Factor in Pickleheimer and Morgan as possible upset choices.

### 130 #

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: SHAWN FAYETTE (MIAMISBURG)**

#### Top Contenders

2	Mattingly (Uniontown Lake)	15	Hill (Mt. Vernon)
3	Sanders (Central Crossing)	16	Hoyt (St. Ignatius)
4	McHenry (Elyria)	17	Meuer (Medina)
5	McLaughlin (Clay)	18	Marrone (Parma)
6	Welsh (Stow)	19	R. Moore (Butler)
7	Dailey (Massillon Perry)	20	Grame (Berea)
8	Davis (Lakota West)	21	Yurkovich (North Royalton)
9	Van Curren (St. Edward)	22	Stradling (Troy)
10	Foore (Wadsworth)	23	Johnson (Twinsburg)
11	Sage (Fairmont)	24	Hutchison (Eastlake North)
12	Williamson (Princeton)	25	Blanchard (Sandusky)
13	Allen (Reynoldsburg)	26	Ballou (western Hills)
14	Ruffing (St. Xavier)	27	Holtman (Moeller)

After the brilliant field that we saw last year at this weight class--Horner, Squire, Sulzer, Fields, etc.--we have a far more pedestrian group in 2009. It's a weight class waiting for someone to have a hot weekend in Columbus and take home the first place trophy. A weight class where the big upset, the unexpected participant, or the lightly regarded underdog cashes in big.

Fayette, only a junior has had an interesting career. As a freshman he went 1-2 at the state meet losing to a pair of eventual state champs, Squire and Henry. Last year he won the district title at Darby and then won three close bouts before succumbing to Tommy Pretty in the finals. It's interesting to note that in his four state bouts he scored a total of nine points--and gave up eight. This year he won at North Canton defeating Sommer in the finals 2-0, and handling Mattingly 6-3. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the GMVWA losing a close 3-2 decision to Felipe Martinez. He has, it seems, mastered the art of winning the close, low-scoring battle.

I'll assume for reasons of personal convenience that Fayette returns to Darby. If so, he faces a somewhat limited field, but with two returning state qualifiers. The first of these, Austin Sanders, is very good. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> to Fayette at Darby last year losing 4-0. He drew Mattingly in the first round and ended with only one state win when you need two to place. This year he won at Franklin Hts. At Brecksville he defeated state qualifier Foore and state runner-up Neff before losing to McHenry in the semi-finals and defaulting to 6<sup>th</sup>. He was undefeated at the Ohio Duals soundly beating McHenry this time, 7-1, and VanCurren. State qualifier Hill is also back after going 0-2 at Columbus last year. He won at Mt. Vernon and was 7<sup>th</sup> at the tough GMVWA. That would leave one opening which should go to Allen or maybe, the young Luft. This could change if state qualifier Riegle decides to compete here rather than at the expected 119#.

There is all kinds of depth at Fairfield although some of whom I'll mention will eventually migrate to Darby. There are four returning state qualifiers in this congregation of talent none of whom placed. Sage and Williamson were at 125# last year, but only the former won a bout at Columbus. Sage won handily over Moore at Fairmont and was 5<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA losing to Fayette and McLaughlin. Williamson has transferred from Colerain to Princeton from whence he placed 4<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA losing badly to Martinez and McLaughlin. Davis was a freshman qualifier at 119# after a very fine 9<sup>th</sup> grade year, but lost two close bouts on Thursday. He's had a busy sophomore year. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the SWOCA defeating Williamson, 8-7, in the consolation final. At Brecksville he lost early to Tessari, but came back strong losing to Vaughan for 4<sup>th</sup>. Finally Stradling qualified at 112# but drew White in the first round and was eliminated on Thursday. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Troy, but failed to place at the GMVWA. That still leaves state alternate Moore, district 6<sup>th</sup> placer Ballou and Holtman as possibilities. However, the wrestler to watch is Ruffing, the MVP at the SWOCA and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT. He drew Tessari early but fought back for 7<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville. He should make waves at this district.

Operating under the assumption that Lawrence will wrestle at 125# there is still some solid talent at Mentor. McHenry was a state quarter-finalist losing a close 8-6 bout to three-time state runner-up Ryan Fields. He then won two consolation bouts to finish 6<sup>th</sup>. This year he lost to Lawrence in overtime at North Coast, and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Brecksville losing only to Tessari. He had two wins at the Ohio Duals but Sanders beat him 7-1. McLaughlin has had a big year winning at Solon and finishing a strong 3<sup>rd</sup> at the GMVWA. Hoyt and state qualifier Grame are possibilities for the last two spots, but the freshman VanCurren has rung up some notable victories lately--including wins over Foore and Holtman at the Ohio Duals. Parma has not had a state champion since 1968 (Bobby Mason), but the

junior Marrone may have long-term plans in that direction. He was a state alternate last year losing a heartbreaking 1-0 go-to-state bout. This will be a good weight class to set the foundation for next year Blanchard has wrestled at least once at 125#, but I think he may find this one a better strategic fit.

Mattingly has had a sensational career. He is already a three-time state qualifier and was 4<sup>th</sup> as a sophomore and 3<sup>rd</sup> last year at 125#. He met the eventual champ Pretty in a quarter-final contest losing 11-9 and that was the only difficult bout Pretty had on his way to the title. I am assuming he will eventually decide to wrestle at this weight class and for which he would have a reasonable shot of winning. He was at this weight at North Canton finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> and losing 6-3 to Fayette--a not insurmountable margin. He was at 135 at Medina losing to Ian Miller very early and then coming back to get 4<sup>th</sup>--losing to Salupo, 6-3, not an insurmountable margin. At any rate he's the best at this district. State placer Foore has not been as sharp as I anticipated. He failed to place at the Ironman and Brecksville, but did win at the Searcy. He lost all three of his Ohio Duals, two of them to freshmen. One of those was to the junior high state champ Zach Dailey who is very impressive. He won three bouts at the Ironman before running into Tessari and that included a win over Sommer. At Medina he lost a 3-2 semi-final decision to Sommer and finished a solid 3<sup>rd</sup>. Welsh, the often overlooked 130-pounder from Stow, won at Hudson over state runner-up Lawrence and can't be overlooked here while Yurkovich, Johnson, and Hutchison are all solid. I think Meuer might be the "sleeper" pick here based on a very solid season. Even his losses have been very close. This is a very crowded district where some may chose to move up a class.

### 135 #

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: ANTHONY SALUPO (ST. EDWARD)**

#### Top Contenders

2	Calarco (North Royalton)	15	Jefferies (Watkins Memorial)
3	Gallagher (St. Xavier)	16	Gyorfi (Lorain Southview)
4	Parra (Barberton)	17	Hillock (Massillon Perry)
5	Languis (Scioto)	18	Range (Brush)
6	G. Moore (Beavercreek)	19	Burrel (Shaker Hts.)
7	Rojas (Fremont Ross)	20	Packard (Brecksville)
8	Shepherd (Mason)	21	Scarberry (Northmont)
9	Price (Masillon )	22	Cornell (Nordononia)
10	Channel (Central Crossing)	23	Merk (Oak Hills)
11	Dempsey (Westlake)	24	Clutter (Westland)
12	Gordon (Wadsworth)	25	McClatcher (Mentor)
13	Burkett (Westerville North)	26	Smith (Pickerington Central)
14	Jacobs (Miamisburg)	27	Castilleja (Clay)

This is another non-descript weight class that provides solid opportunity for as many as a dozen possible contenders. If Mattingly goes at 130# and Calarco is unable to surmount his injury the playing field here is very level. It would also provide St. Edward, in the form of Anthony Salupo a great opportunity to pick up a large number of team points.

When you look at this weight class without Mattingly and Calarco your first question is likely to be “where did everybody go?” These somewhat understaffed weight classes show up more frequently now than they did twenty years ago, primarily because of weight testing procedures. Two decades ago, when it became clear that an opportunity had arisen some of the 140’s would make the steep cut and hope to retain their strength. Now that is impossible to do since who could have foreseen such a situation in November and acted upon it.

Salupo will not have it all his own way at Mentor. After a year it is human nature to forget about how big a surprise he was. He came into this district with nine losses and lost the first night in the quarter-finals. He then won four consolation bouts to take 3<sup>rd</sup>. He had a terrible draw at States, but defeated the favored Harger, 4-3, and the heavily favored Genetin, 6-5, before losing to Fayette and finishing 5<sup>th</sup>. He was 7<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman after losing a 15-14 quarter-final bout and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina--and I’m guessing that he slammed Powers in the semi-finals and that was the loss. Powers forfeited in the finals. At the Ohio Duals he crushed the accomplished Channel, 16-3, but barely beat the athletic Gordon 12-11 (more on him later). There is one very good state alternate looking to take that next step at this weight class. I saw Rojas a couple of years ago and thought he had a lot of talent and it is now beginning to be realized. He was a district semi-finalist last year, but the Lakewood connection of Palmer and Duffy frustrated his qualification plans. This year he won at Fremont Ross and Tiffin in crushing fashion, but it would have been nice to see him wrestle a tougher schedule. My third choice is Dempsey who was injured after a 2<sup>nd</sup> at the North Coast to Henline in overtime. He should come back strong at this weight class. Somehow the brilliant lightweights often obscure Gyorfi at Lorain Southview. He’s my choice for the fourth spot. After this it’s solid folks like Burrell, McClatcher, and, maybe, Castilleja.

There are three solid placement opportunities at Fairfield. They have traded victories so it is a little confusing. Gallagher, the defending district champion returns at the same weight class. He was a state quarter-finalist losing to Duffy and then Mencini to finish 7<sup>th</sup>. Moore was the district champ at Darby at 130#, but went 1-2 and failed to place. Shepherd, two years ago, pulled off a huge upset at 112# downing state runner-up Genetin in the quarter-finals and finishing 6<sup>th</sup>. Last year he lost two Saturday afternoon bouts at 119# and ended up as the state alternate. They all met this year at the SWOCA. Shepherd struck first taking out Gallagher in the semi-finals 6-4, but Moore had the last laugh taking the title 10-6 with Gallagher finishing 3<sup>rd</sup>. The next weekend Gallagher took 3<sup>rd</sup> at Brecksville after losing in a rat-tail and winning 8 consecutive consolation bouts. Shepherd also lost early--at Medina--to Powers, and Mattingly eliminated him before the placement rounds. Moore made it to the semi-finals, but losses to Miller and Mattingly pushed him to 5<sup>th</sup>. I’m looking at a Jacobs or Scarberry as a possible fourth qualifier, with Merk an outside shot.

There are three strong returning state qualifiers at Darby, but the one I like best is Languis. He was 7<sup>th</sup> last year at 130# losing to Sulzer and Calarco but beating Moore. This year he was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun losing only to David Taylor and defeating Moore again. Channel is a two-time state qualifier, but missed out last year. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville, but lost badly to Salupo at the duals. He deserves to place this year since he has certainly paid his dues. Burkett was two and out last year at Columbus and will face tough competition again this year. He did not place at Medina losing to Moore in the quarter-finals. Jefferies looks like the next best though he did place higher than Burkett at Medina. Clutter and Smith are other thoughts.

The big mysteries are at Perry. I've ranked Mattingly at 130#, but I believe he has, perhaps, a somewhat higher probability of winning a title here. Yes, I know Salupo, beat him by three at Medina but that was after Mattingly had wrestled those interminable consolation rounds--remember he lost early there. Also recall that Mattingly defeated Salupo twice last year on, perhaps, a more even playing field. Meanwhile, what do we do about Calarco. The coaches think he might be back soon (as of 12-30), but how will all this impact his performance. I ranked him as if he had been perfectly healthy all year coming off his great 5th place finish last year--great and rather unexpected. Parra has an interesting history. He was 3rd two years ago at 130# after making the semi-finals and losing to eventual champ Palivoda. Then last year after finishing 2nd to Squire at sectional he had to drop out of district competition. This year he's back, winning the Dies and possibly setting himself for up for state placement. State qualifier Hillock is also here in a good position if the top duo are absent while Range, Packard and, possibly, Cornell if at this weight class can be good. A third mystery might be Loudon Gordon. I saw him last year and he is a terrific athlete. He has been part-time at 135, but placed at the Searcy and lost 12-11 to Salupo and defeated Hillock 12-4 at the Ohio Duals. Keep an eye on him. Finally, it appears Wes Price will wrestle. If that be the case he could easily qualify here.

### 140 #

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: COLLIN PALMER (ST. EDWARD)**

#### Top Contenders

2	Zivcic (Mentor)	14	Giffin (Harrison)
3	Sasfy (Reynoldsburg)	15	Luft (Teays Valley)
4	Comar (Twinsburg)	16	Ferguson (Holland Springfield)
5	McCormick (Kenmore)	17	Wirtz (Marysville)
6	Grandominico (Olentangy)	18	Dietsch (Toledo St. Francis)
7	Ball/Brandenburg (Wadsworth)	19	McGrain (Olmsted Falls)
8	Yetzer (Mansfield Madison)	20	Clouser-Simmelink (Fairmont)
9	Foster (Massillon Perry)	21	Wimer (Central Crossing)
10	Hodge (Bedford)	22	Nelson (Gahanna-Lincoln)
11	Fehring (Glen Este)	23	Morgan (Amherst)
12	Peterson (Fitch)	24	Mialma (Lakaota-East)
13	Myers (Butler)	25	Rieman (Hayes)

After Genghis Khan unified the Mongol tribes in what was a monumental struggle he set his eyes upon the riches of China. His game plan was simple he would besiege each of the major cities with his army until all were captured and he was the undisputed emperor. He used an interesting psychological ploy. When first they surrounded a city he would make his headquarters in a brilliant white tent. This let the city fathers know that if they immediately surrendered no real harm would come to their community except that they would have to pay enormous tribute to Genghis and provide him with soldiers. If a few days passed with no surrender he moved into a red tent that signified that when the city was captured all of the men would be killed, most of the women and children sold into slavery and only a few citizens would be left to manage the city. If there was still no action Genghis moved into a black tent which meant that once captured, everyone would be put to the sword and the town razed to the ground.

It seems to me that since the Ironman, Collin Palmer has pretty much had the black tent set up next to the mat. He had all falls at Medina and has regained his aggressive, pin-driven style. He will be a heavy favorite (along with David Taylor) to become the first to win seven state titles combining three junior high state championships with four high school trophies. Overall, I have him at 128-3 that includes a high percentage of falls. He has never lost after the first week of the season and has never been defeated by an Ohio wrestler. I've always liked Palmer's wrestling which shows a hunger for falls and a smile on his face. The bout I remember best was his state title match against the undefeated Ryan Fields in his freshman year. In 188 seconds he was at his brilliant best in totally overwhelming an exceptional foe. His only real competition would arise if former state champion Brad Squire decides to compete at 140#, but why would he do that?

Palmer heads a very good district. An unexpected factor is Zivcic who told me at Brecksville he'd drop and has done exactly that. He was very good at 145# winning at North Coast and Solon and finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> only to Habat at Brecksville. He should be a powerhouse at this class. Also here is state placer Yetzer who was 7<sup>th</sup> last year while winning 44 bouts. This year he won at the Madison Classic and then was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Gorman (to Pfister) and at North Canton (to McKee). He'll be looking to place higher this year. State alternate Ferguson is the favorite for the last state ticket. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Medina and undefeated at Springfield. There are a trio of solid contenders looking to break apart this top quartet starting with Dietsch, McGrain, and Morgan. Dietsch was a district semi-finalist last year, but was outscored by a combined 21-3 in his two go-to-state bouts. That won't happen this year. Morgan and McGrain had two district wins last year and have built on that this year - - Morgan winning at Avon Lake and McGrain placing at Medina and the Dies.

There are six excellent wrestlers for the four allocated state berths out of Perry--and each has a bit of a back story. Comar was 4<sup>th</sup> last year at 119# and has moved up four weight classes. It hasn't made any difference with regard to results or his complaints about making weight. He won at Solon and the Dies and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Brecksville after being beaten by Sasfy in the quarter-finals. He is better on second days of tournaments. McCormick, only a junior, is already a two-time state qualifier who has gone 1-2 each time. He started the year at 145#, but recently dropped. He won at Smithville, but was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Solon to Zivcic and 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Dies to Comar, both wrestlers he can expect to meet again. At Brecksville he was 7<sup>th</sup> losing to state champion Hancock and Comar (again). Foster transferred from Bellaire St. John this year after placing 5<sup>th</sup> in Division III--much like John did several years ago. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Medina losing by fall to Palmer. I'm not sure what will happen but both Ball and Brandenburg are good. The former, in particular, has been sensational subbing for Squire at 145#. He was 7<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman, 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville and won the Searcy. Hodge, a state alternate last year, is also very good. He has been a finalist at Solon, the Searcy, Normandy, and Toledo St. John--winning the latter two. McCormick beat him by two to thwart a state trip last year. He might have to reverse that to qualify this time. Finally, there's Peterson who was a district 6<sup>th</sup> in 2008. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun and 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville and that means he is ready for Columbus, if he can get there.

I thought Sasfy looked very good at Brecksville--majoring Comar and decisioning state champion Hancock before losing in the finals. He was a district champ last year and won three state bouts to finish 6<sup>th</sup>--twice losing to Cline. He also won at the SWOCA and has high placement potential. I also think that Grandominico could grab a low place with his grind it out style. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina losing only to Palmer by fall. He was 1-2 at last year's state meet and should better that this year. Luft and

Wirtz are very good with Wimer in reserve. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Wapakoneta--finishing ahead of Grandominico. Nelson is the "sleeper" here who could easily qualify, also don't forget Rieman who won at Marion Harding and is currently 21-2.

There always seems to be imbalances between districts with one having eight state quality wrestlers and another having barely any. At the moment it looks like Fairfield may be "the barely any" at this weight. The exception might be Fehring who was a district semi-finalist last year, but lost one of his go-to-state bouts 7-6. This year he was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the SWOCA losing a 10-8 battle to Sasfy and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the GMVWA losing to Stephens, 8-4. Myers won at Fairmont and has a chance here along with Clouser-Simmelink and, maybe, Mialma. The real possibility here, though, is Giffin who was at 103# just two years ago.

### 145#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: DAVE HABAT (ST. IGNATIUS)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Horner (Massillon Perry)	14	Leidecker (Teays Valley)
3	Squire (Wadsworth)	15	White (Hoover)
4	Harger (Moeller)	16	Hoffman (Kilbourne)
5	Cline (Uniontown Lake)	17	Ryman (Marion Franklin)
6	Valliant (Sandusky)	18	Shirley (Harrison)
7	Greco (Fitch)	19	Travgliante (Normandy)
8	Drake (Upper Arlington)	20	Castoneda (Amherst)
9	Gordon (Scioto)	21	Ramsey (Springboro)
10	Churchill (Elyria)	22	Millisor (Lakota West)
11	Nickolai (Piqua)	23	Arthur (Holland Springfield)
12	Orth (Clay)	24	Brown (Hamilton)
13	Bass (Marysville)	25	Spangler (Sidney)

This strikes me as one of the best and most intriguing weight class in Division I. There will be a titanic struggle at the top with a solid second tier of wrestlers eager for upsets. The quartet that will battle it out include two wrestlers who have already won state titles, one who twice has been 3<sup>rd</sup> at tremendously difficult weight classes, and another who placed both of his high school years.

Brad Squire, only a junior, crafted an undefeated state championship season as a freshman. Last year he again reached the finals before losing to his nemesis, Seth Horner in overtime. Squire is 72-3 in his high school career with all three defeats to Horner. This year Squire has yet to compete but is expected back at this weight class. Good in all three positions Squire has a great sense of balance and never seems to find himself out of position.

Horner won his first state title last year after twice finishing 3<sup>rd</sup>. When he defeated Squire at the Mayfield Big 8 it seemed to provide that last bit of confidence to take it all. But it wasn't easy. He beat both Sulzer and Squire in the eighth minute of wrestling to capture that well deserved title. This

year he was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Ironman losing to Stephens, but defeating Harger in overtime, and 1<sup>st</sup> at Medina. His ability to win close bouts will again be needed this year.

Habat has had a real affinity for tough weight classes. Both as a freshman and a sophomore it could be argued that he faced the sternest competition--and both times finishing 3<sup>rd</sup>. Last year it was an overtime loss to Lang that cost him a shot at the title. He has spent some of this year at 152#--finishing 4<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman losing twice narrowly (once to Sulzer) and 1<sup>st</sup> at Brecksville at 145#, where I thought he looked a shade sloppy.

Harger has twice captured a low place at the state meet, but as always seemed better than that. As a freshman he gave Squire a tough bout in the quarters and, surprisingly, fell to 6<sup>th</sup>. Last year he had beaten eventual champ Pretty, but lost a first –round upset to Salupo and then was beaten in overtime by Mattingly to finish 7<sup>th</sup>. This year he was a semi-finalist at the Ironman losing to one of the Alton twins (no disgrace there) and finished 4<sup>th</sup> after losing in overtime to Horner. He crushed the field at the SWOCA and seems primed for more than a low place this year.

Horner and Squire exit the same district and will be apart with Habat seeded in the same half-bracket as the loser. That gives the Perry District champion a huge advantage which could be augmented if Harger (a 67% chance) also falls in that opposite half bracket.

The Perry District has four terrific wrestlers at this weight class. We've already talked about state champions Squire and Horner, but there is more. Cline was a state semi-finalist last year, but lost to Palmer and finished 5<sup>th</sup>. This year he was second to Hightower at North Canton losing 4-3 and 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina after being upset by Fondale. State qualifier Greco was 3<sup>rd</sup> at both the Top Gun and Brecksville, but this will be a survival test to get out of this district. One issue could be the bracketing. Horner, Squire, and Cline all emerge from the same sectional so you need to be careful where (if?) you lose so that Cline and Greco don't end up meeting in a go-to-state bout. Shannon White might grab a spot should that happen.

Habat won't have it easy at Mentor. Valliant, what a great name for a wrestler, pulled a major upset at Columbus last year dumping Demas out of the championship bracket in the quarter-finals. However, three straight losses plummeted him into 6<sup>th</sup> place. He has been very solid this year beating, for example, Witt to win at Oak Harbor. Churchill is starting to realize that enormous potential finishing 6<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman and 3<sup>rd</sup> at North Coast. However, he'll be pushed hard by Orth, Travgliante, and Castoneda. Orth lost to Valliant, 3-2, at last year's district and is one of the leaders of Oregon Clay squad that is very solid. He was a bout from state qualification last year. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at Solon at a tough weight. Travgliante was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Normandy and North Coast and 3<sup>rd</sup> at Avon Lake.

Two names stand out at Darby--state qualifiers Drake and Gordon. The latter, only a junior, qualified 4<sup>th</sup> out of this district at 145#. He drew eventual state runner-up Rigel in the first round and ended up losing twice and being blanked in both bouts. He was undefeated until the Top Gun where he wrestled well finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> to Stephens, 13-6. He also won handily at Olentangy and should qualify easily for States this year. Drake is a two-time state qualifier who has yet to win at the big show. However, he has been excellent in the Columbus area – compiling well over 100 victories. This year he won at Upper Arlington, Fairmont, and very convincingly at Kenston, and should be a candidate for a low place. I think Bass could well end up as the third best 145-pounder here with Leidecker and

Hoffman next best. I also think we'll find Ryman also competing at this class. That's a lot of possibilities for those last two spots.

Harger is a sure qualifier, but the other three berths are wide open at Fairfield. Well, not totally. I think we can pencil in the name of Trevor Nickolai. A district finalist and state qualifier last year he quickly lost twice at Columbus. This year he was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the GMVWA losing a 6-5 decision to DeHart but pinning Massillo. After this duo there is a real chasm until we get to Shirley, Ramsey, and Millisor. I suspect there are other possibilities such as Brown, but this is a weight class for opportunists.

## 152 #

### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: ANDREW GASBER (MADISON)**

#### Top Contenders

2	Sulzer (St. Edward)	15	Egnor (Elyria)
3	Demas (Westerville North)	16	Bissell (Twinsburg)
4	Rigel (Tecumseh)	17	Perry (Mentor)
5	Marsh (Marysville)	18	Laney (Toledo St. Francis)
6	Russ (Nordononia)	19	Rahm (Moeller)
7	Crabtree (Darby)	20	Tischler (Berea)
8	Cruz (Lorain Southview)	21	Graham (Teays Valley)
9	Brenner (Canfield)	22	LeForce (Springboro)
10	Mason (Princeton)	23	Burton (Kilbourne)
11	Frost (Upper Arlington)	24	Conners (Elder)
12	Doyle (Brunswick)	25	Haren (Troy)
13	Campbell (Harrison)	26	Gruber (Massillon Jackson)
14	Smith (Davidson)		

This weight class is just about as exciting and competitive as the previous one. Again there are four exceptional contenders with a backdrop of some excellent potential place winners--including one who may well force his way into the finals. Fortunately, the top quartet all compete at different districts so if form holds sway the pairings should be perfect.

If things had worked out a little differently two of the contenders might even now be wrestling off in a back corner of the St. Edward wrestling room. Two years ago Sulzer was a freshman 112-pounder who took full advantage of a bracket sheet that put Touris, Mitcheff, Lang, Mattingly and Ciccarello in the other half. He swept to the finals before losing to Touris on a slippery and cold Saturday night. Last year he wrestled very well losing in overtime to Horner in the semi-finals and then defeating the redoubtable Fields for 3<sup>rd</sup>. Gasber has endured a more torturous path. Two years ago as a sophomore 135-pounder he was 5<sup>th</sup> at that brutal weight class losing to four-time champ Jameson and Habat. He was quoted as being very disappointed with his performance. Then last year for primarily family reasons he transferred back to his home school during the season and OHSAA in their collective wisdom ruled him ineligible. So after a year lay-off he returns at this weight class so far winning all 19 of his bouts. I saw him twice. He remains physically and athletically well beyond most wrestlers, but I thought he looked a little sloppy, a little unsure at times. He'll hit a duck under

so quickly its difficult to believe it even happened, but then there are little timing errors that show up. Still, he is one of those wonderful wrestlers who thumbs his nose at those risk/reward equations that always seem to favor a defensive posture and goes out there takes a chance and tries to score points. By March he'll be fully back in form. Should Gasber win it would free Madison from two burdens--they have had seven runner-ups (the most) and 17 placers without ever capturing a state title. Assuredly that would create great excitement in that part of Lake County.

Another wrestler who looks to score early and often is Demas. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> as a freshman in Division III two years ago and 3<sup>rd</sup> last year in Division I after being upset by Valliant in the quarter-finals. I like a wrestler who produce wins in Columbus with scores like 16-8, 17-11, and 12-8. I would loved to have seen him and Jameson in the Finals last year--it would have been a You-Tube prizewinner. This year Demas has lost only to Sulzer who made it a low scoring bout in his 3-2 win. It would easily be worth the drive to Columbus just to see a Demas/Gasber donnybrook. Westerville North had back-to-back champions last year including Dong at 152#. Demas could make it two in a row at this class for the school and three in a row for the community of Westerville.

Somehow, I keep thinking that Rigel's trip to the state finals last year was an anomaly. The evidence, on the other hand, suggests otherwise. In the three weekends of tournament action Rigel never had a close bout until losing to Jameson in the finals. At States he never had to go six minutes to win his first three bouts. I don't get many Tecumseh scores, but this year the only loss I've seen was a 6-4 defeat by the sensational St. Paris Graham freshman Huston Evans--in overtime. Rigel may be substantially better than I've rated him here.

I think the pairings are critical. If all four of these wrestlers win their districts, a fair assumption, and then win their first two bouts at States, still probable, then the semifinal pairings will be Rigel vs. Gasber and Demas vs. Sulzer. I like the second named in each bout and that sets up a final that pits Gasber against Sulzer in what could well be the bout of the tournament.

I suspect that the Darby District is strongest at this weight class with at least five wrestlers with placement potential--and that's with Ryman at 145#. We've already talked about Demas, but Marsh is a solid second banana. He lost to Demas, 7-2, in last year's district final, but made it to the state quarter-finals where he lost to four-time champ Jameson. He came back with three consolations wins before losing to Demas again. He started at 160# this year, but had dropped to 152# at Brecksville. He started with three very impressive wins, but then, on the second day, just when we were getting to the exciting match-ups, he failed to make weight. It makes you wonder whether he'll go back to 160#, so I've rated him in both places. Still, based on his history he'll be great at either weight class. Crabtree, who was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the district, last year, had an interesting state tourney. He won a close first round bout then lost an overtime heartbreaker to Schreiner and finally ended up 7<sup>th</sup>. This year he won at the Porter over the tough Graham, but was only 7<sup>th</sup> at Medina. Frost was a district semi-finalist last year who lost that by two points and then dropped to 6<sup>th</sup>. This year he won at Upper Arlington and Fairmont. That provides four possible qualifiers, but Graham and Burton would definitely be potential qualifiers should that top quartet stumble or Marsh return to 160#. However, I think the most probable replacement would be state alternate Smith. He missed qualification last year by one point (5-4 to Gordon), but did not place at Brecksville though he had four wins.

We've talked about Gasber at Perry, but there isn't a lot of depth behind him. State qualifier Russ is back from injury and he was a point from placing last year. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at 160# at Solon, but then missed some time. He has been back at both this weight class and 160# but I think he'll end up here. A wrestler I anticipated seeing here was the excellent Jamar Sheppard, a state qualifier at 145# last year. He, apparently, will not be competing. Two who will be at Perry are Brenner, a dominating 1<sup>st</sup> at the Dies, and state alternate Doyle. The latter missed state qualification by one point last year and was 4<sup>th</sup> at Medina losing to Brenner by a point. Other strong possibilities are Bissell and, maybe, Gruber.

Sulzer leads the group at Mentor, but this is not a broad-based weight class here. Bobby Cruz was a state alternate last year losing a 5-3 go-to-state bout to eventual state placer Valliant. This year he won at Southview, Fairfield, and Riverside en route to a 22-1 record. He is at the same sectional as Sulzer so they should be apart at both the district and state level. Egnor, Perry, and Tischler are all possibilities with Laney also in the mix. Egnor was 2<sup>nd</sup> at North Coast and 5<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville while Tischler was 4<sup>th</sup> at North Coast, and 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun. Laney was one bout away from States last year while Perry won at the Searcy and beat Tischler, 8-1, for 3<sup>rd</sup> at the North Coast. This is a shifting, amorphous grouping where the hot weekend and fortunate bracketing get you to Columbus.

There are three strong candidates for Columbus at Fairfield. Rigel we've discussed and he should be joined by Mason and Campbell. They finished 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> at the SWOCA with Mason winning by three. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the GMVWA losing to the freshman Evans in a relatively close final. Campbell was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Big 8 and 5<sup>th</sup> at Medina after making the semis and then losing to Demas and Doyle. Both won two district bouts last year and seemed ready for more this time around. The last spot should be a tug-of-war with Rahm, LeForce, and Haren the principal tuggers.

### 160#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: KYLE LANG (BRECKSVILLE)**

##### Top Contenders

- |    |                            |    |                               |
|----|----------------------------|----|-------------------------------|
| 2  | Goins (Elyria)             | 14 | Korb (Elder)                  |
| 3  | Marsh (Marysville)         | 15 | Pike (Scioto)                 |
| 4  | Rhodes (Nordononia)        | 16 | Ferguson (Pickerington North) |
| 5  | Rice (Davidson)            | 17 | Berman (Beavercreek)          |
| 6  | Coleman (Mayfield)         | 18 | Tischler (Berea)              |
| 7  | Harrison (Massillon Perry) | 19 | Zehler (Edgewood)             |
| 8  | Wharton (Clay)             | 20 | Holte (Colerain)              |
| 9  | Maserang (Moeller)         | 21 | Cvetic (St. Edward)           |
| 10 | DiSabato (Olentangy)       | 22 | McLaughlin (Mentor)           |
| 11 | Glasko (Normandy)          | 23 | Sneary (Tecumseh)             |
| 12 | Skoberne (Twinsburg)       | 24 | Brown (Sylvania Northview)    |
| 13 | Calhoun (Kenmore)          | 25 | Rivera (Harrison)             |

This is another very good weight class, though not quite as strong as the preceding two. It features one of the more enigmatic wrestlers in the competition in the person of senior Kyle Lang. Lang could become the first wrestler ever to finish 4<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 1<sup>st</sup> in his high school career if he can win at this weight class. A superbly talented performer he continues to struggle when reaching for the top step of the podium. I have him with 133 high school wins ranging from 103# to 160# and three state placements, but he has never won a district title. Last year he beat Habat in overtime, crushed Sheppard (who had beaten him the previous week) in the semis before losing to Spicel in overtime in the state finals. This year he has been 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Ironman, Beast of the East, and Brecksville losing twice to Toal. In that latter bout he sometimes appeared to lose focus giving away two takedowns in a 9-8 loss. And yet earlier that same day he beat defending state runner-up J.T. Rice, 10-0, in a flawless performance as you can imagine. The first tourney title came at the Dies where Lang shut out Rhodes in the finals. I expect to see a succession of those by Lang at tourney time.

The Perry District is very good. Rhodes was a state quarter-finalist last year before losing to eventual champ Kline and failing to place. This year he was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Solon (at 171#) and 1<sup>st</sup> at North Canton in a romp. He is good on his feet and can turn from the top position and that combination should lead to state placement this year. Coleman was a real "fooler". At the Big 8 last year I asked Frank Cikach whether the then absent Hayes boy would wrestle by tourney time. He answered in the affirmative and as something of an afterthought mentioned that they'd be starting a freshman in late January who was pretty good. Actually, he was very good. He was a sectional champ and then swept his way to the district finals before losing to Taylor. By this time I was cursing myself for not asking Cikach his name. And yet, he went on, as he made the state semi-finals before losing to Kline and finishing 5<sup>th</sup>. This year I kept his name in mind as he finished 3<sup>rd</sup> at Brecksville --losing only a one-pointer to Goins--and 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun after a 9-8 OT loss in the semis. The Perry move-in Harrison was a state placer in Texas (?) and has been outstanding winning at Medina in a curiously symmetrical bout that featured Courtland Harrison and Harrison Rosch neither of whom wrestled for Harrison High. Skoberne, 1<sup>st</sup> at Solon and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Dies, is another top contender with another move in, Calhoun, now representing Kenmore.

State placer Goins leads a representative group of 160-pounders at Mentor. A tough, physical wrestler he has gotten to be super on his feet. He was the district champion at 152# winning all three of his contested bouts by technical fall. A state semi-finalist he ran into Dong who crushed him from the top position, 12-0, and he ended up 4<sup>th</sup>. He got off to a slow start at the Ironman going 3-2 and failing to place. He won at North Coast getting a takedown record. He was a semi-finalist at Brecksville before losing badly to Toal and eventually defaulting to 4<sup>th</sup>. I think he has high placement potential (maybe even finalist), but he'll need to stay injury free. State qualifier Wharton is back from that solid Clay squad as is state qualifier Glasko. Wharton wrestles a tougher schedule, but Glasko won at Normandy and lost to Goins, 9-6, in the North Coast final. Tischler, Cvetic and McLaughlin are other possibilities with only one spot to be earned while Brown could be a surprise.

Rice was pinned in the district quarter-finals last year, but fought his way back with four consolation wins (including a one-point decision in his go-to-state bout) to qualify. Then he wrestled three very solid bouts to reach the finals before losing to Kline. That is the definition of a hot weekend. Short and stocky he is difficult to wrestle. He was 6<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville defaulting down after being injured in a 10-0 loss to Lang. If Marsh is here this will be a very strong twosome out of Darby, but, if not,

DiSabato should easily qualify with Pike, a 6-5 loser to DiSabato, also a strong contender. The other possibility is Ferguson, who won two district bouts last year.

Most of the candidates at Fairfield look like state quarter-finalists and very low placers, at best. The top trios include Maserang, Korb, and Berman all of whom were at the SWOCA. Maserang, then at 171# finished 2<sup>nd</sup> losing only to an out-of-state wrestler and was again 2<sup>nd</sup> at the CIT. He was a district 6<sup>th</sup> at this weight class last year losing his go-to-state bout by four points. Korb won at the SWOCA beating Berman in the finals. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at the CIT, but did not place at Brecksville, losing to Lang in the first round. Berman was a state alternate at 152# and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the SWOCA. Other possibilities are Sneary, Zehler and Holte with Rivera still in the picture.

### 171#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: NICK HEFLIN (MASSILLON PERRY)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Taylor (Cuyahoga Falls)	16	Houston (Maple Hts)
3	Dilley (Lancaster)	17	Dixon (Fairfield)
4	Abujaradeh (Berea)	18	Stepp (Princeton)
5	Brubaker (Start)	19	Ormiston (Teays Valley)
6	Bryan (St. Ignatius)	20	Meek (Holland Springfield)
7	Hayes (Mayfield)	21	Dove (Western Hills)
8	Alexander (Findlay)	22	Harris (Kenmore)
9	Moore (Lakeside)	23	Hasselmeyer (Elder)
10	Ajayi (Shaker Hts)	24	Morrissey (Clay)
11	Brankamp (Thomas Worthington)	25	Tennant (Reynoldsburg)
12	Nickolai (Piqua)	26	Franz (Springboro)
13	DeLande (Davidson)	27	Godfrey (Glen Este)
14	Tatum (Pickerington Central)	28	Rigsby (St. Charles)
15	Sabo (Olentangy)	29	Randolph (Wadsworth)

If I were recruiting seniors out of Ohio one wrestler that would be near the top of my list is Nick Heflin. Sometimes you can just tell when a performer is great, but still has more potential to be realized. Heflin should win relatively easily at this weight class, but he'll be even better in the future. He made a quantum leap forward last year finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at 152# losing a close bout to the superb Jesse Dong in the finals. This year he was 1<sup>st</sup> at the King of the Mountain and Medina and 4<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman. That last result was deceptive as Heflin, far ahead, was flukily (if that's a word) pinned in the quarter-finals by a wrestler who lost by one point in the semis. I think Heflin would have, at a minimum, been a finalist. He lost to Phillips (who else?) for 3<sup>rd</sup>. There are three other returning state placers at this weight class, but I don't think any of them will severely challenge him.

The deepest district is at Mentor which features three returning state qualifiers, a state alternate, and some strong, experienced challengers. Abujaradeh seemingly came out of nowhere last year.

Despite keeping encyclopedic lists I had never written down his name and had absolutely no knowledge of his progress. Embarrassing since I grew up just two communities over from Berea. At any rate he was a sectional runner-up with nine losses going into districts where he went 3-2 to grab the fourth qualifying berth. At States he pulled a first-round upset, wrestled well in the consolation rounds and finished a startling 5<sup>th</sup>. His 13 losses were within one for the most losses of any placer. Tall and rangy he has been 1<sup>st</sup> at Solon and North Coast and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun including a big win over Brankamp and there will be no double figure losses this year for the leader of a much improved Berea team. Bryan and Ajayi are both returning state qualifiers, but have markedly different seasons. Bryan won the CIT and Big 8 and was 2<sup>nd</sup> to Phillips at Brecksville. He could wrestle at 160# (he did so at the Ironman), but seems more comfortable here. Ajayi has just not put it totally together. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Solon (to Abujaradeh who he had beaten in their two previous meetings), 4<sup>th</sup> at North Canton and 3<sup>rd</sup> at Kenston--each time not quite wrestling up to expectations. I've been assured (Will Knight) that he'll soon be in top form. The one to watch is the junior Alexander. A state alternate last year he may be using the same strategy as his older brother. Hang around the periphery of States for a couple of years then explode at Columbus and take away a state title. This might be the year. He is undefeated this year--including a big win over Brankamp to win at Marion Harding--and dominating his opponents. He has not wrestled an overly vigorous schedule, but then I would have said that about his brother last year. By the way what is it with Findlay and upper weight wrestlers? They seem always to produce solid big guys and this year is no exception. Also here is Morrissey who was a district 6<sup>th</sup> and lost to Abujaradeh in the go-to-state bout. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at Solon and 6<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA and this weight class is so crowded it will take even stronger efforts to prosper here. The dark horse candidate hence is the onrushing Brubaker. He has won at Northwood, Sylvania Southview and Toledo St. John never going the full six minutes in any of the finals. I think he'll bump out one of my top four, and, quite possibly, win this district. That's six quality wrestlers and Meek, Fadenholz, Kelly, and very possibly Greene, if he can compete.

While Heflin is a heavy favorite at Perry (and Columbus) Ethan Taylor seems primed for a high state placement. A district champ he was 21-1 going to states last year, but was upset in the first round. He bounced back to finish 7<sup>th</sup>, but I think there was much more possible. This year he won relatively easily at Hudson and the Dies and now sports a perfect 20-0 record. He'll be away from Heflin at Columbus which will be a real positive. State qualifier Hayes has been slowly working his way into the lineup and should be a factor by tournament. Rumors abound that he may try 160#, but it would force Coleman to 152#--not a pleasant process. Houston was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Hudson, but was only 5<sup>th</sup> at Kenston. Still the lean, lanky Maple Hts. star could reach state qualification. A surprise candidate is Moore who wrestles a nearly invisible schedule (for me), but was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Kenston--defeating Ajayi in the process. He had a district win last year. I'm giving Harris, Randolph, and Erb long-shot probabilities here.

The Darby District is very strong. At the moment I see at least six solid contenders for the four berths. Dilley is the centerpiece of this district. He lost to eventual state champ Kline, 5-4, in the district finals. He was a state quarter-finalist losing there to Tomanek, 14-10, before coming back to finish 4<sup>th</sup> (losing to Tomanek, again). I have him winning everything this year--Tiffin, Olentangy, Licking Hts.--usually with ridiculous ease. However, it has not been, in general, a taxing schedule. State qualifier Brankamp has been a consistent placer most recently 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Marion Harding and has solid placement opportunities. Still he'll have to muscle up to get out of this district. State qualifier Tatum has switched schools, but continues to win. State alternate Sabo is up

from 140# (for now) and placed 4<sup>th</sup> at Medina losing to Heflin in the semi-finals. He lost his go-to-state bout last year 16-15 which has to be one of the most heartbreaking kinds of defeats. Ormiston is another of the very fine Teays Valley wrestlers with excellent credentials while Tennant and Rigsby are reasonable long-shots. The one to watch, though, is DeLande. A superior athlete he was 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville losing only to the incomparable Phillips and Georgia state champ Roberts.

Fairfield will probably be the district you'll want to draw into at this weight class. I think state alternate Colin Nickolai is best here finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at GMVWA and giving Mannier a reasonable tussle in the finals. However, he was only 7<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun losing a couple of close bouts. State qualifier Stepp had some close calls but made it to Columbus last year and with a relatively weak field may well do so again. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at the SWOCA and is just returning from injury issues now. Dove lost an overtime thriller to Stepp last year that cost him a state shot. He is extremely successful in the smaller tournament in and around Cincinnati. Franz and Hasselmeyer are two more conventional choices with Godfrey and Kelly possibilities. The surprise here might be Dixon. He was a district 6<sup>th</sup> last year at 189#, but will likely compete here. He did not wrestle at Kenston, but, if in good health, he could be a real threat to everyone at this district. There will be a couple of surprise qualifiers is my best guess.

### 189 #

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: ANDREW TUMLIN (HARRISON)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Lamberg (Kenmore)	14	Weeks (Lancaster)
3	Isley (Sylvania Southview)	15	Porter (Mason)
4	Borgstrom (Middletown)	16	Trautwein (Fremont Ross)
5	Sanders (St. Charles)	17	Robertson (Maple Hts.)
6	Phillips (Massillon Perry)	18	Friend (North Ridgeville)
7	Miller (Centerville)	19	Meadows (Toledo St.John)
8	Cook (Reynoldsburg)	20	Mast (Fairfield)
9	Smugala (Westlake)	21	Gilmore (Teays Valley)
10	Busson (Wadsworth)	22	Powell (Lakota East)
11	Benton (Waite)	23	Seng (Findlay)
12	Bailey (Grveport Madison)	24	Marrone (Parma)
13	Lanigan (Brecksville)	25	Browning (Troy)

Last year I ranked Tumlin, Lamberg, and Isley at the top of this weight class with the result that none of them won--although they did finish 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup>. As it turned out Matt Alexander beat Lamberg and Isley by identical 3-2 scores to complete a mild surprise, though his senior season should have been a portend to the excellence he showed at states.

Somehow, I still retain the disproven belief (it's probably ego) that my ranking wasn't totally incorrect. Tumlin finished at 37-1, his only loss to Isley in the semi-finals, and defeated Lamberg 18-6 for 3<sup>rd</sup>

place after beating the excellent Miller 16-2 in the consolation semi-finals. This year Tumlin again won the SWOCA (but only by a point in the finals), won at Medina (going overtime with Phillips and beating Schafer by two), and at Mayfield. Those close bouts are worrisome, because eventually your luck runs out. Tumlin has been 7<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the last three state meeting, winning his last bout each time. He would like to complete that sequence with a win late Saturday night.

Isley has missed much of the year to this date, returning only last weekend. He'll be the freshest of this trio, but whether that translates to victories is uncertain. Still as a two-time qualifier and the highest returning placer at this weight class he cannot be overlooked as a potential title holder.

Lamberg could have some trouble at Perry. I've been told that Chris Miller will cut to 189# and if comfortable with the weight has solid placement potential. Phillips could provide huge help for Perry's team chances if he can do well at this weight class. Last year he was a district 6<sup>th</sup> losing his go-to-state bout 5-3. This year he was 6<sup>th</sup> at Medina losing to Tumli--and that in overtime. That was such a positive omen and then at the Ohio Duals he lost 3-2 in a critical bout against Wadsworth losing some momentum. That was the week Wadsworth unleashed Caleb Busson, and it was a significant move. Not only did his win over Phillips provide a crucial difference in the semi-finals, but his fall against St. Edward was of critical importance in their two point team margin. He then went on to pin Marrone to win the Searcy and jump way up in the rankings. Two other able contenders are Lanigan --2<sup>nd</sup> at the Dies and 7<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville including a win over Busson-- and the improving Robertson. His brother Erique, of course, won three years ago including a very exciting semifinal over Honeycutt.

Lamberg, still only a junior, looked very different at Brecksville. He was still losing weight with the idea of possibly competing at 171#. That has not yet happened (he was still at 189# at the Dies). But it is a bold initiative--although I'm not sure it enhances his prospects for a state title this year. Lamberg won his first 40 bouts last year before losing that semi-final to Alexander and then finished 4<sup>th</sup>. This year he won handily at Solon, pinning everybody, and Smithville while dominating in a similar manner. However, at Brecksville it was totally different. Looking small for this weight class he had two narrow wins before losing to Mills, 12-8, and finishing 3<sup>rd</sup>. I'm not sure its been decided which way he'll go, but he did win the Dies at this weight class.

Tumlin exits the easiest district. The only possible threats are state qualifiers Borgstrom and Miller (if not at Darby). Borgstrom was a district 3<sup>rd</sup> that included a go-to-state win over Dixon (see 171#), and went 1-2 at Columbus including a 6-5 loss to Miller. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the GMVWA this time defeating Miller in the semi-finals 12-7. Miller was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the GMVWA and 5<sup>th</sup> at North Canton. Then he and Borgstrom met again in Fairfield where Borgstrom prevailed by five once again. He ended up 6<sup>th</sup> at Columbus last year which included a 16-2 loss to Tumlin. I'd place Porter and Powell next in line with Mast, Browning and Inkrott also possible factors.

Isley faces a crowded field at Mentor, but one without a lot of credentials. The top threat out of the two Cleveland sectionals is probably state qualifier Smugala. He made it to Columbus at 215# last year with some solid wrestling, but quickly lost once there. He is planning to move to 189# and, if there, could be a real factor. That is if he wrestles with an aggressive attitude like he did while winning at Hudson rather than the passive performance we saw at North Coast. I think he has more ability than he suspects. Other possibilities from those sectionals include Marrone and Goff. State alternate Benton is the best from the two Toledo sectionals after missing state qualification by two

points last year. He won at Coffman, but failed to place at Brecksville. That may have been an anomaly. District 6<sup>th</sup> place winner Meadows opened the year with a title at Avon Lake at 215#. He then dropped a weight class and then dropped out of sight. If he wrestles he could be a real threat. Trautwein was a state junior high champ two years ago and is now starting to assert himself. He won at Fremont Ross and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Marion Harding, losing to Weeks. Another Findlay big man, David Seng, is down from 215# and has a long-shot chance at this muddled weight class, but a stronger choice might be the onrushing Friend.

There is also significant talent at Darby. Both Cook and Sanders have placed, but I think the latter has the best chance to topple the top three. It could be an instant replay (well, an annual replay) of what happened last year when Alexander wrestled past all three of the top boys. Last year Sanders lost in overtime to Isley in the quarter-finals and eventually ended up 7<sup>th</sup>. This year he won big at Olentangy and the CIT and was a shocking 2<sup>nd</sup> to Dues at Marion Harding. Cook on the other hand has been a little shaky. He was 5<sup>th</sup> at the SWOCA and failed to place at Brecksville. He'll need to turn it around. State alternate Bailey returns and should qualify this year. Most recently he was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Marion Harding, losing for the first time. I also like Weeks who beat the formidable Wittkamp at Tiffin and also triumphed at Liberty. He has made substantial progress this season. Gilmore and Shalash may be other contenders with good opportunities here.

### 215 #

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: ORLANDO SCALES (ELDER)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Smith (Wayne)	15	Wise (Massillon Perry)
3	Nelisse (Elyria)	16	Krimmer (Glen Este)
4	Hayes (Mayfield)	17	Primavera (Darby)
5	Allen (Hamilton)	18	Gordon (Fairfield)
6	Tavanello (Wadsworth)	19	Mulkey (Coffman)
7	Nelson (Groveport Madison)	20	Skinner (Lebanon)
8	Weeks (Marysville)	21	McCormick (Mason)
9	Miller (Fitch)	22	Santana (Lorain Southview)
10	Lawson (Shaker Hts.)	23	Newberry (Kenmore)
11	Green (St. Edward)	24	Knowles (Springfield North)
12	Romine (Xenia)	25	Goff (Cuyahoga Falls)
13	Rose (Centerville)	26	Staebler (Sylvania Southview)
14	Samiljenko (Normandy)	27	Miller (Teays Valley)

Orlando Scales has dominated this weight class for the past year and a half winning 70 bouts in a row. Strong, agile and a terrific thrower he forces the action in directions that favor him. Controlling most of the tie-ups he keeps looking for upper body throws that keep his opponent defensive and moving backward. As the top-ranked high school wrestler at this weight class, he is very confident and has backed that up with wins at Brecksville and the SWOCA. At the latter he had a succession

of first period falls including one against the excellent Allen in the finals. At Brecksville, however, both Pickerel and Hayes kept it close with a defensive strategy that left Scales somewhat frustrated, but he ended up with 4-1 and 6-2 decisions that were not that close. That seems to be the templates for wrestling Scales today--fight off the upper body ties, moving quickly backward when threatened, keep it close, and hope for something good at the end. Scales and Pretty became Elder's first state champions (and third overall) since 1973 when the very talented Dave Shuler took first place at 152.

The one wrestler who could really challenge Scales is the peripatetic Cody Smith. He began his career as a freshman state qualifier for St. Paris Graham at this weight class three years ago. Last season competing for Beavercreek (reported as a football inspired move) he was disqualified in the district final throwing him into the same quarter-bracket as Scales. In a real battle Scales kept his unbeaten streak alive in overtime while Smith quickly won four consolation bouts to finish 3<sup>rd</sup>. Now, as a senior, Smith is at Wayne just beginning to compete. He has missed a substantial part of the season, but he remains as the biggest threat to derail Scales attempt for a second title.

Scales and Smith could come out of the same district or Wayne could opt for Darby in which case they would still be apart by virtue of the seeding mechanism. The Darby District has three solid wrestlers, but the depth is not there so you can anticipate some movement from the Dayton area where there are a flock of contenders. Weeks, now a junior leads the Columbus group after returning from an injury hiatus. He was 3-2 at States last year losing to two time state runner-up Cogar and to Smith while finishing 7<sup>th</sup>. He beat both Lawson and Green in the consolations. Obviously he has just started to compete, but he will be very good. Nelson also qualified, beating Weeks 7-0 for 3<sup>rd</sup>, and until that score is reversed has to be top-rated in Columbus. He won easily at Marion Harding and has not lost since dropping to 215#. Primavera won two district bouts last year and is a solid third best in this area. Miller and, particularly, Mulkey are well within shouting distance of the top trio.

There are five possibilities in the Dayton area with some moving to Darby and others to Fairfield. Smith is, of course, the best, but Romine, whose results I have not seen in some time, is very good. He was the district runner-up to Scales last year and went 1-2 at Columbus being eliminated from the tournament by Smith, 4-0. If he competes he'll be a real threat. Skinner lost 9-6 to Smith at the Fairfield final while Knowles was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Fairfield and 1<sup>st</sup> at Tipp City. Still the wrestler with the best chance of qualifying after Smith and Romine is Rose. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the GMVWA and North Canton, and has wrestled a solid schedule. You may remember him from two years ago wrestling Phillips in the junior high state finals at 176#.

Allen ranks second to Scales in the Cincinnati area, but has had no luck with him in head-to-head bouts. Last year he was the state alternate at 215# after getting pinned late by Scales in the semi-finals. This year he was dominant at the SWOCA until the finals where he was pinned early by Scales. He won at Fairfield pinning the undefeated Gordon in the finals. He could well place in Columbus this year. I like Krimmer next best with a 3<sup>rd</sup> at the SWOCA and a 4<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA. McCormick, a district 6<sup>th</sup> last year is also good, and along with Gordon will be a dangerous foe.

The Mentor District has three returning state qualifiers with Nelisse at the top of my list. He was a state quarter-finalist at 189# last year before losing to Tumlin and failing to place. This year he was a narrow semi-final loser at the Ironman and then defaulting to 6<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup> at North Coast, and 3<sup>rd</sup> at Brecksville--losing only to Pickerel in overtime. About to suit up—perhaps, as early as this week--is

the defending district champion Roman Lawson. Out all year recovering from a football injury he'll have a few weeks to shake off the rust before the tournaments. He went 1-2 in Columbus last year losing a tight 6-5 quarter-final bout to two-time placer Rasha. Green was the district runner-up to Lawson, but failed to score at Columbus. He has had an up-and-down year--failing to place at the Ironman, but finishing a very strong 2<sup>nd</sup> at Medina losing to Houska in the ultimate overtime--and then losing a critical bout to the freshman Tavanello at the Ohio Duals. He is a grinder who must score some state points for Ed's to win their 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive state title. State alternate Samijlenko will try to move up at least one place at the district level after winning at Normandy, finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at Avon Lake, and coming in 3<sup>rd</sup> at North Coast. Other possibilities are Santana and Staebler.

Cody Hayes stands out at Perry. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Brecksville and the Top Gun with some big wins the past three weeks. A state qualifier last year he lost an ultimate overtime thriller in the first round and couldn't bounce back in the consolations. Tavanello is an amazing find. He was a junior high state champion last year, but has been brilliant at 215# as a freshman. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville losing only to Hayes in the tie breaker and narrowly to Nelisse while defeating state qualifier Miller and state placer Pickerel. He was also 1<sup>st</sup> at the Searcy and had three huge wins at the Ohio Duals. Miller had plans to head to 189#, but apparently decided to stay at 215#. He has solid placement potential. He lost one of those ultimate overtime decisions, 6-5, in his state placement bout last year. He was 7<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun losing only to Hayes. I'd rank Wise below Tavanello and Miller with Newberry and Goff a respectful step behind.

## 285

### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: JAMES MEDER (VALLEY FORGE)**

#### Top Contenders

2	Walls (Beavercreek)	16	Brooks (Northmont)
3	Johnson (Brecksville)	17	Stocum (Riverside)
4	Beverly (West Carrollton)	18	Reinold (Coffman)
5	Buzzelli (Wadsworth)	19	Curry (Fairfield)
6	Baker (Sandusky)	20	Oglesbee (Olentangy)
7	Caldwell (Marion Franklin)	21	Ballow (Brunswick)
8	Gladstone (Findlay)	22	Powell (Moeller)
9	Schramm (Central Crossing)	23	Cox (Bowling Green)
10	Laird (Olmsted Falls)	24	Kravic (Garfield Hts)
11	Coher (Barberton)	25	Marrero (Reynoldsburg)
12	Watson (Admiral King)	26	Karageorge (Thomas Worthington)
13	Moss (Fitch)	27	Forfia (Firestone)
14	Bucknell (Twinsburg)	28	Stotter (Shaker Hts)
15	Burton (Lorain Southview)	29	Brading (Troy)

Last year I struggled much of the year finding a viable choice for this title before receiving excellent advice about my eventual choice and winner Josh Kline. This year the problem comes from the other

direction with at least six viable candidates in what is always a volatile weight class. Interestingly three of the possible choices are from the Northeast Districts which has not taken this title since 2002 (Adebesin).

The most crowded district is at Perry. Johnson, the defending district champion was 7<sup>th</sup> last year at Columbus--losing in overtime in the first round to Meder and later getting pinned by Buzzelli. This year he won at the Ironman (beating Buzzelli in the semi-finals) and at Brecksville (majoring Buzzelli in the semis). His only loss was something of a fluke at the Beast of the East. Not an overly huge heavyweight (about 250#) he relies on good mobility and solid technique. Buzzelli, 4<sup>th</sup> last year, will undoubtedly renew his acquaintance with Johnson one more time. As noted he has twice lost to Johnson, but was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Ironman and had all falls at the Ohio Duals. Buzzelli is a very large heavyweight with good athleticism. There is nobody in the field he could not beat. Also returning is state qualifier Bucknell, but he will have to be at the top of his game to qualify again. Moss, Stocum and Coher are all very good and Kravic has had some impressive victories. Factor in Forfia and Ballow and it's quite a list. Bucknell won at Solon beating Stocum by a point while Coher has gone 24-1 this year. Watch out for the newly arriving Moss. He had three district wins last year and battled Buzzelli in a 3-1 loss. Kravic must also be handled with care as he pinned Coher last year.

There is a crowded field at Mentor as well. Meder is 270 pounds of muscle, but has had a topsy-turvy two years. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Ironman last year, but shortly thereafter was injured and was never quite the same. Nonetheless he beat Laird to reach Columbus as a 4<sup>th</sup> place district finisher, upset Johnson in the first round, lost to Baker in the ultimate overtime, and eventually defaulted to 6<sup>th</sup> place. This year, when well ahead (6-0) in the Ironman quarter-finals, he unaccountably threw in the legs, and quickly found himself on his back and pinned. Instead of a clear road to the finals and Johnson (again) the best he could do was his 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish. He was also 3<sup>rd</sup> at Black River losing to Hamilton (who he had previously defeated), but won at Marion Harding beating Gladstone and Neal and winning an OW. He can defeat anyone in the field on a good day. Baker has already proven he can do that --well, almost. Last year Baker entered sectional with 6 losses and garnered a runner-up finish at that venue. He barely defeated Burton in the first round of districts, but then won three more to win the district title. Invigorated he won his first three state bouts before losing to Kline in the finals. It was great. This year he won at Oak Harbor, but lost to Torrence at Norwalk. State qualifier Gladstone was a quarter-finalist last year and knows how to win. He'll have to hold off to Lorain area warriors--Watson and Burton--along with the impressive Laird, who has but one loss this year. He was a district 6<sup>th</sup> last year and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina losing only to Walls. Well coached and strong he is difficult to defeat. Mix in the rapidly improving Cox and Stotter and this is a potent combination. I think Gladstone and Laird get out, but it won't be easy.

While Baker, Meder, Johnson, and Buzzelli lead the northern contingent. Walls and Beverly are best in the south. Walls was a three time placer for Graham (6<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 2<sup>nd</sup>), but transferred to Beaver creek for football (?). Last year he defeated the favored John Hiles in an overtime semi-final struggle and the way to the title looked clear, but Hawkins scored an upset 3-2 win to squelch that opportunity. Ironically, Walls would be a huge favorite in Division II this year with the weakened crop of heavyweights there. This year Walls was 1<sup>st</sup> at the SWOCA and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Medina losing a 1-0 bout to Morosko, but then won again at Beaver creek. This is a very experienced heavyweight wrestler fully aware of the best way to beat bigger, stronger heavyweights. Beverly was 3<sup>rd</sup> last year--losing only to Baker and wrestling less than the regulation time in all five of his victories. He had all falls winning

the GMVWA and is, probably, the strongest pinner in the field. Now both of these teams wrestled in the Darby District this year, but, of course, that lineup changes every year, so it is impossible to know where each will compete at the district level.

At any rate the Columbus area boasts few big men with placement potential this year. Caldwell is a returning state quarter-finalist and leads this group. Reinold is a bit of mystery since he has missed almost of this year. He won two district bouts last year and could be a factor. Schramm was a state alternate last year and should qualify this time around. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Franklin Hts. and 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville losing only to Johnson and Buzzelli. Other possibilities are Karageorge, Oglesbee, and Marrero. Of this trio I like Marrero the best after placing 2<sup>nd</sup> at the SWOCA and 8<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville.

I'm guessing that either Walls or Beverly will head the field at Fairfield. The other three qualifiers are likely to be a step behind as none of the six district placers returned this year. I think Brooks is a possible district finalist after finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> to Beverly at the GMVWA. A 215-pounder last year he brings quickness to the mat. Curry, 2<sup>nd</sup> at Fairfield and Kenston this year, and had two district falls last year. He should also be a top contender at Fairfield that leaves Powell, Brading, and possibly Owen as possible qualifiers. This group will likely struggle against the northern contingent.

## TEAMS

1. St. Edward it's being written that Goliath has been brought to its knees, but can that really be true. St. Edward has won 12 consecutive team titles and 24 in the last 31 years, and has proved very resilient over the years. Not only have they won 12 in a row, but it hasn't been close with an average victory margin of nearly 83 points. Let's look at their assets this year—seven returning state qualifiers including three champions and two other placers, a couple of additional qualifying prospects, and a far easier district, which could mean a couple of extra qualifiers and higher district finishes which translates into better pairings. Palmer, Clark, Sako, Sulzer, and Salupo are all potential finalists, but they need help from Green and Cobos. If VanCurren, Cvetic, or one of the 103's can get out so much the better. Bonus points could decide this contest and with Palmer and Clark leading the way they could win it, as Troy Christian did two years with extra scoring.
2. Massillon Perry No public school has won a Division I team title since the days of Jenkins Codner and Cole and the 1977 Nordonia team. Massillon Perry has a glorious opportunity to write a new chapter in the history of big school wrestling—but do they have enough points. Heflin, Horner, and White should be finalists and rack up big points. Hannan looks like a sure placer, but they'll need lots of help from the freshman, Dailey transfers Foster and Harrison, and Phillips. That's a lot of question marks. They have won the runner-up trophy five of the last six years, and its time to move forward.
3. Wadsworth The state dual meet champs created an enormous stir with their big win. The question remains, however, whether they can win their second team title in history and their first since 1942—when they edged out a fine Shadyside squad. Only the two Squire boys would seem to have finalist potential, although Buzzelli and, maybe, Tavanello could be major surprises. That means Wenger, Gordon, Busson, and the Grays have to really pitch in. It is such a tough district that both Perry and Wadsworth will be hurt by it.
4. St. Ignatius They are not nearly the dual meet team of the top trio, but they have, potentially, four big-time scorers. Habat and Robinson have the look of finalists with DiCamillo looking for a high place and Bryan hoping to score big. If Hoyt and Long can help it'll cement this top four finish for coach Mark Sullivan.
5. Mayfield McNulty and Cody Hayes should be big scorers with Coleman and Cory Hayes potentially piling up some points as well. If Zingale can negotiate that treacherous 103# district and Birr or Carlone get hot they could move up a place.

6. Marysville The trio of Marsh, McCombs, and Weeks can score a lot of points especially with the favorable pairings they should generate as district champs. If they can augment these three high placements with help from people like Wirtz or Bass they'll have solidified this placement.
7. Elyria A team that has the ability to do better than this ranking. Nelisse, Goins, and McHenry are all terrific, but need to be 100% healthy at tourney time. If Churchill or one of the Egnors can score at the state level, it could mean a Top Five finish.
8. Brecksville Lang and Johnson could score 50 points, but increasing that number seems difficult. Baran would have a chance, but he has to get out of that brutal 103# bracket. Maybe, Lanigan or Bucca can help but if they get those 50 points and others falter that could still be Top Five.
9. Moeller A powerhouse team for the last decade fell back a little last year, but still finished 6<sup>th</sup>. This year Harger and Corrill should put up a lot of points with Maserang or Hammer helping. They generally have one "sleeper" who contributes as well.
10. Fitch Is Fitch a Top Ten team or one that falls completely by the wayside. They have a lot of upside with Greco, Miller, and Ague and I wouldn't be surprised if Peterson scores some points and helps their chances.

## Division II

### 103#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: NICK BRASCETTA (GRAHAM)**

#### Top Contenders

2	McGee (Minerva)	14	Tiell (Upper Sandusky)
3	Burkhart (Carrollton)	15	Spangler (Keystone)
4	Langdon (Claymont)	16	Lee (Oakwood)
5	Gould (Lexington)	17	Ramos (Bryan)
6	Graham (West Branch)	18	Thompson (Hubbard)
7	Kazimir (Kenston)	19	Edwards (Greenville)
8	Bertubin (Cambridge)	20	Simpson (Clermont NE)
9	Ward (Goshen)	21	Stainbrook (Streetsboro)
10	Morris (Canton South)	22	McGrath (Hamilton Twp.)
11	Bergman (Oak Harbor)	23	Sidoti (Norwalk)
12	Heavilin (Harrison Central)	24	Broska (Walsh)
13	November (West Geauga)	25	Gerber (Clyde)
		26	Gunter (Coventry)

We will almost surely witness a milestone at this weight class in Columbus. The Division II tournament was begun in 1971 as the number of wrestling schools grew to a point where a split needed to be made. The Northeast District quickly piled up a lead in terms of number of champions, but the Central District always sent a strong contingent of wrestlers. At that time you hoped to draw into someone from the Southwest District. At one point the Central District had provided 24 champions to just 2 for the Southwest. Later that margin increased to a 43 to 18 differential. However, beginning in the 1990's that balance of power shifted. If Brascetta prevails as anticipated, it will give the Southwest District its 71<sup>st</sup> individual title, one more than claimed by the Central District.

Brascetta was 3<sup>rd</sup> last year at this weight class, losing only to state champion Mitch in the semi-finals. His other four victories were all completed in convincing style, including a 10-5 win over Romanchik in the consolation finals. This year he opened with a sensational run at the Ironman, which concluded with a 6-3 win over the nation's number one ranked 103-pounder Mark Grey. He did not have to go six minutes in any bout at the GMVWA and won by technical fall against the highly regarded Gould at the Ohio Duals. As we saw, it was more of the same at the Top Gun with Brascetta totally dominating every opponent. At this moment no serious challenge would seem to exist for him at the Division II (or any other) level.

Some of the top contenders for the spot opposite Brascetta in the finals will emerge from the Firestone District. Foremost, in this group is Cody McGee who was 5<sup>th</sup> last year beating Burkhart 4-2 in that bout. He won this year at Smithville and was 4<sup>th</sup> at the

Top Gun. Sometimes a wrestler's losses can bring him into the foreground quicker than a dozen inauspicious victories. So it is with West Branch newcomer, Dustin Graham – a good name to have this year. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Riverside Rumble, but what caught my eye was that he lost in the final round to Division I third-place finisher, Uland Ralston, by only 4-2. Shortly thereafter he defeated Division II place-winner Burkhart by that same score. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Dies as reality struck back but, clearly, he's a real threat. State qualifier Thompson entered last year's districts with a losing record, dropped his first bout, and then reeled off four straight wins to qualify. He was still at 112# at the Top Gun this year, but I think he'll have to be at this weight class if he wants a return ticket to Columbus – and even that will not be assured here. State alternate Morris was 5<sup>th</sup> at North Canton, but has lost to McGee by five. That's four possibilities, but Graham is inexperienced and Thompson looks possibly vulnerable which could open the door for Kazimir and November. Kazimir lost to Labry, 1-0, in the Solon finals (note Labry defeated Graham by 3), but has been plagued by injury problems. He won two district bouts last year and lost a narrow bout to McGee, 2-0. November beat Harrington to win at Perry and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Kenston after an upset loss. Add in Stainbrook, Broska, and Gunter and this will be an extremely competitive district.

The other strong district is at Heath. Both finalists return at this weight class as does the 4<sup>th</sup> place finisher. Burkhart was the dominating figure winning the finals 11-1 and then going on to place 6<sup>th</sup> in Columbus. This year he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at North Canton and lost the dual to Graham, but has otherwise been very strong. He has finalist potential. Bertubin was the district runner-up and was the center of attention at Value City Arena when he wrestled Dustin Carter in what had to be a difficult first round bout. He beat Thompson in the consolation, but ended one bout from placement. He has been at 112# virtually the entire season, but will compete at this weight class starting with the OVAC. Heavilin, the third returning state qualifier, had a tough draw in Columbus losing to Brascetta and McGee in back-to-back bouts. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Barnesville this year, and should qualify once more. They'll all have to worry about the freshman Langdon (3<sup>rd</sup> at Junior High States), who was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina--and one point from being in the finals—placed at the Top Gun, and was a one point loser to Gray at the Ironman. Only Burkhart and (maybe) Bertubin can go with him here. I don't see much else at this district with Maynard, McGrath, and McGhee possibilities.

There are no returning state qualifiers at Fostoria in a weight class that should be dominated by one wrestler, senior John Gould. The igniter for a wonderful Lexington team that, to outsiders, seemed to emerge overnight, he has real finalist potential. He was at 103# at a sophomore, and, if memory serves, just missed state qualification. Last year he was pushed up to 112# by the arrival of state placer Gambucci, but has now returned to this weight class. He has pretty much crushed everybody, losing only to Brascetta, 21-5, at the Ohio Duals. If nothing else, that defines the gap at this weight class. State alternate Tiell also returns and will battle with folks like Perrysburg and Oak Harbor champ Alex Bergman, Sidoti, and Gerber. Dark horse candidates for state places might be Ramos or Spangler, but no one here, except Gould, will be a major threat at States.

That same conclusion also applies to Goshen. Brascetta is great, but no one else can probably hope for more than a very low place, with the possible exception of the freshman Ward. Highly touted at the onset of the season, he has been very good. He beat GMVWA place winner Edwards 15-3 in their dual meet. Edwards defeated Simpson who won two district bouts last year, while Lee was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Troy and 3<sup>rd</sup> at Bellbrook. This trio will likely battle for the last two state slots.

## 112#

### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: TY MITCH (AURORA)**

#### Top Contenders

2	Jordan (Graham)	15	Beemer (Wapakoneta)
3	Westfall (Perry)	16	Hutchins (Canal Winchester)
4	B.Miller (Defiance)	17	Harting (Kenton Ridge)
5	McLaughlin (Canal Fulton NW)	18	Stevens (Carroll)
6	A. Miller (Beaver Local)	19	Simpson (Salem)
7	Mirman (Padua)	20	Colvin (London)
8	Romanchik (Padua)	21	Brooks (Benedictine)
9	Warner (Claymont)	22	Thurn (Clyde)
10	Stone (Oak Harbor)	23	Hupp (West Branch)
11	Gambucci (Lexington)	24	Johnson (Logan Elm)
12	Wiltshire (Buckeye Local)	25	Webb (Miami Trace)
13	Hayes (Ravenna)	26	Parsons (Licking Valley)
14	Jacobs (Oakwood)		

Moving up from 103# to 112# is very often a treacherous climb. Not only are there weight and strength issues, but age and experience factors (often sophomore versus senior) can play a major role. Since 2000, 23 underclassmen have won state titles at 103#. Of that number only nine repeated as champion the next year, or 39%. However, two of those repeat winners competed at 103# the next year, so that the true percentage of success for those moving up at least one weight class was 7 of 21 – just 33%. That is not to say that some of these 4 non-repeaters did not win state titles later in their careers, but that just 33% did so in the very next year.

Those are the odds that face state champion Ty Mitch (and Sako and Stieber, as well). And, indeed, this weight looks like a remarkably even, three way battle for the top spot giving Mitch about a 33% chance of winning. However, I think the odds may be just a little better than that. He is a strong and resilient wrestler who has proven resourceful in times of crisis. His battles with Johnni DiJulius last year proved he could bounce back from a defeat one weekend and win the next. He also has a canny (if old) coach who is probably worth a point or two on the side of that mat. This year he lost twice to freshmen at the Ironman – once to Squire (by two) and once to Jordan (by one). At Brecksville he was 4<sup>th</sup>, losing a semi-final overtime thriller to Squire and a close consolation battle to Robinson. He could have won any of those early season bouts.

Last year it was just Mitch and DiJulius, no one else was close. This year there will be many more contenders, so those overtime losses will have to be converted into wins. I think that will occur as Mitch will go one up on his grandfather in terms of state titles.

The Jordan family, fathers and sons, have done rather well at state tournaments. I have them at 47-1 including eleven state titles. If they had been a high school, that would rank them 34<sup>th</sup> in Ohio history. Isaac Jordan will surely add to that total – the question is whether it will begin this year. A Junior High State champion last year, he failed to place at that brutal Ironman weight class, but did defeat Mitch. And, besides, that was his first weekend of varsity experience (just for the record David Taylor also lost his first varsity weekend). Since then he has crushed everyone, winning the GMVWA with huge scores and defeating Westfall, 7-1, at the Ohio Duals. He is getting ever more comfortable on the mat and that is not a good sign for his opponents. Mitch will want to meet him late on Saturday when he could have a size advantage.

The third primary contender for the state title is Nate Westfall. It seems that he has been with us for a decade and this is, indeed, his senior season. He is a three-time state placer and two-time state semi-finalist who has always drawn tough foes in his career. Last year he beat A. Miller and B. Miller in the first two rounds at this weight class, but, unfortunately, there was no C. Miller in the semi-finals only D. Taylor. With well over 100 career wins Westfall will exit the same district as Mitch. They should then be apart at Columbus and should Jordan draw into Mitch it would give Westfall a great shot at wrestling Saturday night.

Mitch and Westfall are part of a district weight class at Firestone that has four state placers and very little else. McLaughlin is a two time state qualifier who cashed in last year with a 7<sup>th</sup> place finish. This year he was at 119# for the longest time, but finally moved down for the Dies. Matched up against a representative field he took the title beating Mirman, 6-5. He should place again this year. The fourth state placer is Hayes, who was 4<sup>th</sup> two years ago for CVCA. I saw him at Solon, but he was injured at that meet and has not yet reappeared. He seems problematical at this district. If so, the fourth slot is wide open with Simpson, Hupp, and Brooks possible contenders.

Jordan faces a field that is a clear step below him at Goshen. Stevens was the district runner-up last year at 103# before losing by technical fall in the finals. He won three bouts at States to finish a solid 7<sup>th</sup>. This year he was also 7<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA, but met Jordan (who must have not been seeded) in the second round and lost 12-4. Jacobs was a state alternate last year, while Harting was a district quarter finalist. Both have improved. Harting was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Troy and 6<sup>th</sup> at GMVWA, beating Stevens, 11-3, in a consolation bout. Jacob was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Bellbrook and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Troy ahead of Harting. This suggests both may have passed Stevens. Johnson has been a finalist in at least three tournaments and seems best from the southeast. Webb, also from that area, may also get in the picture.

The deepest strongest district is undoubtedly at Fostoria. There are two state placers, two state qualifiers, with at least four other first wrestlers in the mix. It is from this group

of district qualifiers that upsets may be hatched. Also part of the forecasting problem is that two or three of these wrestlers are still deciding whether to wrestle here or at 119#. For purposes of clarity I've placed Cook and Schneider at 119# since they have been there all year and I have no definitive evidence they'll be down at this weight class. Also remember that this district is fed by three northwest sectionals and one northeast sectional.

In this case, I think two of the better wrestlers are both from the northeast sectional. Romanchik was the district champ at 103# last year beating Gambucci in the finals 12-2. He was a state semi-finalist before losing to DiJulius and Brascetta and finishing 4<sup>th</sup>. This year he was 5<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville losing only to Squire and Robinson. He did, however, have a disappointing CIT. Mirman was a district semi-finalist, but had to forfeit his second day bouts. This year he was just recently a one-point loser to McLaughlin in the Dies final. Gambucci was 8<sup>th</sup> last year and has spent much of the year at 119#. He won at Coffman and the Gorman, and should qualify once more. It looks like Stone, a state qualifier two years ago, will represent Oak Harbor at this class instead of Cramer. He won at 119# at Oak Harbor and placed at Medina and has the experience and talent to be good at this lower weight class. That's four excellent wrestlers, but it ignores the returning district champion at this weight, B. J. Miller. He had very little trouble winning here in 2008 and went to States with a 42-0 record. A quarterfinal loss by major decision put him into the consolations where he finished 8<sup>th</sup>. I do worry about his relatively weak schedule. Add in Beemer and Thurn and this is an outstanding district weight class.

Most of the best wrestlers at Heath will be from along the river. The only returning state qualifier is Arizona Miller who went 1-2 off a tough draw that saw him open with three-time placer Westfall and close with state runner-up Inghram. He'll improve on last year's district 3<sup>rd</sup> by winning this year and, in all likelihood, find himself with a far more generous bracket. His big win was over Division I stalwart Inchaurregui, 7-3, at Southview. State alternate Wiltshire could be the other district finalist. He was a solid 3<sup>rd</sup> at North Coast and 1<sup>st</sup> at Steubenville, where he beat Division III placer Reed. Challenging him will be the second of the great Claymont freshmen, Kyle Warner. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Junior High States last year, losing to Bo Jordan in the finals. This year he won three bouts at the Ironman losing to Sako and Squire, was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina losing in overtime, and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun, losing this time to Isaac Jordan 16-6. He has already passed Wiltshire, but Miller is still slightly ahead of him. Hutchins looks like the favorite for the fourth berth with Colvin and Parsons other viable candidates.

**119#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: JOHNNI DIJULIUS (WALSH)**

Top Contenders

2	Inghram (University School)	15	Foster (East Liverpool)
3	Neff (Miami Trace)	16	Cramer (Oak Harbor)
4	Minnard (Fairfield Union)	17	Hoopes (West Branch)
5	Jones (Licking Hts.)	18	Warner (Greenville)
6	Worthington (Shelby)	19	Schneider (Tiffin)
7	Perez (Wauseon)	20	Seldenright (New Philadelphia)
8	Kegley (Graham)	21	Kissinger (West Holmes)
9	DaFonseca (Padua)	22	Nelson (Carroll)
10	Cook (Toledo Central Catholic)	23	Greenlee (Circleville)
11	Brown (Tallmadge)	24	Hughes (Utica)
12	Brunk (Elida)	25	Oberholtzer (Ravenna)
13	McGovern (DeSales)	26	Leonetti (West Geauga)
14	Smith (Kenston)	27	Hochwalt (Oakwood)

This is one of those rare weight classes where a Graham wrestler is not in the top tier of wrestlers (although Kegley looks to have placement potential). I mention that in the context that four different Graham wrestlers have won this weight class in the past four years (Jordan, Hart, Longstreath and Neibert). I'm not sure that has ever happened before. At any rate the top four contenders all have outstanding credentials in what should shape up as an intense struggle.

DiJulius had an exceptional freshman year at 103#, losing in overtime in the state finals to a rival he had beaten the previous weekend. He cranked out 48 victories and (with Mitch) dominated the 103# class. He missed the earlier part of the season, but looked terrific at Brecksville while beating Kovach in the finals. He is a big 119-pounder and his added strength is impressive.

With DiJulius at Firestone is two-time placer James Inghram, 2<sup>nd</sup> two years ago to Taylor and 3<sup>rd</sup> last year after losing to Neff in the quarterfinals. He was a semi-finalist at the Ironman, losing by two, and then finishing 3<sup>rd</sup>. In the third week of the season he won handily at North Canton and was at the top of my pre-Christmas list for this weight class. However, he suffered a dislocated knee at Brecksville and that will set him back, perhaps, even prevent his participation in the state tournament process. However, if fully healthy he could easily win it all.

Neff faked me out last year. He spent most of the season at 125# and then dropped two weight classes to 112# at tournament time. It seemed to work as he finished 3<sup>rd</sup> at districts (losing to Taylor), and then won his first three state bouts including a four-point win over Inghram and a semi-final fall over Minnard. Of course, Taylor was there for the finals to snuff out any hops of a state title. This year Neff has followed the same plot line wrestling at 130#, but will compete at this class in February and March. He, too,

had injury issues (what is it with these 119's) and defaulted out of Brecksville without placing. He'll be a real load at this weight class.

Minnard is also a two-time placer (3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>) who dominates in the southeast part of the state. He defeated Neff in overtime at last year's sectional, but then fell victim to that third period fall in last year's state semi-finals. If he has lost this year I am unaware of it, and that could be a problem. His schedule does not measure up to what the other three must confront.

The pairings will be interesting. If Neff wins his district he will be away from either DiJulius or Inghram – whichever one wins that Firestone District. Should Minnard win then the seeding process will not be employed.

DiJulius and Inghram are both at Firestone, leaving only two spots (if Inghram is healthy) for everybody else. I think there are four logical contenders with one long shot. The two favorites have to be Brown and Smith. Brown won at Aurora and now at the Dies in impressive fashion, while Smith is a whirlwind and one of the most entertaining wrestlers I've seen this year. He goes for the fall as hard and as long as he can. At Hudson he was beating Polley, 14-12, when he got pinned, but then reversed that result two weeks later. Hoopes and Oberholtzer both have district experience and know how to win. Leonetti, winner at Perry, is my long-shot threat here.

Again Neff and Minnard are both terrific and that leaves only two openings for all the rest. I think Kegley snags one of those. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> to Mirman at the Midwest Classic, 14-12, and won the GMVWA over admittedly not the strongest of fields. He defeated Gambucci at the Ohio Duals, but twice lost narrowly at the Top Gun – once to Brunk. That doesn't leave much margin for error for the rest of the contenders. I think Warner and Nelson battle it out with state qualifier Greenlee and Hochwalt probably doomed to disappointment.

I could very well have enumerated at the beginning of this essay five great contenders and, perhaps, rightfully included Chandler Jones. He is a two-time Division III placer and has qualified three times. He lost two one-point decisions last year while failing to place for the first time at States. This year he has won what seems like a myriad of small tournaments, however he was most impressive getting 2<sup>nd</sup> at Medina, beating both Stone and Hannan in overtime before losing to state champion Sako. Quite honestly the rest of this district is pretty ordinary. State qualifier McGovern brightens it up a bit. He was 5<sup>th</sup> at the CIT and 8<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville, losing to Cook and Perez. District semi-finalist Foster is certainly a strong possibility, but that last state ticket is really available. The Smithville finalists Seldenright and Kissinger are both good, while Hughes has been an oft times tournament finalist.

As is so often the case at these lower weights, the Fostoria District has great depth, but few with finalist potential – and so it is at 119#. Five state qualifiers are here, along with a state alternate and two other potential qualifiers. Those five state qualifiers were 2-10 in Columbus last year so there is room for improvement on the last weekend of the

season. Trying to parse this out I'm putting Worthington at the top after a district 3<sup>rd</sup> last year and tourney wins all through the midlands of Ohio. Perez was the district runner-up at this weight class and won at Northwood. I wonder if his weak schedule will end up biting him. DaFonseca was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Brecksville and the CIT over Cook. He might be a district finalist. Cook is right there, certainly in the qualifying circle as of now. One to watch is Brunk who won at Tiffin and was 5<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun. He looks like the type of wrestler primed to pull off the big upset. He won two district bouts last year. That leaves state qualifier Cramer and state alternate Schneider outside the qualifying circle, but not by much.

### 125#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: ZACH NEIBERT (GRAHAM)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Skonieczny (Walsh)	14	Holy (Lake Catholic)
3	Garringer (Miami Trace)	15	Brower (Bellbrook)
4	Fickel (Padua)	16	Hile/DeVito (Lexington)
5	Lynch (Napoleon)	17	Beemer (Bath)
6	Morris (Ravenna Southeast)	18	DeLorge (Avon)
7	Alsip (Norwood)	19	Van Dyne (Cambridge)
8	Rininger (Highland)	20	Overholt (West Holmes)
9	Risdon (Harrison Central)	21	Quisenberry (Kenton Ridge)
10	McGraw (Fairless)	22	Wilson (Valley View)
11	Kazimir (Kenston)	23	Monebrake (Eaton)
12	Cohen (Granville)	24	Scavuzzo (Revere)
13	Troyer (Elida)	25	Campbell (Marlington)
		26	Townsend (Hamilton Twp.)_

Defending state champion Zach Neibert has to be the heavy favorite at this weight class, although there may be slender upset possibilities for some of the top contenders. I thought Neibert looked terrific at the Ironman, especially in the finals where he was the more aggressive wrestler, keeping White on his heels most of the bout. I, frankly, thought he deserved a victory for that effort. He crushed everybody at the GMVWA, and only Rininger gave him any kind of resistance at the Ohio Duals. At the Top Gun he pinned Skonieczny in 89 seconds and had little trouble with anyone else. This is not unexpected. Neibert is a three-time placer who was 2<sup>nd</sup> two years ago to Garbrandt and then pinned him in last year's finals at 119#. Neibert has needed to be tough. After all he had to defeat the defending state champ at this weight class – Tucker Armstrong – just to make the team. Graham has won this weight class five of the last six years with some of their brightest lights, Schlatter, Doggett, and Jordan, included in that list. Neibert will be a worthy addition.

Neibert heads an excellent field at Goshen. Garringer is a three-time state placer (6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>) and in many years would probably be a favorite for the state title. He has placed

at the first three weight classes, and has been knocked out of the championship round all three years by Kyle Gilchrist – twice in the first round, once in the second. It is an almost unbelievable coincidence that they would be paired that closely together for three consecutive meets. Mercifully, Gilchrist graduated and the pairings should be far better since he should be away from Neibert. Incidentally, Garringer has one of the most ferocious facial expressions as he competes. It has to be worth the first takedown alone. Alsip placed 8<sup>th</sup> last year and put up a 50 win season for Norwood. He has solid placement potential, but lost to both Neibert and Garringer last year. State qualifier Brower has to be the favorite for the last state ticket. He was 5<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA, but lost to Alsip, 10-3, in the Bellbrook final. District placer Quisenberry might be the most likely candidate to upset one of this top quartet with Wilson and Monebrake also in the picture.

There are two exceptional freshmen at this weight class, both with placement potential and one with possible finalist opportunities. That latter wrestler is Nate Skonieczny, and it would not be a major surprise to see him across the mat from Neibert on the first Saturday night in March. He was a State Junior High champ last year and second to Ian Miller the year before, and has stepped right into the Walsh lineup. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Brecksville after beating Reynolds and Garringer, but then losing the finals bout when he was probably the better boy that particular night. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Top Gun, beating Garringer again, but this time only by a point, before losing to Neibert on a quick fall. Brother Chase won a state title, but I think this boy will better that. State placer Shelton Morris is a pretty tough boy to track down. Last year he moved over to CVCA and was a state semi-finalist, losing to two-time champ Sergeant 5-3 and finishing 4<sup>th</sup>. This year he has just started competing for Ravenna Southeast and I expect to find him (eventually) at this weight class. He's very good and Skonieczny will have to be in top form to win. McGraw was a state alternate last year and should reach Columbus this year. He has lost some close bouts during the year, but I think he'll squeeze into the top four here. It would help if Morris stayed at 130#. District semi-finalist Kazimir would be the favorite, if healthy, with Holy, Scavuzzo and, maybe, Campbell in the mix. Watch out for Holy who could be real surprise.

The other great freshman is Brent Fickel, who was 2<sup>nd</sup> last year at the Junior High States to Skonieczny. He started off with a bang at the Ironman beating a three-time Georgia state champ the opening night. Unfortunately, reality took hold and he did not place. He was 5<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville, defeating a number of excellent wrestlers (Reynolds, McIntire, etc.), but losing twice to Garringer. At the CIT he was 2<sup>nd</sup> to Hammer by a point. He will face stiff competition at the Fostoria District. Lynch, Rininger, and Beemer are all returning state qualifiers, with Lynch also a defending district champ. Each has crafted a solid season and should again return to Columbus. However, Hile, a state alternate last year, may be the wild card here. He won the Gorman at 130#, but is now at 125#. He is a scorer with real upset potential. Should he move back to 130# then former state qualifier DeVito would play a similar role. Also very strong is Troyer, a semi-finalist at the Top Gun who finished 4<sup>th</sup>. He was impressive at Tiffin and cannot be overlooked. DeLorge, a transfer from St. Edward, is also very good and could catch

one of the top kids by surprise. This will be a wild competition and we haven't even talked about Crozier (Clear Fork), Liechty (Fairview Park), or Hackworth (Oak Harbor).

Heath is by far the weakest of the districts. Risdon did place 7<sup>th</sup> last year and is top rated in that Eastern District. I think Cohen is probably next best, winning at Licking County and Coshocton. Van Dyne and Overholt are possible qualifiers, with Townsend also a reasonable choice. I think we'll see some surprises here, possibly from some of the younger wrestlers.

### 130#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: FELIPE MARTINEZ (GRAHAM)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Vaughan (DeSales)	14	Lawler (University School)
3	Strausbaugh (Orrville)	15	Katich (Louisville)
4	Nakama (Big Walnut)	16	Frey (Wauseon)
5	Knotek (Walsh)	17	Plavka (Carrollton)
6	Hile/DeVito (Lexington)	18	Santoferraro (Hoban)
7	Storts (Springfield Shawnee)	19	Taylor (Elyria Catholic)
8	Wolfe (Licking Hts.)	20	Rose (New Richmond)
9	DiFrancesco (Avon)	21	Numbers (Kenton Ridge)
10	Duckett (Toledo Central Catholic)	22	Bryant (Rossford)
11	Mellinger (West Branch)	23	Warren (Maumee)
12	Hupp (Marietta)	24	Kooser (Oakwood)
13	Mahoney (Rocky River)	25	Dennis (McNicholas)
		26	Kaufman (New Albany)

They say that when the great concert violinist Paganini performed in his twenties he played so rapidly that audience members swore they saw an ethereal presence next to him (angel or demon) helping him move at superhuman speed. Somehow you get that same feeling watching that acrobatic whirlwind named Felipe Martinez wrestle. All of that was on display at the Ironman. He defeated two excellent out-of-state wrestlers – Kelly and Garafolo – in early rounds, but then met the number one ranked wrestler in the nation, Tony Ramos, in the semi-finals. The key moment occurred when Martinez hit a rapid-fire double leg, converted it into a bear hug, and threw Ramos for five points, and the eventual win. He lost to the long and slithery Villalonga in the finals, but this tournament cemented his top tier placement as a freshman – not that there was really any doubt. He was a three-time junior high champ, and I remember Jeff Jordan telling me that he had a fifth grader that could go with his varsity lightweights. Martinez rolled through the Ohio Duals and won at the GMVWA, crushing everyone until the final round. Then state runner-up Shawn Fayette provided a template for competing with Martinez, wrestle a defensive, down tempo style and try to make it a one move bout. The question is can any Division II wrestler execute such a plan and the answer might be.....

Jake Vaughn was my choice last year, but failed to place. I wondered about the unnecessary (?) cut to 125# and whether that impacted his first round performance. At any rate he went 1-2 at Columbus after a solid regular season. This year, again, I thought he looked great at Brecksville, losing only to Tessari by a point and majoring Davis for 3<sup>rd</sup>. A state placer his first two years of high school, he has finalist potential again this year.

Martinez should have little trouble at Goshen. Storts, a state qualifier two years ago at 103#, was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Olentangy and 1<sup>st</sup> at Troy. He has good qualification chances, but will be no match for Martiez. State qualifier Hupp, if healthy and if at this weight class, has district finalist potential. He has a solid foundation of fundamentals, but has missed time due to injury and does not wrestle a strong schedule. That leaves GMVWA placer Numbers, Rose, and Kooser in a good position to get to Columbus. Certainly one other possibility is Dennis, winner at Franklin.

In a perfect world Cody Garbrandt would be healthy and fit for tournament action. He was a freshman state champ two years ago (over Neibert) and 2<sup>nd</sup> last year (to Neibert), and one of the more exciting wrestlers in the state--the author of that dramatic comeback over Gilchrist. Picture him battling Vaughan at districts, or even better, matching athleticism and speed with Martinez. Not happening now, maybe next year. Two-time state qualifier Nakama will have to do as Vaughan's biggest obstacle. Vaughan defeated him, 5-4, in last year's district semi-finals and then Nakama went 1-2 at States. He won up a weight class at Olentangy defeating Languis for a most impressive win. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Marion Harding, losing to Jordan Palmer (Lance and Collin's brother), giving him his only defeat of the year. State alternate Wolfe is back, a finalist this year in at least three tournaments, he should qualify. Nakama sent him to a 5<sup>th</sup> place bout last year with a second period fall. Plavka, if healthy, has had substantial district experience, and could finally make it to States. I don't see anything along the river.

This is one of the few times where there is little depth at Firestone. State placer Strausbaugh is up three weight classes, but is well situated at this level. He has been 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> the last two years, and with a little luck and a hot weekend (get Vaughn and Martinez on the other side of the bracket) he could be a finalist. This year he won at Smithville, beat Mattingly in a dual meet, and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun after losing to Martinez by technical fall. Knotek was a state quarter-finalist last year before losing a 9-8 thriller to Baxter and failing to place. He has had an "up-and-down" career, but has real talent. He should place in this his last attempt. I think Mellinger and Lawler are next best. The first named was a district 6<sup>th</sup> last year, losing to Ford in the go-to-state bout. This year he won at Riverside and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Dies to Dalton, losing by 7. Lawler was a junior high state champ two years ago and then spent a year at St. Ignatius before moving to University School. He hasn't quite put it together, but the talent is there. He hasn't placed in any tournament this year so this is a very speculative ranking. Still he has had tough draws and keeps losing to good people by

very respectable scores. I also like Katich and Santoferraro in a district weight class that is not overly demanding.

The depth is at Fostoria. However, it's the kind of depth where we have ten wrestlers clawing for the four state berths, but none of them have much more than low placement potential. State qualifier DeVito (or Hile) along with state alternate DiFrancesco, might be said to be the top of this large contingent, but it is all very close. Duckett was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the CIT to Vaughan, while Mahoney and Frey have good district pedigrees. Taylor also was a CIT semi-finalist. Bryant and Warren are possibilities. Somehow it will all get sorted out in two frantic days the last weekend of February.

### 135#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: DAVID TAYLOR (GRAHAM)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Miller (Oak Harbor)	15	Berger (Cambridge)
3	Maiwurm (Orrville)	16	Schlegel (Maumee)
4	Henline (Coventry)	17	Ritchey (Big Walnut)
5	Cintron (Alliance)	18	Barnett (Sheridan)
6	Skonieczny (Walsh)	19	Bolton (Bellbrook)
7	Eaton (Eastwood)	20	Tomayko (Copley)
8	Rosch (Canal Winchester)	21	Kardasz (Lexington)
9	Shaw (Minerva)	22	Unger (Ross)
10	Hefner (Lima Bath)	23	Bartrug (Buckeye Local)
11	Zappitella (Conneaut)	24	Iachini (Steubenville)
12	Jacobs (West Holmes)	25	Montana (Norwalk)
13	Combs (Bryan)	26	Seldenright (New Philadelphia)
14	Gresham (Goshen)	27	Land (Valley View)

When I was in school I can remember taking the bus downtown to the Cleveland Public Library and poring through the old newspaper files for wrestling results. It didn't take long to calculate that Cleveland West had produced the most state champions. Eventually the great Maple Heights dynasty claimed that mark and held it until St. Edward put up numbers that could not be matched. Still, Maple Heights held on to second place with 46 individual titles. However, it will be just about at this weight class when St. Paris Graham takes over the second spot (depending, of course, on the battles at the lower weight classes). If this is, indeed the timing, then who better to set the mark than the incomparable David Taylor. One of the most accomplished youth wrestlers in history he has tacked on to that legacy with three junior high titles, four state titles and four Ironman titles (the only one to do so). He'll beat Palmer by one weight class to become our first seven-time champion, but he has accomplished so much more. It could be argued (and convincingly) that he was the best little guy in Ohio history, but now he's getting much bigger. He is a marvelous takedown wrestler, but he is even better on top. Riding had kind of gone out of style in Ohio, but Taylor has

proven how important it can be. He will be Graham's third four-time champ, the most of any school (and I'm not even giving a half credit apiece for the Schlatter brothers). Yet in a few years when experts look back to identify the ten or so best Ohio wrestlers in history I'm sure Taylor will make that cut.

While Taylor is clearly the best wrestler at this weight class, his district is (not so coincidentally) the weakest. I see no other returning state qualifiers, but a pair of state alternates has the inside track to Columbus. If your goal is to be a state qualifier or state placer and standing tallest on the podium doesn't figure in your plans, this is a good district weight class to select. At any rate, Unger and Barnett were both one bout from States last year and should make it this year. Barnett has wrestled at several weights, most recently finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> to Block at Sheridan. I think he'll end up here. Unger won at Franklin and is an experienced senior. The touted freshman Gresham is also here and should qualify. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at last year's Junior High States in the same weight class as Skonieczny and Fickel. I also like Bolton a lot and think he'll get to Columbus – maybe at the expense of Unger. That leaves Land as a long shot.

Ian Miller apparently had not heard that Taylor is unbeatable. The Oak Harbor sophomore had Taylor on his back at the Ironman and was winning well into the third period before losing 13-9 (see the *Amateur Wrestling News* description). It was the sensation of the tournament. Miller then lost in the tangle of consolations and did not place. Miller was a State Junior High champ two years ago (beating Skonieczny). He took the title at Medina this year beating Mattingly early and won handily at Oak Harbor. He also won at Perrysburg nipping the excellent Rojas, 3-2. State qualifiers Eaton and Hefner are here, neither should directly challenge Miller. Neither won a bout at Columbus, but that should change this year. State alternate Combs was a district semi-finalist last year, but could go no further. He is back at the same weight class. I believe Schlegel, Kardasz, and Montana are the top backups to the four already mentioned.

Easily the best weight class is at Firestone. There are six wrestlers strong enough to qualify or even place. I would not be surprised to see one or two of this group migrate to 140#. Maiwurm is one of those wrestlers who can beat almost anyone on a given day, but is also able to lose to unlikely opponents on that same day. Last year at the state meet he was on a hot streak. He beat two-time state place winner and favorite Brian Stephens in the first round in overtime, decisioned Rosch, and then lost a 9-8 thriller to Hightower in the semi-finals. The next day he was back in action defeating Melillo and state runner-up Severance, 12-11, to finish 3<sup>rd</sup>. He won at Smithville, but was pinned in the finals at North Canton. He looked very good at the Top Gun, finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> to Taylor. He could be 2<sup>nd</sup> or not place at all. The big plus for Maiwurm is that if he wins the district he will be seeded away from Taylor. Should that happen then, of course, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place finishers will be in the same half bracket as Taylor – in fact, one in his quarter bracket. Henline was 5<sup>th</sup> last year, losing twice to Severance. He was 1<sup>st</sup> at North Coast and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Dies at 140# (a trial balloon?) and has a very vocal cheering section. Cintron was state semi-finalist last year, losing a narrow decision and falling to 5<sup>th</sup>. He was a semi-finalist at the Top Gun, losing to Maiwurm, 6-4. This is an imposing threesome, but there is another trio just barely below this first bunch. Shaw

was a district semi-finalist last year and lost his go-to-state bout to Henline, 5-4. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> to Maiwurm at Smithville and beat Combs to win at Toledo St. John. Zappitella wrestles an unusual schedule, but won big at Riverside over Range. He won two district bouts last year until Maiwurm put him out. The “ringer” in this weight class is Nick Skonieczny. He, too, was a junior high state champ last year and has begun to fulfill that promise in his freshman year. He was the only one to give Georgia champ Lazor a battle at Brecksville, but had a tough Top Gun, losing to both Cintron and Shaw by a 1-0 score. He gets a little more offense and he’ll be even tougher to defeat. Tomayko could also be a factor here.

The district at Heath has suddenly gotten stronger with the addition of Rosch. A state quarterfinalist last year he lost to Maiwurm and Henline and failed to place. He has won a number of small tournaments at 145# and 140#, and was 5<sup>th</sup> at Medina defeating McKee. I think the three next best are state qualifiers Jacobs and Berger and state alternate Richey. This group can really aspire to no more than a low place, however. Berger had an excellent district, but was overmatched at the state level last year, losing his two bouts by a combined 36-5 score. Jacobs was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun and beat Cintron in the consolations. I’m thinking, maybe, Iachini is the next solid possibility with Bartrug, Seldenright and Strayer (Hebron Lakewood) as possibilities.

### 140#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: HARRISON HIGHTOWER (UNIVERSITY SCHOOL)**

##### Top Contenders

2	M. Stephens (Graham)	14	Schaffer (Roger Bacon)
3	Leek (Howland)	15	Ramsey (Canal Winchester)
4	Ice (Beaver Local)	16	Budka (Vermillion)
5	McKee (Highland)	17	Severino (Edgewood)
6	Beemer (Wapakoneta)	18	McGinnis (Bath)
7	Fraley (Streetsboro)	19	Beauch (Toledo Central Catholic)
8	Moeglin (New Lexington)	20	Gierhart (Amanda Clearcreek)
9	Conrad (Ross)	21	Armstrong (Miami Trace)
10	Slaga (Buckeye Local)	22	Loxterman (Perry)
11	Klosz (Holy Name)	23	Walker (Goshen)
12	Newell (Kenston)	24	Picklesimon (Alder)
13	Willis (Carroll)	25	Harble (Licking Valley)

One of the wrestlers who made enormous improvement last year was the then sophomore Harrison Hightower. He just seemed to make quantum-like improvements every couple of weeks. It paid off at year’s end with sectional, district, and state titles. At Columbus Hightower had two quick first period falls and then outlasted the powerful Maiwurm, 9-8, in the semi-finals. It was not close in the finals as Hightower defeated the 53-0 Sean Collins by five points. Now a junior, Hightower began the year at 145#

and failing to place at the Ironman. He won at North Canton beating the excellent Cline 4-3 in the finals. He dropped to 140# and looked great pinning Sasfy in the finals. Then at the Top Gun, after this paragraph was already written, he pinned Stephens to cement his ranking at this weight class. There are some substantial obstacles in his path, but Hightower has to be the favorite and become University School's first two-time state champ.

One of the obstacles will be the sophomore Matt Stephens. He was a sectional and district 140# champ last year, but then lost his first round state bout in overtime. He bounced back with four consolation wins to take 4<sup>th</sup> place. This year, like Hightower, he failed to place at the Ironman losing to Palmer early. He won at the GMVWA, but had an upset loss to McKee at the Ohio Duals. I'm not sure he has been quite as sharp as expected, but one can expect that will be corrected by February.

The other major contender will be state runner-up Leek. He had an amazing two weeks last year. He lost in the first round of districts and got tangled up in the consolation rounds. He then won four consolation bouts including a 1-0 victory over Kostandaras in his go-to-state bout before bowing to Knotek and finishing 4<sup>th</sup>. Then at Columbus he upset my pick Vaughan, 9-6, in the first round and won twice more before losing to Armstrong in the 125-pound finals. I saw him at Hudson (which he won) at 140# and it's clear he could make 135#, but where is the reward. At best (if he won that brutal district) he would be seeded away from Taylor. He has already been 2<sup>nd</sup>. His best chance of taking the title is here.

Harrison and Leek already have their names engraved on two state tickets not leaving much for everyone else. I think Fraley is probably next best at Firststone. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Hudson, 1<sup>st</sup> at Kenston, and 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun, losing to Peterson and Hightower. State alternate Newell is next in line after a great district last year that put him one bout from Columbus. However, he has missed a big part of the season returning only recently. I'm not seeing much else – maybe a Severino or a Loxterman. What I expect is that some of the 135's will move up.

The crew at Fostoria at this weight class is not overladen with fine credentials. McKee might just be the best choice here. He defeated Stephens, 8-6, at the Ohio Duals, and was 1<sup>st</sup> at North Canton over Yetzer. However he was only 6<sup>th</sup> at the MIT and defaulted to that same position at the Dies after losing 1-0 to McCormick in the semi-finals. He, obviously, can get the big win, but not always. State qualifier Beemer went 1-2 at Columbus, but was most recently 4<sup>th</sup> at Wapakoneta. He seems to wrestle at his best late in the year. I have few answers after this duo. I like the young Klosz who was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Junior High States last year. He won at Avon Lake and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the CIT. Beauch and Leis are two possibilities from the far west, while Budka and McGinnis are long shots.

Stephens should have little trouble at Goshen. Moeglin was 8<sup>th</sup> last year after rebounding from a first round district loss just to qualify. He failed to place at Medina, but part of that might have occurred because it was his first time down at weight – and

the loss to McGrain was only 1-0. Schaffer was 6<sup>th</sup> at the SWOCA, but failed to place at the CIT, losing to Klosz. I think Conrad has gone past both of this duo. A district semi-finalist last year, he was pinned by Meyer in 46 seconds and forfeited his last two bouts. Willis, 4<sup>th</sup> at the CIT, Armstrong, and Walker are my other top contenders at this district.

There should be at least two placers out of Heath. Ice was a big surprise, at least to me last year. He crushed all opposition at his district last year looking nothing like a young sophomore. He then won his first two bouts at states before Riedy and Stephens (by 4-2 margin) pushed him to 5<sup>th</sup> place. He has been just as good this year and is the best at this weight class in the east. I saw Slaga at North Coast and he is physical and strong as he won handily. He also won at Steubenville pinning Hogley, and is second ranked along the river. The powerful Ramsey has moved down from 145#. He won several smaller tourneys early in the year, and could be a real surprise. Gierhart might be a possibility with Picklesimon having two district wins last year also in the picture.

### 145#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: BRIAN STEPHENS (GRAHAM)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Witt (Oak Harbor)	16	Williams (Wyoming)
3	Fondale (New Lexington)	17	Burrows (Lexington)
4	Fee (Lake Catholic)	18	Ryba (Crestwood)
5	Mullins (Perry)	19	Renner (New Philadelphia)
6	Dulaney (Whitehall)	20	McKenzie (Carroll)
7	Gresock (Highland)	21	Johnson (Morgan)
8	Johnson (Maumee)	22	Bihun (Revere)
9	Massillo (Van Wert)	23	Fraley (Miami Trace)
10	Fry (River View)	24	Rogel (West Branch)
11	Roddy (University School)	25	Banks (Harrison Central)
12	Redden (Washington CH)	26	Habash (Copley)
13	Stout (Buckeye Valley)	27	Bays (Gallia)
14	Wagenhauser (Defiance)	28	El-Tatawy (Toledo Central Catholic)
15	Disbennet (Bethel Tate)	29	Eby (Valley View)

My guess is that Brian Stephens has something to prove this year. He was 6<sup>th</sup> as a freshman and then as a sophomore he lost that titanic 14-12 overtime battle in the state semi-finals to Brian Dean and finished 3<sup>rd</sup>. Last year he was the standard choice at 130# with Collins and Severance, perhaps, a half step behind him. After a district win over Severance he was bracketed away from both of them, but lost immediately to Maiwurm in overtime and then quickly lost his first consolation bout. An entire season had evaporated on a late Thursday afternoon. Now up three weight classes he looks terrific. He rolled into the Ironman finals off a win over Division I state champion Seth Horner and provided stubborn competition before losing, 5-3, to one of the Alton twins. No one went the distance with him at the GMVWA, which included wins by technical fall

over Massillo and DeHart. That continued at the Ohio Duals where he pinned Burrows and tech falled Gresock. There were no close bouts at the Top Gun where he beat Roddy 28-13 and Greco 20-8. It will take a monumental upset to derail this express train in 2009.

There won't be any close bouts at Goshen for him either. That's not to say that Fondale isn't very good. He was a district 6<sup>th</sup> last year, losing to Gifford in his go-to-state bout. He was very impressive at Medina beating Cline and Betts before running into Horner on one of his best nights. Fondale has won everywhere else and should easily qualify for States. A major positive is that he will be away from Stephens in Columbus. State alternates McKenzie and Williams return, but I'm not sure they have state spots nailed down. McKenzie is down from 152#, but did not place at the GMVWA and apparently did not compete at the CIT. Williams, up five weight classes, was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Reading (to Disbennet) and 2<sup>nd</sup> at the SWOCA (to Harger) and 1<sup>st</sup> at Norwood. That seems like a smooth transition for a five weight class jump. However, I think Redden and Disbennet may have moved ahead of this pair with Fraley, Eby, and Bays still having chances.

Some of the best district action at this weight class will be at Fostoria. I like the sophomore Witt best, but he is not shining quite as brightly as I thought. I hope he doesn't intend to wait until his senior year like his brother to win a state title. What is really amazing is that Oak Harbor won three state titles in four weight classes – at the upper weights. It doesn't happen very often when you start dealing with the big boys. Witt was a state quarter-finalist last year as a freshman and has now moved up four weight classes. It's taking a little time to get used to. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Oak Harbor (to Valliant), but was hurt at Medina and failed to place. However, he just recently won at Perrysburg. He's probably still a year away. Johnson is also a returning state qualifier, but struggled in Columbus. Maumee has a good team this year and he is one of its prime movers. He won at Tiffin (as did the team), but was only 5<sup>th</sup> at Oak Harbor in a very difficult weight class. State qualifier Gresock is up two weight classes. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Midwest Classic and 6<sup>th</sup> at North Canton at 152#, and then was 5<sup>th</sup> at Medina and 1<sup>st</sup> at the Dies after moving down. I show this to demonstrate the roller coaster pattern that makes it difficult to decide what happens next. He had a tough Ohio Duals, losing to two of my picks – Stephens and Hightower. State alternate Massillo was a Junior High State placer two years ago, and has wrestled well this year, finishing 4<sup>th</sup> at Oak Harbor and the GMVWA. Add in the excellent Burrows, Wagenhauser, and El-Tatawy and it will be a great competition.

Dulaney and Fry were state qualifiers last year, but it is not a particularly formidable district at Heath. I do believe Dulaney has placement potential, while Stout could well be second best, though that is yet to be determined. The problem for Dulaney may be that he does not wrestle a testing schedule, although he does win a lot of tournaments. Fry was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun, losing by only a point to Gordon. Renner was 2<sup>nd</sup> to McCormick at Smithville, while Johnson and Banks are both good. I wonder if Mellot (West Holmes) will return to this weight class.

There is some solid placement potential at Firestone. A major reason is Fee who was a district semi-finalist last year before losing to Cintron and then to state runner-up Wukie, 3-2, in his go-to-state bout. He was 8<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville at 152# after winning at Coffman at that class. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT, losing only to two-time Division I placer Harger. I also like Mullins who missed state qualification by one point at 152# last year. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Riverside at 152#, but won big at Perry beating Bihun, 11-3, in the finals. Roddy has moved down to 145# and was 6<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun in a tough field. He beat Burrows, 8-0, at the Ohio Duals. I think Schindel should be good at this class along with Bihun, while Hudson champ Ryba could also qualify. Rogel and Habash could also be factors in what should be a rough struggle for qualification spots. The mystery is whether Zupancic (Norton) will be able to compete. If so, he will have to be accounted for.

### 152#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: JONATHAN MCGOOKEY (PERKINS)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Wukie (University School)	14	Wohlgamuth (Benjamin Logan)
3	Evans (Graham)	15	Martycz (Kenton Ridge)
4	Gifford (Logan Elm)	16	Eicher (Canal Fulton NW)
5	Rosch (Canal Winchester)	17	Delpra (West Geauga)
6	Eddy (Buckeye Central)	18	McGinnis (Valley View)
7	Hildenbrand (Franklin)	19	Graves (Maumee)
8	Oktavec (Streetsboro)	20	Hepner (Carrollton)
9	McLaughlin (Athens)	21	Supanik (Buckeye Local)
10	Stoffer (West Brqnc)	22	Van Wey (John Glenn)
11	Mossing (Toledo Central Catholic)	23	Watkins (Tipp City)
12	Carfagn (Columbus DeSales)	24	Steiner (Buckey Valley)
13	Gregor (Buckeye)	25	Siegenthaler (Dover)

If you think these telecasts are easy just try doing McGookey versus Wukie for 15 minutes. At that time, the Brecksville tournament, I thought that might be a preview of the state finals, but now I'm not so sure. There are some younger wrestlers who are showing rapid improvement, who could play a significant role in the resolution of this weight class.

McGookey still has to be the favorite. Last year he was a state semi-finalist (losing to Jordan) and then wrestled well to nail down 3<sup>rd</sup>. All four of his wins were by reasonably comfortable margins. This year he was 5<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman and had the big win at Brecksville defeating two-time place winner Wukie, 8-6, in a bout that never seemed to be that close. That mirrored his win over Wukie at the Ironman where he got the critical takedowns. He was excellent on his feet, registering a wide variety of takedowns. In the semi-finals he took state quarter-finalist Rob Eddy down, perhaps 10 to 12 times en route to a 31-16 victory. By the way, last year the Northwest District won five

consecutive weight classes (first time ever) starting at this weight class beginning with Tank's upset of Boyd and finishing with Cubberly, Witt, Magrum and Fisher.

Wukie is a two-time state place winner who was an overtime loser in the state finals at 119# two years ago. Last year at 135# he broke bones in both elbows (check out the scars), but continued wrestling. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at the district level (defaulting his last bout) then won two state bouts before Skonieczny effectively ended his season with a 43 second pin. This year, besides the second at Brecksville, he won at North Canton, and did not place at the Ironman. If he is to beat McGookey, he must do better on his feet.

McGookey will not lose any sleep worrying about the district battles to come. For a while I didn't even have four people listed at this weight class. Mossing was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT and Sylvania Southview and was a sectional champ before being injured in the first round of districts. Gregor was 6<sup>th</sup> at Medina and 4<sup>th</sup> at the Dies, while district placer Graves returns at this weight class. Schutte (Wauseon) might be a possibility, but my feeling is that several of the 145's may move up to fill this void.

Wukie also will have little to concern himself with at Firestone. It's a weight class where a few little things done correctly can vault a wrestler into the top four at this district. Oktavec was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Hudson to Gasber, losing only by 4-3, and won at Kenston. Stoffer was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Dies and 3<sup>rd</sup> at Riverside. He can be a player here. Eicher was 6<sup>th</sup> at the Dies and was a factor at last year's district. The dark horse candidate here is Delpra who was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Perry (to Gasber) and 4<sup>th</sup> at Kenston. Everyone here (after Wukie) has about equal chances.

It is rather ironic that the top two state candidates come from relatively easy districts, while many wrestlers with good placement chances will struggle through tough ones. At Heath state qualifiers Rosch, Eddy and Carfagna lead the way. Rosch had a district 3<sup>rd</sup> last year and then won two bouts at States to finish 8<sup>th</sup>. This year he has worked his way down from 171#. He was a finalist at Medina at 160# defeating the excellent Packard, but losing to Harrison. Eddy pulled off one of those unexpected first round upsets at Columbus when he beat Stephens in overtime. However, the euphoria quickly wore off as he was pinned the next two rounds. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville and 1<sup>st</sup> at Barnesville, and I see him ranked first in the Eastern District. He probably "owes" McGookey a little revenge after the 31-16 score at Brecksville. It looked a little over the top. Carfagna was 5<sup>th</sup> at the CIT, but lost twice early at Brecksville – one of which was to Mossing. State alternates Hepner and Van Wey both were close with Hepner being put out by Carfagna. Other good choices here might be Supanik, Steiner, and Siegenthaler who are all strong and alliterative.

The powerhouse district is at Goshen, and there are good wrestlers everywhere. Evans was a Junior High State champion the last two years and you begin to wonder whether he'll just keep that momentum going. He was 7<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman, losing only to Sulzer and McGookey (by five). He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Midwest Classic, but won the GMVWA, including an overtime win over Division I state runner-up T. J. Rigel. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun behind Gasber and Wukie, losing to the latter 4-3. Gifford is very good. He

placed two years ago and has not, to my knowledge, lost this year, winning recently at Grandview Hts. McLaughlin and Hildenbrand are both returning state qualifiers. The first named was 6<sup>th</sup> last year at 145# - twice in the tournament losing to McGookey by fall. Hildenbrand was a district 3<sup>rd</sup> over McLaughlin, but did not place. He won at Franklin, but has not been tested in big tournaments to date. Wohlgamuth was a district 6<sup>th</sup> last year, losing his go-to-state by a point to Hildenbrand. I also rate Martycz, McGinnis, and Watkins as potential qualifiers. This should be a real battle.

### **160#**

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: ADAM WALTERS (WEST GEAUGA)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Kilroy (Padua)	14	Gryniuk (Washington CH)
3	Ryan (Graham)	15	Green (Elida)
4	Tate (A SV)	16	Nadeja (Hubbard)
5	B. Brown (Highland)	17	Eshelman (Milton Union)
6	Mellor (River View)	18	Kaiser (Buckeye Valley)
7	Christman (Indian Valley)	19	Clark (Whitehall)
8	Hoffman (Eastwood)	20	Wilson (Amanda Clearcreek)
9	Spence (Walsh)	21	Washam (Lima Shawnee)
10	J. Brown (Eastwood)	22	Garner (Finneytown)
11	Gallik (Lexington)	23	Lamancusa (West Branch)
12	Nealan (New Richmond)	24	Starner (Circleville)
13	Bernardo (DeSales)	25	Gilday (Kenston)

At last a wide open weight class where at least a half dozen boys have an opportunity to win. It's a weight class with a lot of returning state experience, but no one who has reached the state finals. This is where the "hot weekend theory" could kick in with a relative unknown winning the title--but then again, maybe not.

West Geauga had state champions in back-to-back years with the great Sam Komar and Rocky Woodie providing the titles. Since then they have had a 35 year dry spell that could be lifted this year. Walters was a state semi-finalist last year before losing quickly to two-time champ Eric Cubberly. He bounced back to get 4<sup>th</sup> in a tournament where he recorded two falls. This year at the Ironman he absolutely gave away his bout to an Illinois wrestler after securing a too comfortable lead. He regained his momentum and took a third defeating that same wrestler with relative ease. Since then it's been a little too simple with the Kenston title as the last signature moment.

Walters will have to contend with an old foe at Firestone. Tate is two-time state qualifier who twice has now missed state placement by one bout. Last year it was an overtime decision to Garbrandt. He was 7<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville giving Lang a tough quarter-final bout and then losing a close contest with Kilroy. Spence was a semi-finalist at the Top Gun

before losing to Utley and was 8<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville losing to Tate, 8-2, after dropping an earlier, 12-11, bout. Other possibilities are Nadeja and Lamancusa from the east and Hudson champ Gilday.

I think it's time to see Kilroy step up at this weight class and start winning tournaments. It always seems he is wrestling well in the consolation rounds, but now as a junior, it's title time. Last year he was 6<sup>th</sup> at Columbus, losing in the first round, but coming back to place. This year he was 7<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman and 6<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville after quarterfinal losses. However, at the CIT he suddenly exploded beating the solid Maserang, 13-2, in the finals. There are six other possible qualifiers and it's a colorful lot as it includes Jason Brown, Ben Brown, and Cody Green. Ben Brown was 4<sup>th</sup> at Medina and 5<sup>th</sup> at the Dies and has two important head-to-head wins --4-3 over Ryan and 4-2 over Jason Brown. Jason was 1<sup>st</sup> at Perrysburg and Sylvania Southview and 5<sup>th</sup> at Medina. He was a state alternate losing to Kilroy 4-3 last year. Gallik is also a returning state alternate who has won this year at Coffman and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Gorman. Hoffman and Green have a substantial portfolio of victories and places. Maxworthy and Washam are both very good, but will need to spring major upsets to qualify.

I thought it would be a two-man battle at Heath with state qualifiers Mellor and Rosch on center stage. However, with Rosch moving down to 152# it looks like Mellor will have far less competition. Mellor was 2<sup>nd</sup> in his big tournament--the Top Gun. That included a big 9-8 OT victory over Division I placer Coleman and a fall over Pike. However, Utley beat him badly in the finals. I believe that the exciting Bernardo---3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT--comes next with Kaiser, Wilson, and perhaps Clark to follow.

Ryan got caught early by Kwiat and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the GMVWA and was also 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun as the red-hot Utley majored him. He did win at the Midwest Classic and that is enough to rank him first at Goshen. State alternate Christman was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the GMVWA and should surely qualify this year. I put state qualifier Nealan 3<sup>rd</sup> here. He wrestles a low profile schedule but has won at Roger Bacon. Don't discount him, he had four district wins at this weight last year and none of them were remotely close. It looks like Gryniuk will opt for 160# and should play a role at this weight. Eshelman has been a consistent placer this year and along with Garner has to be hopeful for a state berth. A long hot possibility here is Starnier operating in the southeastern part of the state, an area which seems to be developing a greater number of solid wrestlers than in the past.

**#171**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: JAMES MANNIER (GRAHAM)**

Top Contenders

2	Raber (Orville)	14	Bates (West Branch)
3	Garbrandt (Claymont)	15	Lauth (St. Marys Memorial)
4	Sarosy (Perry)	16	Maxworthy (Buckeye)
5	Nolan (Coshocton)	17	Wolford (Logan Elm)
6	Kuechler (DeSales)	18	Trautman (Perkins)
7	Gaydosh (Padua)	19	Robinson (New Lexington)
8	Bishop Eaton)	20	Scott (Edgewood)
9	Magalski (Walsh)	21	Flaherty (Hamilton Twp.)
10	Mallarnee (Oak Harbor)	22	Borac (Lake Catholic)
11	Howell (Harrison Central)	23	Krownapple (River View)
12	Eschenbrenner (Eastwood)	24	King (Milton Union)
13	Recknagel (Rossford)	25	Nentwick (Beaver Local)
		26	Miller Chaminade)

St. Paris Graham has so many marvelous wrestlers it's easy to lose track of some of their stars. One wrestler often overlooked is James Mannier who has provided four quality years of varsity wrestling, and now has his last and best shot at his first state title. Unlike some of his teammates this title, should it be gained, will not have come quickly and he has paid his dues, in full, in time and effort. Already a three time district champion he missed state placement his freshman and sophomore by one and two points respectively. Last year he finally placed 3<sup>rd</sup>, losing a tough 160# semi-final to Bittinger. This year he was 6<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman losing to Chris Phillips' conqueror, Ed Ruth, in the semi-finals and to Heflin in the consolations. He won the GMVWA, but had two close bouts and then swept all three of his Ohio Duals bouts including an 8-6 win over Sarosy. He crushed the field at the Top Gun scoring points in bushel size amounts. He will be the favorite at this weight class, but like everything else, I do not see the title coming easily. He'll need to be rock solid in the close bouts that will inevitably occur.

A recent surprise has seen Howell move down to this weight class making for a very spirited competition at Heath. However two-time placer Garbrandt is still the top guy here, though, I keep wondering whether he'll take a shot at 160#. He was 4<sup>th</sup> two years ago and 8<sup>th</sup> last year after getting beat 15-0 by Cubberly and that vicious tilt. He also lost to Kilroy who remains at 160#. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Medina pinning the red-hot Utley in overtime, but then losing to Heflin. Nolan was also 8<sup>th</sup> at this weight class last year as he benefitted by being the champ at this district, and then won at Coshocton and Northwestern this year. Every note I get on him talks about his toughness. State alternate Kuechler was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the CIT and 5<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville. If DeSales gets off to a good start he could easily place. Howell won two district bouts after a sectional title. This year at 189# he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Barnesville and a strong 6<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville. That's my

top quartet with Flaherty, Krownapple, and Nentwick, at this point, outside the qualifying circle.

There are also four “evident” choices at Firestone—so you know how that will work out. Sarosy, Magalski, and Raber all qualified for States last year, but at different weight classes. Raber drew that powerhouse Pool in the first round and ended up going 1-2. This year he was 2<sup>nd</sup> to Mannier, 19-7, at the Top Gun while beating Nickolai and Abujaradeh back-to-back. He won at both Smithville and North Canton and this junior will likely only get better. Sarosy qualified at 160# and went 1-2 losing to Cubberly early. This year he won at Riverside, Perry, and Kenston. Magalski qualified at 171# and he has had the least successful season to this point. He was injured at Brecksville and failed to place and missed the Top Gun as well. He needs to get back to his 2008 form. Bates and Scott are my next two choices, but Borac, 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT, is rapidly closing in.

I wouldn't exactly say the cupboard was bare at Fostoria, but I wouldn't characterize it as overflowing either. There are some names, but none that look like they'll be able to exceed a low place at States. I am going to put forward six names, but the ranking will, of necessity, still be very problematic. Mallarnee was a state quarter-finalist at 145# last year, but has found this class somewhat more daunting finishing 8th at Medina and 1st at Oak Harbor. Gaydosh and Trautman were 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville while Recknagel and Lauth were 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> at Marion Harding. Maxworthy was 7<sup>th</sup> at Medina at 189# and 4<sup>th</sup> at this weight at the Dies. Meanwhile Recknagel has wrestled at least once at 160#, but this weight should seem more appealing. The dark horse candidate here is Eschenbrenner who lost, 10-7, to Mannier and then didn't place. The four that do qualify will need a few days to recover from this struggle.

It looks like a three man game at Goshen. Mannier, of course, tops the list with state alternates Bishop and Wolford next in line. Bishop was district semi-finalist, but then was pinned by both Thomusseit and Foster. This year he was 5<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA losing in the semis to Mannier. Wolford most recently won at Grandview Hts. and could be a finalist at this district. I also like Robinson and King with Miller also in reserve.

**189#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: NICK MILLS (UNIVERSITY SCHOOL)**

Top Contenders

2	Thomusseit (Graham)	15	Viancourt (Holy Name)
3	Wenger (Fairless)	16	Young (Athens)
4	Brown (Eastwood)	17	Blankenship (Alder)
5	Mallarnee (Harrison Central)	18	Poyser (Louisville)
6	Henderson (Toledo Central Catholic)	19	Ulmer (Galion)
7	Woods (Claymont)	20	Moten (Cambridge)
8	Wittkamp (Elida)	21	Hagan (Benedictine)
9	McIntosh (Miami Trace)	22	Taylor (Licking Hts.)
10	Sanford (Finneytown)	23	Day (Valley View)
11	Henderson (Beaver Local)	24	Cross (Coventry)
12	Baker (Padua)	25	Childers (Lemon Monroe)
13	Rice (Conneaut)	26	Noggle (Van Wert)
14	Sill (Perry)	27	Monroe (Crestwood)
		28	Kelton (River View)

I think many people expect a classic two-man battle between Mills and Thomusseit at this weight class, but I'm not sure it will be quite that straightforward. Should they emerge as district champions they will be seeded apart, but that eventual finals meeting will have to overcome some potentially serious obstacles. There are, perhaps, a half-dozen wrestlers who could upset either of these top contenders, and some who have already made it close. Nonetheless, let's look at that top duo.

Mills seems a bit of a free spirit and he reminds me that my daughter, when she was in high school, should have realized that University School students make far superior boyfriends than boys from Hawken. He is twice a state placer, finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> last year at the absolutely brutal 171# class – his only loss a 5-4 decision to eventual champ Keith Witt. This year he won at North Canton and Brecksville and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Ironman, losing to Thomusseit, 2-1, on some kind of weird penalty point. He reversed that with a one point win of his own at the Top Gun.

Thomusseit is a wonder. He placed 7<sup>th</sup> as a freshman at 130# and then moved up seven weight classes to finish 3<sup>rd</sup> at 189#. No Ohio wrestler had ever done that. His only state loss was a semi-final decision administered by two-time state champion Cody Magrum. This year he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Ironman, won the GMVWA, and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Top Gun.

Wenger is the wild card at this weight class. He has won two tournaments and his only loss was in the finals at North Canton to Mills, 9-7. He is a high -energy wrestler, good on his feet (he twice took Mills down), and powerful. He has not wrestled the difficult schedule of a Mills or a Thomusseit, but it has been at least reasonably challenging. He holds the key to the state pairings. If Mills wins the Firestone District then Thomusseit

would have to beat Wenger and Mills to win. If Wenger closes that two-point gap and takes Firestone, then the odds favor Mills and Thomusseit on the same side of the bracket with Wenger apart from them. The rest of this district looks a full step below the top duo. Rice was just one win away from Columbus, but he wrestles a schedule where results rarely flow in my direction. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Riverside, but it was on a default to Hagan, so it's difficult to judge where he stands. Poyser wasn't on my original lists, but his 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun thrusts him into the picture. Sill won at Kenston and Perry, but was only 4<sup>th</sup> at Riverside, losing to Hagan. Factor in Cross as a possibility with Monroe looking for upsets.

Thomusseit and McIntosh met in the finals at this weight class last year at Goshen, and I think we can expect a rematch. Still only a sophomore, McIntosh was 1-2 in Columbus and was just recently 5<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun where he lost to Mills and was pinned by Woods. I saw him at Brecksville (but not for long) as he failed to place. Still, he should have little trouble at this district unless Sanford, a state qualifier last year, is able to compete. He barely defeated him, 6-5, last year. I have seen no scores for Sanford so his status is unclear. After that, district placer Young and Day (champ at Franklin and runner-up at Valley View) head my list. Back-up help might be had from Childers who won two district bouts last year.

The deepest district is at Fostoria. There are several wrestlers who should compete for low to middle places at States – or even more. Leading the pack is Brown, who was the state alternate at 215# last year. Now at this class he was 5<sup>th</sup> at GMVWA, losing two narrow bouts – to Thomusseit (6-4) and Division I placer Miller (5-4). State alternate Henderson, who was most recently 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT, and 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville, also should qualify. The powerful Wittkamp, 2<sup>nd</sup> at Tiffin, had to default his Top Gun semi-final bout to Thomusseit, but may see him again in Columbus. Baker and Viancourt will be strong representatives out of that northeastern sectional, with Gorman, champ Ulmer and Noggle also possibilities.

Woods, a former state qualifier, had an excellent tournament at the Top Gun, and his 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish combined with his 5<sup>th</sup> at Medina, make him a co-favorite with state qualifier Mallarnee at Heath. Mallarnee, who has been at 215# most of the year, was a semi-finalist at Brecksville and had a memorable bout with Hayes there. He ended up a solid 5<sup>th</sup>. Henderson, this one from Beaver Local, should follow this twosome. Blankenship, Moten, and Taylor are all contenders for that last state berth, with Kelton a long shot.

**215#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: TYLER HOUSKA (HIGHLAND)**

Top Contenders

2	Busick (Steubenville)	14	Burke (Milton Union)
3	Erb (Wapakoneta)	15	Bailey (Shelby)
4	Pickerel (Toledo Central Catholic)	16	Ramsey (Chillicothe)
5	White (Graham)	17	Halmbacher (Buckeye Valley)
6	Thompson (Tallmadge)	18	Pyciak (Buckeye Local)
7	Bloom (Napoleon)	19	Pavlik (Ravenna)
8	Carpenter (Sheridan)	20	Balzano (West Geauga)
9	Dilley (Amanda Clearcreek)	21	Rice (River View)
10	Rippke (Maumee)	22	Dorsten (Greenville)
11	Gravely (Gallia)	23	Bompezzi (Alder)
12	Lugo (ASV)	24	Kosley (Crestwood)
13	Lias (Hubbard)	25	Strickland (Clyde)
		26	Rose (Benjamin Logan)

One of the overlooked superstar wrestlers of the past was the prodigiously gifted Harry Houska, who won a state title in only his second year of wrestling. He subsequently won an NCAA Division I championship and was one of the most feared wrestlers of his time. (Disclaimer – Harry and I were on the same high school team for two years, but that in no way influenced this judgment.) He had a personal philosophy that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once cogently encapsulated: “Never mind trifles. In this world a man must either be an anvil or a hammer.” Now almost 50 years later another Houska has appeared with a solid opportunity to wrest yet another state title from the wrestling gods.

Houska had a breakout season last year. He beat the strong 215-pound favorite Matt Fisher in the district finals, and won his first three state bouts. One of those was a semi-final overtime struggle against the exceptional freshman, Logan Erb. However, Fisher this time beat Houska in the finals, 4-3. This year Houska won at North Canton, Medina and the Dies, including a tough overtime win over Green at Medina. He has to be given the favorites role here, but the competition will be rugged with Busick, Pickerel, Erb, and several others, all very good. Keep in mind the 285# is extremely weak. It would not surprise me if some of this group decided to migrate to a heavier, but more congenial, weight class.

There will be difficult competition for Houska streaming in from every district, but one of the toughest will be Busick from the Heath District. He has been pretty much untouched and unchallenged in the East, and he brings great credentials to this forecast. He was a district champion last year and made it to the semi-finals before losing a one-point decision to Fisher and ending up 3<sup>rd</sup>. He defeated both Pickerel and Erb in that run. The only negative plays off one of his positives – that is he has not been challenged all year – so he has not had to perform under constant stress and pressure. Note Busick

has only lost two bouts in two years. Now that Mallarnee has moved to 189#, state alternate Dilley is probably second best. I show recent wins at Logan Elm and New Albany for Dilley, who is not a large 215-pounder, but one who relies more on mobility. It looks like Halmbacher or Pyciak might be in line for the last two spots, with Rice and Bompezzi as two other viable candidates.

Three of the four top rated boys exit Fostoria. Houska, or course, is the favorite, but all three are very close. Pickerel was a state placer two years ago (7<sup>th</sup>), but the narrow loss to Busick last year thrust him to the consolations and he did not place. At last years district Fisher beat Pickerel by one and then Pickerel was defeated for 3<sup>rd</sup> place by a point. At Brecksville Pickerel was 6<sup>th</sup>, losing a close semi-final bout to Scales and then after a consolation loss, defaulting to 6<sup>th</sup>. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the CIT, again losing to Scales – this time 2-1. I did notice a couple of competitive efforts by Pickerel at 285# and I wonder whether that is an audition for the future. Erb was a terrific freshman, coming off his 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish in the Junior High States. He was 34-4 going into district action last year and made it to the semi-finals before yielding a quick fall to Houska, but still ended up qualifying. Once there, he again reached the semi-final before again losing to Houska in double overtime. He ended up 4<sup>th</sup> after losing to Busick. He won at Wapakoneta and Elgin, of late, and will be a major threat. That takes up three of the four state berths leaving little for the rest – and yet there is so much more here. Bloom was a district semi-finalist last year and was 5<sup>th</sup> at the tough Medina weight class and 1<sup>st</sup> at Perrysburg. Rippke won the title at Tiffin, Oak Harbor, and Waite. Bailey took the Gorman, while Strickland won at Clyde and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Sylvania Southview.

The other principal threat is White, who was the state alternate at Goshen this year. At one point his role in high school might have been as a back-up for Cody Smith and Adam Walls, but their departure has allowed him to realize his potential. He has been 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Ironman, 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Midwest Classic, and 1<sup>st</sup> at the GMVWA and Top Gun. Two of his three losses have been to Houska – the last by a 9-1 count. Still, do not underestimate his determination. State alternate Carpenter is second best here and he has had a fine season. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina coming back after being pinned by Bloom in the quarterfinals. He dominates the southeastern area, both at this weight class and at heavyweight (where he recently won at Sheridan). I would not be surprised to see him move to 285# at tournament time. We'll write about that more in the next essay. There are four candidates for the last two spots (or three). Gravely won two district bouts at this weight class and will again wrestle at 215#. Burke, at heavyweight last year, won at Edgewood, was 4<sup>th</sup> at Troy, and defaulted to 6<sup>th</sup> at GMVWA. Ramsey won at Valley View, defeating a good field including Halmbacher. Dorsten, at 189# last year, was 5<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA, but did not actually wrestle Burke. Rose was runner-up at both Tipp City and Franklin. I favor the first two, but it will be close.

The threat to Houska at Firestone will be state qualifier Thompson, who just lost to him 2-0 at the final of the Dies. He was a finalist at the district last year, but drew Pickerel in the first round, losing a narrow decision. This is a difficult weight class, but he has good placement potential. He beat Holcomb to win at St. Clairsville, and also was champion at Aurora. Lugo was one bout from qualification last year and has come back strong,

finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Big 8 and 7<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun. Pavlik, 6<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun and Lias, 5<sup>th</sup> at the Dies, are also good and have solid district experience. The latter boy, like Lugo, was one bout from Columbus. Balzano, who is improving rapidly, was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Kenston and 1<sup>st</sup> at Perry and has good qualification chances with his grind it out style. Kosley is a long shot here.

### 285#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: JOSH JACKSON (CLAYMONT)**

##### Top Contenders

2	A. Jackson (Benjamin Logan)	14	Keener (Athens)
3	Williams (Geneva)	15	Kidwell (Buckeye Valley)
4	Torrence (Norwalk)	16	Day (Valley View)
5	Neal (St. Marys Memorial)	17	Hawkins (Crestwood)
6	Malone (Carrollton)	18	Rutherford (Norton)
7	Spence (Amanda Clearcreek)	19	Puskac (Licking Hts.)
8	Brooks (Bellevue)	20	Sandwisch (Oak Harbor)
9	Demick (Chillicothe)	21	Chizmadia (Keystone)
10	Cardone (Toledo Central Catholic)	22	Watkins (Tipp City)
11	Jones (Harvey)	23	Quallich (Buckeye)
12	Selfinger (Lexington)	24	Chanthakoun (West Holmes)
13	Cresswell (ASV)	25	Miller (Jefferson)

This is quite honestly the weakest group of heavyweights that we've seen in Division II in a long time. Twelve of the sixteen state qualifiers last year were seniors, and the best of that remaining quartet, Adam Walls, is now in Division I. The remaining threesome went a combined 1-6 with the only victory when they wrestled each other. None of the 215's moved up, at least not yet, so we're not seeing a lot of state experience. This will be the opportunity for a heavyweight to have a couple of hot weekends and close his career with a state title. I did note that David Pickerel wrestled a little at heavyweight recently and we may find some 215-pounders in that crowded field at least thinking about other options.

When I looked at the top heavyweight wrestlers this year there was little to distinguish one from another. Nobody this year has bright, shiny credentials with state titles and placements in full view or with huge tournaments won and district titles to show. From the perspective of numbers they all look pretty much the same – except for one item. If you look at all the top contenders only one has wrestled a long and very testing schedule replete with top tournaments and strong competition. That wrestler is Josh Jackson, who was 5<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman, 4<sup>th</sup> at Medina, and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun – a string of terribly difficult competitions. My guess that the lessons learned all year could be worth a point or two, and at heavyweight that is so often the difference.

Jackson was in the most difficult district last year (with state champion Hawkins and Hiles), and missed qualification in an overtime loss. He'll have to face again this year state qualifier Spence who beat him in last year's quarterfinals, 4-3. He was 1<sup>st</sup> at Logan Elm and 2<sup>nd</sup> at New Albany, and has the state experience to use as backup. Also here is Malone – 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun (to Jackson) and 2<sup>nd</sup> at North Canton. He had an unlucky district draw last year, catching eventual state champ Hawkins in the first round. Factor in Kidwell and Puskac and it's one of the better districts. A long shot might be Smithville champ and Licking Hts. runner-up Chanthakoun.

One of the very top contenders leads the Goshen District contingent. State qualifier Alex Jackson was a district semi-finalist last year before getting pinned in 14 seconds by Chris Holcomb. As a labor saving device it worked perfectly as Jackson swept two bouts in the consolation rounds for 3<sup>rd</sup> place and a ticket to Columbus. This year he won at Tipp City and Franklin. I think Demick is next best, having pinned Kidwell to win at Bellbrook and also won at Circleville and Bishop Ready. It is totally wide open after this duo, with Keener, Day and Watkins as real possibilities. Clearly, Carpenter would qualify easily at 285# - probably as a finalist – taking advantage of his mobility and technique.

There is a lot more depth at Fostoria, but what I see is lacking in consistency. I like Torrence the best, but by a paper-thin margin. He was 1<sup>st</sup> at Edison and Norwalk, defeating Division I state runner-up Baker – and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Gorman, losing a one-pointer to Selfinger. Selfinger went on to win the Gorman and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Coffman, while going undefeated at the Ohio Duals. Neal has lost only once at last count to Meder at Marion Harding and was a district quarter-finalist. Brooks was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Avon Lake and won at Bellevue. He was a quarter-finalist at Brecksville and finished 7<sup>th</sup>. The interesting figure is Cardone. He was a Junior High State 3<sup>rd</sup> a couple of years ago and is really a 215-pounder. However, with Pickerel at 215 he has gone up to heavyweight and won the CIT. His speed could cause real issues here. Sandwisch, Chizmadia, and Quallich will need a lot of good things to happen to qualify.

Ricky Williams leads the Firestone group and his 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish last year got him to Columbus. This year he won the Midwest Classic and Kenston and will be a major player in Columbus. Cresswell was hurt much of the year, but came back to get 2<sup>nd</sup> at the big 8. He should be ready by sectionals. Jones and Hawkins are possibilities, with Rutherford having solid upset opportunities. Miller, runner-up at Riverside, could also be a factor. This is not the most awesome set of heavyweights that Firestone will send to Columbus, although Williams could easily win it all.

## TEAMS

1. Graham

This will be their ninth consecutive team title—by far the record in Division II and second only to a pair of streaks crafted by St. Edward (12 currently and 10 between 1978 and 1987). It will also be their 11<sup>th</sup> overall team title which will propel them past Maple Hts. and place them a clear second on the all-time list. They should also exceed the record number of team points for Division II that they set last year (221.5), and for all divisions currently held by the St. Edward team of 2007 with 229. The ancient record of six individual champions held by Cleveland West since 1951 is also in jeopardy as Graham could have as many as ten finalists and who knows how many champions. Still, we must remember that they had a little stumble in the first round last year which prevented them from breaking the overall scoring record, but that is unlikely to happen again.
2. University School

They were 4<sup>th</sup> last year, but have a solid opportunity to secure the runner-up trophy this time around. State champion Hightower, Mills, Inghram and Wukie are all possible finalists and all of them finished at least third or better in the past. Roddy and, maybe, Lawler can help with strong districts that give them a chance to score at the state level. Much, however, depends on Inghram's health for that is a critical element for their overall team success.
3. Highland

Houska is the centerpiece of this team and they need him to at least make it to the finals once again if they are to reach this level. Then, the returning quintet of potential placers--Rininger, Mirman, McKee, Brown and Gresock--have to contribute. Key parts of their success will be Mirman who has to cash in at 112# and the middleweights capturing some kind of place.
4. Walsh Jesuit

DiJulius should win at 119# and the two Skoniecznys need to take their exceptional freshman seasons all the way to Columbus. Nate at 125# has proven that he can compete with just about everyone at this weight class and he has, in the past, wrestled in so many big tournaments that I don't see his first state meet fazing him. That then leaves it up to the upperclassmen like state qualifiers Knotek and Magalski, and Spence to put on the finishing touches.

5. Claymont Their three very experienced seniors—Jackson, Garbrandt and Woods—all have the ability to score heavily at the State level. Jackson, in particular, is situated in a very weak weight class where opportunity abounds. If the two freshmen are as good as I think they are they could move up. You have to wonder where they would be at with a healthy Cody Garbrandt.
6. Orrville There are only three scorers on this team, but each of them is a top four performer in his weight class. Strausbaugh, Raber, and, particularly, Maiwurm (away from Taylor) need to be supercharged at the district level to get optimal pairings. If that happens and all goes well they could sneak into the Top Five.
7. Oak Harbor They had three state champions last year which provided enough momentum to nail down the runner-up trophy—even without a lot of backup. This year Witt and Miller need to score heavily, but others also have to contribute. That means Mallarnee, Stone, and, maybe, even Cramer have to be at the top of their game.
8. Padua This is a team with a significant upside. Kilroy has to become the main man and upper classmen like Gaydosh, DaFonseca, and Baker need to help out. Then Romanchik has to score heavily at the tough 112# class while the freshman Fickel shows us what the future will be like at 125#.
9. Miami Trace This is not the great all-around team that we saw last year. Still, Neff and Garringer should score big-time points once again and the sophomore McIntosh will chip in at 189#. However, after that trio it's difficult to know from what direction help will arrive—maybe, Fraley or Armstrong.
10. Columbus DeSales This year Vaughan has one last chance to showcase his talent and score heavily at the same time. Then, McGovern, Kuechler, Carfagna, and Bernardo have to put on their game face and score some ancillary points.

## Division III

### 103 #

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: ALEX DRONZEK (BEACHWOOD)**

#### Top Contenders

2	Harrington (Sandusky St. Mary)	14	Hall (Preble Shawnee)
3	Goebel (Elmwood)	15	Hiltibran (Mechanicsburg)
4	Mowen (Greeneview)	16	Nedved (Clinton Massie)
5	Michel (Edison)	17	Carroll (Northmor)
6	Tschantz (Chanel)	18	Mcfadden (Black River)
7	Grier (Norwayne)	19	Hamilton/Harter (Waynedale)
8	McLaughlin (Nelsonville York)	20	Harrison (Reading)
9	Pizzuto (Jackson Milton)	21	Kern (Liberty Center)
10	Border (Caldwell)	22	Fahrer (Evergreen)
11	Retay (CVCA)	23	Niese (Newark Catholic)
12	Hennegan (Purcell)	24	Schaffer (Seneca East)
13	Elchert (Arcadia)	25	Deaton (Blanchester)

This weight class has a tradition of being difficult to forecast because of the infusion of new exciting, but untested talent. However, that has not been a problem in recent years in Division III, as the Steibers, Harrington, Lint and others have enormously simplified this exercise. That will not be the case this year as we face a fluid, chaotic situation at this class. Should we go with the only returning state place winner or, maybe, the Medina Champ or an exciting freshman or, perhaps, a big school move-in, or...

As it turns out I'm making the safety play and going with the returning state placewinner. One of the reasons is that I've seen Dronzek a number of times the last two years and recognize how much better he is getting. He was the Maple Hts. district champ last year beating Tschantz in the semi-finals 5-2. He was 8<sup>th</sup> in Columbus losing a tight battle with the excellent Reed, 4-3 in the quarterfinals. This year he has won at Beachwood, North Coast, and Hudson while finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at Southview, losing to Division I state 3<sup>rd</sup> place finisher Ralston 2-0. He is a good all-around wrestler and is particularly solid on top. He'll need to be in top form because this is an evenly matched weight class.

State qualifier Tschantz should be back at the Maple Hts. District with Dronzek. He drew Steiber in the first round of States and then the senior Yeary and was quickly out. This year he was hurt at Solon and has not competed since then. However, he is expected back by tournament time. After that it is a wide-open competition. Pizzuto missed state qualification by one point last year and was 4<sup>th</sup> at Solon in a good weight class. The experienced senior Hamilton also returns after winning two district bouts last year, but could end up at 112 with the young Harter, also good, taking his place. However, he will struggle with the red-hot Grier who won at Chippewa and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at

the Dies and the freshman Retay who was 6<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun. An impressive result from the Dies for Grier was a fall over the excellent Graham for 3<sup>rd</sup>. Factor in McFadden and it's a very competitive weight class.

Two of Dronzek's chief adversaries will emerge from Owens. Harrington was a district runner-up to Steiber last year and went 1-2 losing to Dronzek by four in the consolation rounds. Now a junior he'll match up very well with many of the younger wrestlers in this weight class. One of his district victims last year was the oncoming Goebel who ended up as the state alternate. This year Goebel won three close, close bouts in a row at Medina, including a 2-1 decision over Retay, to make the finals where he dominated Lyons to win. I like Michel just slightly behind this duo as he has dominated most of his completion. He lost to Goebel in that ultimate overtime in the 5<sup>th</sup> place bout at districts. The last spot should go to former state qualifier Elchert who went to States two years ago, but missed out in 2008. Kern, Fahrer, and Schaffer are other contenders but may need good bracketing to succeed.

It was, I thought, to be a three-man battle at Steubenville. I favored Reichle who lost to Reed in the district quarterfinals last year and then in overtime to be eliminated. This year he had been dominant in the Columbus Area and appeared to have good placement potential. However, he apparently will not compete this rest of this year. Next on my list is the intriguing freshman from Nelsonville-York, the sensational McLaughlin. I have him winning four tournaments and just "crushing" everyone in his bracket. He seems to have had it almost too easy. Border is probably the best out of the Eastern District, and should provide good match-up with McLaughlin. We'll know more after we see the results of the OVAC, which occurs after this is written. The last two state berths are strictly up in the air. With Reichle out of the picture opportunity waits. Carroll is probably the best bet finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Gorman with Niese 3<sup>rd</sup> at Coshocton, as another challenger, along with Crilley.

The news at this weight class in the Fairmont District was Mowen moving to Greeneview. A district quarter-finalist in Division I last year he has a solid experience base. He defeated Pizzuto to win at Elyria Catholic. He was an easy winner at Bellbrook and was 5<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA defeating Garcia before being dropped into the consolations by Brascetta. I like Hall next best with Nedved and Hiltibran certainly capable of being a district finalist. Hennegan has seemingly come out of nowhere to capture 3<sup>rd</sup> place at the CIT and cannot be overlooked. Deaton could also be a player here, but the big question mark is Harrison, who was only 5<sup>th</sup> at Madeira.

**112 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: SPENSER PIERCE (NORTH UNION)**

Top Contenders

2	Tolson (Delta)	14	Ankrom (Bloom Carroll)
3	Majoy (Edison)	15	Bailes (Mogadore)
4	Reed (Waterford)	16	Johnson (Monroeville)
5	Arthur (Greeneview)	17	Fortune (West Salem Northwestern)
6	Powers (CVCA)	18	Richter (Monroe Central)
7	Spreng (Loudonville)	19	Glosser (Otsego)
8	Porter (Bellaire)	20	Heiss (Miami East)
9	Pavia (Sandusky St. Mary)	21	Parker (Mohawk)
10	Weirauch (Archbold)	22	Kapper (Manchester)
11	Triskett (VASJ)	23	Lovejoy (Allen East)
12	Wiseman (Jackson Milton)	24	Johnston (Blufton)
13	Huffman (Tri-County Noth)	25	Frederickson (Dixie)

Now that Hunter Stieber has apparently moved to 119# this weight class has suddenly become a wide-open affair. It opens the door for any number of wrestlers who just a couple or weeks ago were just hoping to draw away from Stieber at the state meet. It also may mean a major revamping of the participants at this class. It is not difficult to envision 119 pounders who certified at 112#, but found it a tough cut suddenly re-examining their decision to compete at 119#. Some may well decide that 112# suddenly looks like a more congenial weight class. Look for some surprises here.

Early in the year, I envisioned a Pierce/Reed match-up at the district level would determine who was seeded away from Steiber and thus a potential finalist. At the time I favored the more explosive Reed. Now two things have changed. The district isn't nearly so important and I've switched to Pierce who has had a better year. He was the district champ last year beating Reed 8-7 and it was important since it put him away from Steiber (by chance) so that he could finish 2<sup>nd</sup> and the best Reed could do was 3<sup>rd</sup>. Pierce has won everything this year most recently at Elgin where he beat Division I place winner and old friend Boehm. I don't see many of Reed's scores but he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Steubenville losing 8-2 to Wiltshire, however, I totally misread his talent last year and he may make me eat my words again in 2009. State alternate Ankrom should be the third qualifier out of this district and has had some impressive results this year. There is not a lot of wiggle room at this district so people like Porter and Richter have little margin for error. Both lost early last year and then had to try and qualify out of the consolations. It's a lot easier if you can make it to the semi-finals.

This is a weight class that seems to run in pairs, that is each district seems to have two outstanding contenders at Owens that works out to Tolson and Majoy. The first named was a state semi-finalist at this weight class before losing to Heminger and dropping to 4<sup>th</sup>. His recent victory over Manley to win at Perrysburg was significant and he, clearly,

has finalist potential. Majoy was 5<sup>th</sup> at this weight class last year after losing to Heminger in the quarterfinals. Tolson had defeated him in district action. This year he was 1<sup>st</sup> at Bellevue, Edison and Plymouth and this is his best opportunity to nail down a high place. State qualifier Pavia, Parker and Glosser all are at this weight class, but Weirauch is at that same level. The big unknown is Lance Johnson for whom the dramatic Stieber weight adjustment was made. At the moment it is a bit of a mystery as to how well he'll do. Last year he was a district qualifier at 125# and went 1-2 with two close losses. This year at Brecksville at 119# he won three bouts losing to state runner-up Inghram and state qualifier Cook. My guess is that you have to get tough rolling around with the Stiebers every day. Only two will qualify and with the spread between sectionals the pairing should be reasonable. Currently, I favor Weirauch and Pavia to capture those last two spots. That would leave out Glosser and Parker who were 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> at Tiffin, and, of course Johnson. Should this be incorrect and Johnson qualifies, it would be an enormous plus for Monreville's team chances.

State placer Spreng and state alternate Powers are the top duo at Maple Hts. Spreng was 6<sup>th</sup> last year which included a first round win over Glosser. Spreng has been a consistent placer this year finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at Mt. Vernon and the Gorman and 5<sup>th</sup> at North Canton. He is a battle-hardened veteran who should place again. Power lost a semi-final donnybrook in overtime to Spreng in last year's district semi-finals. He was 5<sup>th</sup> at Medina defeating Artrip 7-6 and if you believe in the "common opponents" philosophy Spreng lost to Artrip 8-3. He was 6<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun losing to Birr in the semi-finals. The lanky Triskett who power washed my house this fall is third and if he hits his opponents with the same energy he used on my house he'll be in good shape. He was a sectional champ last year beating Dronzek and then failed to make weight for districts. He did not, however, have a real good CIT, but then Romanchik didn't place either. Fortune is an excellent freshman, who was 5<sup>th</sup> in one of the toughest weight classes at the Junior High States last year. Also here is Wiseman who won at Elyria Catholic beating state qualifier Tim Arthur 7-3. The senior Bailes and Kapper are two other quality competitors. This will be a dynamite competition.

The top twosome at Fairmont is state qualifier Arthur and state alternate Huffman, and they'll compete at slightly different levels. Arthur went 1-2 at the state meet beating Parker. This year he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Elyria Catholic, 1<sup>st</sup> at Bellbrook and 2<sup>nd</sup> at the GMVWA losing only to Isaac Jordan and beating Tolson 10-5. Go figure. Arthur defeated Huffman in their go-to-state bout, but he has quickly bounced back. Also a wrestler to watch is Heiss. He won convincingly at Troy over a solid field and placed 8th at the GMVWA losing to Regan and Heidkamp in overtime. He was a district 6<sup>th</sup> last year. That leaves one open slot to be fought over with Lovejoy, Johnston and, very probably, Frederickson or Beatty.

**119 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: HUNTER STIEBER (MONROEVILLE)**

Top Contenders

2	Heminger (Northmor)	14	Branham (West Jefferson)
3	Kovach (Chanel)	15	Cattran (Bloom Carroll)
4	Hall (Tuslaw)	16	Lee (Elmwood)
5	Barlow (Heath)	17	Jacober (Beachwood)
6	Hoskins (Greeneview)	18	Caudill (Spencerville)
7	Anthony (Carlisle)	19	Cole (Edison)
8	Harbart (Garrettsville Garfield)	20	Ganger (Miami East)
9	Hancock (Troy Christian)	21	A.Merschman (Delphos St. John)
10	Dandurand (Hopewell Loudon)	22	Gantka (Genoa)
11	Pizzuto (Jackson Milton)	23	Wooton (West Liberty Salem)
12	Glenn (Otsego)	24	Barker (Barnesville)
13	Thompson (Brookfield)	25	Lump (Paint Valley)
		26	Yoder (Martins Ferry)

Defending State Champion Hunter Stieber will apparently, in a strategic decision, abandon 112# where he competed the first third of the season and move to 119#. It's a decision predicated on acquiring the team title and its one the great Division III Coach Jude Roth undoubtedly applauds. The point is to give Lance Johnson the best chance to contribute some team points in what may become a close battle with Troy Christian (See the Team Section for more thoughts on its ramifications). As it is, I don't see it as much of a gamble. Stieber had four falls in winning last year at 103# and should not be overly discomfited wrestling at 119# rather than at 112#. He was 51-0 last year, but lost for the first time in his high school career at the Ironman finals to a very hot Devin Carter, who he had majored the year before. He defended his title at Brecksville in a far tougher weight class at 112# than he'll face here at 119#, defeating Robinson in a tiebreaker and Squire with two takedowns to one escape. Like all of the Monroeville wrestlers he is good in all three positions, but I'm most impressed by how well all four of them can ride. They are tough, aggressive and relentless and react like college wrestlers on top. It's their not so-secret weapon when faced with a tenacious opponent.

With Stieber at 119# that leaves only three state spots open at Owens at this weight class. Despite that I expect to see some of the 112's to move from that terribly crowded field to the relative serenity of 119#, except, of course, when you are on the mat with Stieber. The natural second choice is three-time state qualifier Dandurand, who has been a constant winner in the northwest for four years. He has a 1-6 record at the state meet, but has placement potential in this his last opportunity. I rate state alternate Glenn and Lee dead even and if a dynamite 112 pounder moves up, the bracketing could decide who goes. As currently constituted they both should qualify. After that one sees only chaos. I think Cole might be next, but Gantka was a district semi-finalist last year with Fleming, perhaps another option.

The competition at Maple Hts. will be far more dramatic than what will happen at Owens. There are six bona fide state candidates looking at four state tickets. The alpha wrestler here is defending district champ Kovach who leveraged that win to a 4<sup>th</sup> place finish at Columbus. He's been very solid this year winning at Solon and finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at Brecksville (to DiJulius), Mayfield (to DiJulius) and the CIT (to Corrill) with two of the three losses closely fought. Many-time state qualifier Hall and Harbart are just behind. Hall was the state runner-up at 103# two years ago, but failed even to qualify last year. Harbart was 4<sup>th</sup> two years ago, but did not place last year. Both would like to improve on junior season that probably did not quite meet expectations. That leaves state qualifiers Pizzuto and Thompson in the unenviable position of fighting over most likely just one spot. Also a possible issue is that Harbart exits from the same sectional making the pairings rather dicey. I favor Pizzuto in this battle. Also here is the gifted Jacober. A tremendous wrestler he is very small for this weight class and that will likely be exacerbated with the weight allowances. That he continues to win is a testament to his ability and he could qualify.

Heminger is fun to watch and a very good wrestler. Last year as a freshman he ripped through a very tough district defeating two-time state place winner Reynolds in the finals 18-11. Then in Columbus two falls and a 14-0 win put him in the finals where he nearly pinned Tessari. Down 9-4 he tied it with the big move, but lost 12-9. Except for not being able to beat the boy from Shelby, Worthington, he has had another big year. For example at Gorman he had a succession of quick falls before again losing to Worthington. One major positive for Heminger is that as a district champion he will be seeded away from Stieber, a real incentive to win another district title. The other place winner at Steubenville is Barlow who was 4<sup>th</sup> at 103# last year losing to Stieber and Reed by fall. Now at 119# he has been a steady placer and should hold off the many challenges here. That group would include Cattran, Branham, Yoder, and Barker. I like the first two slightly better, but it should generate a lot of close bouts. Last year at districts Yoder defeated Cattran in overtime and Branham, 7-3, but that relationship could easily have changed. Lump and Rozman (Ready) are other thoughts here.

There are four returning state qualifiers at Fairmont including two who placed last year. Hancock was 5<sup>th</sup> at 103#, losing a one-pointer to Pierce in the semi-finals and a two-pointer to Barlow. He wrestles a big time schedule around the state including an impressive 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville and a 3<sup>rd</sup> at Wapakoneta. If healthy, he's the best here. Hoskins was 7<sup>th</sup> at 112# after a district 2<sup>nd</sup> behind Anthony--a loss that was avenged in the state placement bout. He and Anthony will again lock up starting at the sectional. They've had parallel years winning or placing high in small tourneys and failing to place at the GMVWA. Hoskins won two of their three tourney bouts last year. Ganger is the other returning state qualifier, but I see him as a long-shot to repeat, but then again he was an underdog last year. Instead state alternate Caudill might be the favorite for that coveted fourth slot. He missed by two points last year. In that same sectional Beck and the younger Merschman are also possibilities, joining Wooten and the freshman Perdue (Reading).

**125 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: LOGAN STIEBER (MONROEVILLE)**

Top Contenders

2	Reynolds (Pleasant)	16	Goldberg (Miami East)
3	Donahue (Tuslaw)	17	B.Merschman (Delphos St. John)
4	Vargo (CVCA)	18	Fano (Waterloo)
5	Shepard (Sparta Highland)	19	Petersheim (Waynedale)
6	Lopez (Patrick Henry)	20	Guilford (Badin)
7	Kiefer (Chanel)	21	Fisher (Carlisle)
8	Campbell (Troy Christian)	22	Smith (Delta)
9	Mallos (Cuyahoga Hts.)	23	Fisher (Allen East)
10	Fusco (Hartley)	24	Foster (Bellaire)
11	Panno (Blanchester)	25	Coulter (Cardington Lincoln)
12	Burns (Edison)	26	Smith (Evergreen)
13	Nolte (St. Clairsville)	27	Matacic (Jackson Milton)
14	Border (Caldwell)	28	Burge (Norwayne)
15	Johannsen (Port Clinton)	29	Norval (Woodridge)

If at the beginning of this year one was to list those wrestlers with the highest probability of becoming a 2009 State Champion the name Logan Stieber would have to be at the very top of the list. Already a two time state champ he has been on of the most dominating wrestlers in state history and was moving up only one weight class. He came into this season with a 94-1 record (losing only to David Taylor when a freshman) and was never really tested last year. Yet, had he fractured his hand in February rather than November it would have destroyed his season. Such are the vagaries of chance in all sports (and in life) where the unexpected can bring down giants. As it is Stieber has just returned and barring further bad luck will overwhelm the field at this weight class. Incidentally, Stieber could become the first wrestler in history to win four state titles without ever needing to wrestle a six-minute bout. In his first two years he has had five falls (in exactly six minutes) and three technical falls.

With the battle being for 2<sup>nd</sup> place it will be an advantage to exit Stieber's district (you'll be away from him in Columbus) and it just so happens that Lopez, a top contender, will also be at Owens. Lopez placed two years ago and had a terrific regular season last year, but did not participate in the tournament process. Lopez has won this year at Arcadia and Woodmore, but wrestles a weak schedule. State qualifier Johannsen is also a threat here. He wrestles a much more vigorous schedule and took a title at Black River. He should qualify again. The fourth spot, or, maybe better, belongs to the freshman Burns. He upset three-time state qualifier Dandurand to win at Edison, won again at Bellevue and just three days ago won at Plymouth. McGrail is a possibility but if there is an upset it's likely to be pulled off by a Smith, Jordan (Delta), Jeff (Evergreen) or Matt (Margaretta). They're all good.

The Steubenville District is terrific. I think at least two of the top contenders have finalist potential. And one of them, Reynolds, if he wins his district will be paired away from

Stieber. Reynolds was 5<sup>th</sup> two years ago at 103# and 3<sup>rd</sup> last year after losing by fall to Tessari at 112#. He's wrestled a solid schedule finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Midwest Classic and Elgin, but failing to place at Brecksville after losing to two fabulous freshmen. I've always liked Shepard, but he just hasn't done much once he gets to States. Last year he took Householder (eventual state runner-up) into overtime in the district final, but then went 1-2 at States, losing to Sommers and Begg. This year he's been great again and needs to carry that to the Value City Arena. Fusco was a state quarter-finalist last year losing to Tolson and failing to place. This year he most recently was 4<sup>th</sup> at the CIT. All these boys are from the Central District, but both Nolte and Border are from the Eastern District and both are also returning state qualifiers. They split two bouts this year and could challenge Fusco, but probably not the top duo. Jake Foster, Coulter and Neer are other possibilities, but this is a very crowded district.

I wasn't sure whether Donahue or Vargo should be top rated at Maple Hts. but the question was nicely answered when Donahue won 6-2 at Medina. Donahue was a state qualifier last year, but drew two-time champ Sergent in the first round and got pushed into the loser's bracket. After a shutout win over Gualtieri, he lost to three-time state placer Pope. It was not the luckiest of draws. He was a semi-finalist at Medina finishing 4<sup>th</sup> and then won the Dies. Vargo, a transfer from Akron St. Vincent, was 5<sup>th</sup> at Medina and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun losing only to state champ Zach Neibert 6-1. Both have finalist potential. Right with this duo is Kiefer, sometimes hurt and always just getting to weight, but very solid. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT splitting two bouts with Fusco. Prior to that, he was 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville including a win over Skilton. Injuries caused him to miss the tournaments last year. That leaves, in my mind, state placer Mallos and state qualifier Fano with just one open berth. Last year, after a first round state loss, Mallos beat Merschman and Fusco to place. He could meet both of them again if he can get to Columbus. I favor the former, but Petersheim, Maticac and Norval are possibilities. Watch for Burge he went into overtime last year with Donahue almost eliminating him from state qualification.

Despite some solid credentials Fairmont is probably not the strongest district. Campbell, who has great talent, stepped in as a backup last year and wound up taking 6<sup>th</sup>, nice depth for a Division III team. This year it's been more of a struggle partly due, I believe, to the injury bug. State qualifier Panno was quarter-finalist last year, but then quickly lost to Kovach and was soon gone. He's been even better this year winning, for example, at Edgewood and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Elgin at 125#. Merschman placed two years ago at 103# and qualified last year, but he'll have to be at his best to get out for a third time. Still he has proven to be a resourceful wrestler. Goldberg has something of the same history. This year he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Troy. Guilford is one of the first wrestlers from Badin I've mentioned and he has been cleaning up in smaller tournaments and was a placer at the SWOCA. Trey Fisher (Carlisle) and Ty Fisher (Allen East) both, coincidentally, made my list along with Breisch.

**130 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: CAM TESSARI (MONROEVILLE)**

Top Contenders

2	Carpenter (Madeira)	14	Freeman (Allan East)
3	Sommers (CVCA)	15	Hook (Nelsonville York)
4	Canter (Bellaire)	16	Widder (Waynedale)
5	Kuzma (Hopewell Loudon)	17	Correll (Calvert)
6	Begg (Bluffton)	18	Breuer (Deer Park)
7	Orrill (Chanel)	19	Hernandez (Elmwood)
8	Gualtieri (West Jefferson)	20	Gerber (Garaway)
9	Dankle (Cuyahoga Hts.)	21	Mackey (Martins Ferry)
10	Callarik (St. Clairsville)	22	Freiberg (Cardinal)
11	Ziegler (Mechanicsburg)	23	Sandridge (Johnstown Monroe)
12	Cardiero (Girard)	24	McDonald (Plymouth)
13	Bodenbender (Tinora)	25	Grys (Western Reserve)
		26	Bouman (Norwayne)

For the second consecutive year Monroeville will be heavy favorites to win state titles in three consecutive weight classes. Tessari, perhaps the least well known of Monroeville's four superstars, will be the anchor man in that quest, but like the other two will be a heavy favorite. Tessari has had a knack for finding rough weight classes in which to compete. Last year he opened his state competition facing three returning state placers, pinning them all. Then in the finals he surrendered a big five-point move to fellow freshman Tyler Heminger, but then earned an escape and a clinching takedown to win 12-9. This year he was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman, losing to the brilliant Chris Villalonga in the semi-finals and 1<sup>st</sup> at Brecksville. At the latter tournament he eked out a tough 4-3 semi-finals win over the redoubtable Jake Vaughan. In his high school career he has suffered 5 losses all at the Ironman Tourney.

I happened to be standing right next to the mat when Johnny Carpenter and Mike Kovach battled for 3<sup>rd</sup> place at 119# last year. These were two fine young wrestlers at the end of a long tournament still going all out and still very physical in a battle of equals. Carpenter was happy to win the 4-3 decision, and, today, maybe even happier since a district title seeds him away from Tessari. Carpenter was very good, beating Sommers 12-2, and pinning Johannsen, to make the semi-finals where Logan Stieber tech falled him. This year he's up two weight classes and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the SWOCA, an upset loser to a suddenly hot Ruffing, who won the MVP. Carpenter could be a finalist. State placer Begg was 7<sup>th</sup> last year and has wrestled primarily at 135#. I'm guessing he's keeping his options open. He should easily be second best at this district and maybe more. He only lost to Carpenter 11-9 in the district finals. A reversal of that score might well put him opposite Stieber. State qualifier Ziegler is one of the leaders of a good Mechanicsburg team and won most recently at Olentangy. He missed out on qualification last year, but seems to have bounced back strongly. Freeman won at Allen East and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Marion Harding, in this, his last run at state qualification. Factor in

Brewer, Timmerman (Coldwater) and Bierman (Badin) and this will be a solid test for Carpenter.

I'm not seeing the normal level of depth at Maple Hts., however, Sommers, who was 5<sup>th</sup> last year at Columbus, has apparently made a quantum leap forward. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at North Canton losing to D-I state runner-up Fayette 2-0 and 1<sup>st</sup> at Medina. He looks ready. Orrill qualified at 125# last year, but lost to Carpenter in 33 seconds and to Kuzma 8-7. He'll do better this year if he can bounce back from injuries. State alternate Dankle should be in a solid position to qualify. I watched him last year use tremendous quickness to upset Donahue at districts, but Morris and Orrill cost him a state trip. Cardiero was also one bout from States last year with Freiberg, Widder and, maybe, Bouman with similar type chances.

After Tessari it's a weak group at Owens. A possible exception might be Kuzma who qualified for States with a district 4<sup>th</sup> and went 1-2 in Columbus. He's wrestled at three different weight classes but I think he'll end up here. It's his easiest path to Columbus. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Tiffin at 135#. Hernandez and McDonald are seasoned veterans who could do something here, but do not look to have the firepower to compete well at States. Bodenbender, just down from 135# was a big winner at Perrysburg and this is the kind of weight class where a hot weekend can get you to Columbus. Perhaps Grys or Crapo are more the answer. Crapo (Seneca East) just won big at Plymouth while Grys won handily at Clyde. Still both have had uneven years. Two mysteries surround this weight class. Will state alternate Correll participate in the tournament process and how good is the young Cowell (Archbold)?

State qualifiers Canter and Gualtieri shine at Steubenville. Canter has been winning everything after going 1-2 at the state meet. Bellaire has had a nice team the last few years and its strength has often been in the middle of the lineup. At Columbus last year he won his first bout, but then drew two-time state champion Daniel Kolodzick in the quarterfinals losing 12-4. Immediately thereafter he lost to Powers and was eliminated. He kicks off a segment of their lineup that includes state qualifier Faykus, Dobson, state runner-up Chilson, and Porter. Gualtieri won 46 bouts last year, but suffered a heart-breaking 8-7 loss in first round action at States and failed to place. I thought he might go at 135# but has apparently settled here. After that it's by guess and by golly. Hook is a monster winner in the Southeast but Gualtieri beat him 12-3 at district while Callarik just won at St. Clairsville, Gualtieri also beat him at districts 2-1. You might look for Gerber, 1<sup>st</sup> at Aurora or Sandridge.

**135 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: JORDAN THOME (TROY CHRISTIAN)**

Top Contenders

2	Oney (South Central)	14	Rayfield (Delta)
3	Powers (CVCA)	15	Gainey (Girard)
4	Prezzia (St.Clairsville)	16	Robinson (Heath)
5	Rentschler (Liberty Center)	17	Clark (Monroeville)
6	Collier (Chanel)	18	Hershey (West Salem Northwestern)
7	Vitallo (Waynedale)	19	Traver (Genoa)
8	Deady (Triad)	20	Allen (Ridgewood)
9	Espinoza (Milbury Lake)	21	Sanders (Badin)
10	Alexander (Elmwood)	22	Stretar (Black River)
11	Faykus (Bellaire)	23	Cummins (Cardington Lincoln)
12	Hussey (Ayersville)	24	Klaus (Mechanicsburg)
13	Montoney (Woodridge)	25	Meinking (Purcell)
		26	Borton (Clinton Massie)

As a three-time state placer Jordan Thome is in the top of echelon of Division III wrestlers, but he has struggled the last night of major tournaments. He is a three-time Brecksville runner-up, a three-time district runner-up, and has lost his last bout at all three of his state tournament appearances, finishing 6<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 2<sup>nd</sup>. This is the year where he closes the deal and takes home the state title at 135<sup>th</sup>. The same weight class his brother dominated just two years ago, Troy Christian has had a brilliant four year run, already winning two state titles and likely a third to this year and gaining a runner-up trophy in 2006. That dominance is not likely to be sustained next year as the last three stalwarts, Hancock, Toal, and Thome will graduate.

The question really is; Are there wrestlers out there in Division III who could frustrate Thome yet again? My answer is that Thome would be at least a 90% favorite against any contender, but that still leaves an edge of uncertainty. One of those ten percenters is Tyler Powers, a state qualifier at 130<sup>#</sup>. Last year he caught Thome's buddy, state champion Zac Hancock in the first round, and lost by fall. However, he went on to win three time state consolation bouts to finish 7<sup>th</sup>. This year he was one win from placing at Ironman, and then won at North Canton, including falls over Burrel and Maiwurm. At Medina he moved into the semi-finals after an impressive win over Shepard to meet Salupo. It appears (and this is strictly by interference) that he was injured in the bout, but declared the winner. He forfeited in the finals and has not wrestled since. State qualifier Collier returns after a 1-2 record in Columbus last year after an amazing tournament run. He entered the sectional with a 15-18 record, but won a sectional title and was a district runner-up. He'll do much better this year. After early season injuries he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Big 8. But then failed to place at the CIT. I like Vitallo as third best. Last year at districts he lost to state placewinner Thoreson in a tough two-point bout and then in overtime in his go-to-state battle. This year he was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Dies and 1<sup>st</sup> at Elgin. The last state ticket is there for the asking. I favor Montoney after his gutty 2<sup>nd</sup>, up

a weight at North Coast, and his recent win at Woodridge. Gainey is another possibility after recently defeating Tomaino and having previous district experience. Hershey, Stretar and Rose (Cardinal) are other wrestlers with good credentials. .

Oney should dominate at Owens. Now a junior he has matured into a high-scoring wrestling machine. Already a two time state qualifier he was 6<sup>th</sup> last year losing early to Sergeant and later to the older Carpenter. This year he has ripped off wins at Black River, Plymouth, and Clyde and has demonstrated finalist potential. If Kuzma wrestles at 130<sup>th</sup> as I hypothesize, that would leave three vacant state possibilities. One would think that returning state qualifiers Rentschler, Alexander, and Traver would be natural favorites, but I don't see it this way. It looks like Rentschler should qualify, but Traver will have to be at this absolute best to do so. Alexander is somewhere in the middle with perhaps, thoughts of competing at 140#. Hussey, down from 140# is a solid choice as is Espinoza who won at Northwood and was 2<sup>nd</sup> to Hussey at Woodmore. Rayfield is also a solid contender despite a problematic genetic background on the paternal side, but Clark is the long shot candidate. He won three bouts at Brecksville, losing his placement match, 4-3, to two-time Division I placer Channel.

I'm not seeing a whole lot after state qualifier Prezzia at Steubenville however this sophomore has solid placement potential. He upset district champ Costello in the first round at Columbus and then loss to Hancock and Carnahan (in overtime). If he has lost this year I haven't seen it and most of his victories are by big scores. State qualifier Faykus also returns after missing out last year. He's won at Shadyside and East Liverpool this year. Two returning state alternates, Allen and Robinson, are also in the mix. Watch, particularly, the latter boy who is only a sophomore and narrowly missed qualification last year. Boyd (Caldwell) and Tanner (Johnstown Monroe) are other possibilities with Cummins also a having upset potential.

Thome will be the heavy favorite at Fairmont. Begg will decide between 130# and 135# trying to match his goals with the best possible outcome. If here he would rank second best at this district, the same as at 130#. After Thome (and, possibly, Begg) this will not be a strong district. State qualifier Deady, may compete here and that would add to its substance. He was a district 3<sup>rd</sup> last year, but lost two close bouts on Thursday and failed to advance. The sophomore Sanders is the last of four consecutive good wrestlers at Badin. He should qualify. That leaves Klaus as a solid alternative and Burton and Meinking as longshots.

**140 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: ZAC HANCOCK (TROY CHRISTIAN)**

Top Contenders

2	Coomes (Pleasant)	14	Hickin (CVCA)
3	Pfister (Black River)	15	Paus (Clinton Massie)
4	Block (Johnstown Monroe)	16	McNichols (East Knox)
5	Sonnenberg (Van Buren)	17	Davis (Zane Trace)
6	Noernberg (Cuyahoga Hts.)	18	Rinehart (Plymouth)
7	J.Reindel (Stritch)	19	Bromelmeier (VASJ)
8	Goebel (Edgerton)	20	Cartwright (Mohawk)
9	Trusnik (Chanel)	21	Blackwell (Grandview Hts.)
10	Espinoza (Genoa)	22	Z.Reindel (Delphos St. John)
11	Freeman (Bluffton)	23	Ziegler (Cardinal)
12	Malkus (Berkshire)	24	Dobson (Bellaire)
13	Bruns (Versailles)	25	Walters (Allan East)

Probably the single biggest surprise in the final round at the state meet last year was Zac Hancock's upset win over Daniel Kolodzik at 130#. He defeated a two time state champ who had been at 135# most off the year and had defeated the D-II and III state champions at that weight class. In addition it avenged an 11-0 drubbing he had received from Kolodzik in the 2007 finals and ended a streak of at least three losses to that wrestler. I credit Steve Goudy and his staff for having an excellent game plan to win that Saturday night. However, don't get me wrong, Hancock is a tremendous wrestler, a three time state placer with a boatload of tournament titles. This is the fifth consecutive weight class with a heavily favored wrestler at the top of my list. However, I'm a little worried here since Hancock did not look particularly sharp at either the Ironman or Brecksville.

One of the significant positives is that he'll emerge from a very weak district. I'm not finding much competition for him. There is, of course, the possibility that Deady might move back to 140# or that some of the excess 145's have room to drop. There is a huge quality difference at this district between this weight class and 145#. I do expect to see district semi-finalist Freeman competing here and if so he'll be second best. Add in Bruns and Paus and that might be the top four that I see currently there. Two other possibilities from the north are Zach Reindel and Walters. There will probably be additional movement into the weight class, and possibly, out.

Two solid contenders for high placement will emerge from Steubenville. Coomes has been 5<sup>th</sup> the past two years as part of those fine Pleasant teams. Both times he reached the semi-finals only to lose to the eventual champ, last year it was 12-3 to Hancock. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Brecksville, losing to Hightower in the semi-finals (and giving him his only tough bout) and ended up, you guessed it 5<sup>th</sup>. Ironically, that was by virtue of a forfeit win over Hancock. Block was a solid 7<sup>th</sup> last year and he has been a

consistent winner this year, most recently at Sheridan. This duo should dominate here with the added bonus of having a two-thirds chance of being opposite Hanock for the winner. There are probably 10-12 wrestlers with legitimate shots at the last two berths, and some of them are from schools with little wrestling visibility. I have listed four possibilities, but as before, this is really just a semi-educated guess. At any rate I'm looking at McNichols, Davis, Blackwell and Dobson. It should be interesting.

Owens is another district that doesn't have real depth at this weight class. Reindel is a two time state qualifier who has recently opted for this weight class. He is 1-4 at the state level losing two close bouts last year, one in overtime. He has won at Northwood and, significantly at the CIT. He was also 3<sup>rd</sup> at Oak Harbor, when at 145#, behind Valliant and Witt. The other returning state qualifier is Goebel, who qualified at this weight class last year, beating Dye for 3<sup>rd</sup>. He, too, has been at 145#, but expect to see him here. I really like state alternate Sonnenberg who was a placer at the Junior High State Meet. He dropped late to 130# last year and ended up as the state alternate when, I think, strategically, 135# might have been a better location. Now at 140# he could be a district finalist. He was 1<sup>st</sup> at Woodmore and Arcadia, but doesn't wrestle a tough schedule. Rinehart and Cartwright are possibilities with the Northwood champ Espinoza slightly ahead. If Alexander is here he severely diminishes the opportunity of this last group.

Pfister is a potential state finalist coming out of Maple Hts. He was undefeated last year when hurt at mid-season and missed the rest of the year. Two years ago he was a state semi-finalist before losing to Chilson and dropping to 6<sup>th</sup>. This year he won at Black River and the Gorman where he defeated Yetzer in overtime. He was again injured at Black River where he lost two close bouts to McKee and McGrain. State qualifier Noernberg should qualify once more. Last year he beat Reindel in the first round at Columbus, but then lost to three-time state champ Gambill. He has been a finalist at all of his tournaments this year. I then count five wrestles for the last couple of spots. I like Trusnik and Hickin best with Malkus very close behind and with Bromelmeier and Ziegler still in good position. Each has had a successful year with Trusnik, for example, winning at the Big 8, 2<sup>nd</sup> at Solon and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT. These will be the qualifiers you won't want to draw into.

**145 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: KURTIS JEFFERIS (BARNSVILLE)**

Top Contenders

2	Burns (Troy Christian)	16	Runyon (Blanchester)
3	Hunter (Manchester)	17	Boehm (Montpelier)
4	Chilson (Bellaire)	18	DeWitt (Delphos St. John)
5	Betts (Elmwood)	19	Swan (Western Reserve)
6	DeHart (Covington)	20	Cochrane (Berkshire)
7	Cooperider (Pleasant)	21	Monesmith (Preble Shawnee)
8	Bender (Loudonville)	22	Robinson (Johnstown Monroe)
9	Miller (Brookfield)	23	Pridemore (Margaretta)
10	Rufenacht (Archbold)	24	Fleming (Port Clinton)
11	Rado (Woodridge)	25	Nelson (Newark Catholic)
12	Neuberger (Edison)	26	Kassnel (Cuyahoga Hts.)
13	Ferber (South Central)	27	Hayes (Madeira)
14	Washington (Carlisle)	28	Griffin (Fairport Harbor)
15	Schafer (Chanel)	29	Wireman (Fairland)

I think this is the deepest weight class in Division III with quality wrestlers emerging from almost every corner of the state. I've identified at least eight wrestlers with a minimum of a 10% chance of winning the title. That means great matchups, ones that in other years might be the state finals, could happen as early as the quarterfinals. It will be important to win the district title because it provides the highest probability of avoiding such early round battles. And, as always, pairings will be critical because of the diversity of styles we'll be seeing here.

The most rugged district competition is likely to be at Steubenville where there are three state title contenders. Jefferis was a state qualifier at 140# last year losing to eventual champ Pajestka 6-4 in the quarterfinals and failing to place. Part of the problem was a one-point district final loss to Chilson that threw him into a more difficult bracket placement. This year he was undefeated at 152#, but recently dropped to 145# where he "handled" Chilson in a 5-2 win at Shadyside. Only a junior he is, like all of the many Jefferis wrestlers, rugged and relentless. Chilson will likely get another shot at Jefferis at the OVAC and he has been a big event wrestler. A state-finalist two years ago at 135#, he was 5<sup>th</sup> last year after losing a narrow semi-finals bout to Cloran. The Jefferis loss is the only blemish on his record and he has a proven track record at the state meet. Cooperider cannot be overlooked at this district. He was a state quarter-finalist last year losing a tough 10-9 bout and then failing to place. I have him winning at DeSales and Elgin and losing only to Stephens (Graham) in the finals at the Midwest Classic. Since Chilson and Jefferis exit the same sectional, he'll have to defeat both to win at districts. The fourth qualifying spot is likely to be a real donnybrook, but at a much lower level of performance. Perhaps, Robinson or Nelson might be the leading candidates for that spot, but do not be surprised if someone like Wireman, completely off the radar, qualifies.

Two wrestles stand out at Fairmont. The first is Chris Burns who, as I will later discuss in the team section, is a key element in Troy Christian's plan to win a third consecutive state title. Two years ago wrestling up a weight class, he took a 7<sup>th</sup>, and last year followed up his district title with a strong 4<sup>th</sup> place finish. This year he has been absent almost from the start, with injuries. Still he beat Chilson by three points last year and the Troy Christian wrestlers are always well coached. If healthy he has to be in the top three. DeHart was 2<sup>nd</sup> to Shivener at the Junior High States two years ago. He was a state quarter-finalist at 130# last year losing a 12-11 decision to Coomes and eventually finishing 6<sup>th</sup> (losing to Coomes again 8-7). This year he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at GMVWA to Brian Stephens while beating some good kids in the earlier rounds. He is an aggressive wrestler providing Covington with another state title contender just three years after Logan Brown swept away all competition in 2006. This duo stands somewhat above a talented field of potential qualifiers. State qualifiers Washington and Runyon are currently at this weight class and are both possible contenders. Both qualified two years ago, but missed out last year. Runyon was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Elgin (to Cooperider) and 1<sup>st</sup> at Edgewood. Washington struggled at the GMVWA, but has the experience to qualify. District semi-finalist and state alternate DeWitt might be a stronger candidate, but wrestles a relatively undemanding schedule. Add in Monesmith and Hayes and that adds up to five well-credentialed wrestlers for two openings. We may have some of this group at 140# or 152#, particularly the former which looks like a far easier district.

The Owens District also has no shortage of potential state qualifiers. There are currently three returning state qualifiers, a state alternate and at least three other solid contenders. I think the best of this contingent is the senior Alex Betts, who had 40 wins last year including a 1-2 record in Columbus. This year he has spent much of the time at 160#, but competed at this class at Medina. He managed a solid 4<sup>th</sup> place ribbon that included a big win over Konner Witt. I think we can expect a medium to high place from Betts. State qualifier Rufenacht would by some natural progression seem to be the next best at this weight class. Rufenacht has been at 152# much of the season, but won at the weight class at Vermillion. He had a difficult state meet last year, but has bounded back well. I think state alternate Neuberger is at the same level. He won at both Edison and Bellevue and has a solid defensive philosophy. One to watch is Ferber. He was a district semi-finalist last year as a sophomore, missing state qualification by two points. He was very impressive at Black River majoring Fleming in the finals. I think he'll reach Columbus this year. Also in contention are Boehm, Swan and Pridemore with first named a particular threat. Again, as I mentioned at Fairmont it is likely some will bail from this weight.

Early on in this process I had Aaron Hunter as the top-ranked 145#, but now I'm not so sure. Yes, he has won a couple of relatively weak tournaments, but his 4<sup>th</sup> place finish at North Canton was somewhat disconcerting. Not that I expected him to beat Hightower and Cline (he wrestled neither), but that his two losses were to far less credentialed wrestlers. Hunter was 3<sup>rd</sup> last year at 145# in Columbus, losing in the opening round and then winning five consecutive bouts, including one over defending champ Stiltner. He has the ability to win it all, and while he is not ranked first here he

could certainly end up on the top step of the podium. The wrestler to watch is the unheralded Dylan Bender. He was 1<sup>st</sup> at Mt. Vernon, 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Gorman and a semi-finalist at North Canton. The last tournament is where he upset Hunter 6-4. Last year he was at 160# and failed to reach the district tournament. This year he should do far better. State qualifier Miller now seems likely to be at 145#. He is a two time Top Gun placer and has placement potential at this difficult weight. I don't want to overlook Rado who was at 152# last year and was a district semi-finalist. These Woodridge kids were all tough a year ago and the same looks to be true this year. At any rate Rado who was a point from qualification last year remains a real threat at this weight class. That still leaves room for at least one more qualifier and that should come from Schafer, Cochran or Kassnel. All three have district experience and have had solid years. I think Schafer is the most athletic of this group and therefore has a slight edge.

### 152 #

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: MICHAEL CAWLEY (NORWALK ST. PAUL)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Gladieux (Stritch)	14	K. Burns (Troy Christian)
3	Walter (Chanel)	15	Drake (Triway)
4	Howe (Blanchester)	16	Falk (Grandview Hts.)
5	Price (Mechanicsburg)	17	Francis (Girard)
6	Rayl (Blufton)	18	Remenaric (Tuslaw)
7	Pajestka (Cuyahoga Hts.)	20	Chatterton (Dixie)
8	Chapman (Hopewell-Loudon)	21	Elling (Liberty Center)
9	Prather (West Jefferson)	22	Kunk (Coldwater)
10	Porter (Bellaire)	23	Howard (Edison)
11	Georgian (VASJ)	24	Dies (Manchester)
12	Fullenkamp (Versailles)	25	Keller (Montpelier)
13	McElrath (Woodridge)	26	Kaiser (Martins Ferry)

This is the kind of weight class that frustrates and depresses forecasters. To me at least there just doesn't seem to be anyone that I can quite envision walking off the mat Saturday night and jumping into his coach's embrace. There are a lot of people who mentally forecast their choices for state titles (only a few idiots write them down) and my guess is that precious few will get it right at 152#. Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of very competent wrestlers at this class, but I'm just wondering which one will grab it by the throat and win. Yes, certainty is the last thing you'll find here, but that's what will make it fun to watch. Most people like a good mystery and this one will be tough for all of us to untangle. I think the pairings are critical here because we have defensive wrestlers and some heavy-duty scorers. My view is that if the defensive wrestlers draw into each other not only will it make for some boring wrestling, but it will make certain that at least one aggressive wrestler will be on the mat Saturday night. That's the night when stalling warnings increase giving the aggressive wrestler, perhaps, a slight edge.

One of the best districts will be at Owens. There a pair of state qualifiers who didn't make it to Columbus will do battle. Gladieux, now a junior, has had a terrific season. He is not just defeating people, he is pinning them. Most recently he finished off Cody Walters in less than 90 seconds to win the CIT. He also had a quick fall to win at Northwood, and he seems to be in total control at this time. Cawley also missed out last year, losing to Schalk and Rufenaecht after reaching the district finals. He is the kind of wrestler you enjoy watching with his go-for-broke style. He worries far more about getting back points than in defending his opponent. He beat Prather to win the Gorman and was second at Lorain Southview, losing to Bobby Cruz, 12-10, in overtime. He and Gladieux should light up the scoreboard. State alternate Chapman has moved up three weight classes without missing a beat. He missed state qualification by two points last year. He has been wrestling at 160#, but was at 152# at Tiffin where he finished 2<sup>nd</sup> to Laney, 3-1. Yet another contender is Elling who was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Marion Harding after suffering his first loss. Howard is also here after finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> to Chapman at Edison when both were at 160#. I would not be, as mentioned, surprised to see a couple of 145's move up (or back) to this weight class.

It's a very crowded weight class at Maple Hts. with four wrestlers who have state experience. Walter is the only placer in that quartet, finishing a sturdy 7<sup>th</sup> after a narrow first round loss to Foley. He won three bouts, including one over Kyle Burns. This year he was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Solon (splitting two bouts with Eddy), 1<sup>st</sup> at Mayfield, and 2<sup>nd</sup> at the CIT to Gladieux. Pajestka, Drake, and McElrath all went to Columbus last year, but were a combined 0-6. I think Pajestka is the best of this bunch despite the fact that he hasn't wrestled much due to injury. Last year his brother made spaghetti of my rankings winning the state titles from 13<sup>th</sup> spot – the lowest ranked wrestler to win in a couple of years. Pajestka could easily do the same – except that he isn't ranked 13<sup>th</sup>. McElrath is a mystery at districts. He won his first two bouts 12-10 and 10-8 and then was pinned in 25 seconds by Pajestka. Still, he came back to beat Georgian to go to States. He may have to do that again as Georgian is also here, losing to Walters in the semi-finals 5-4. The sophomore Hall has surpassed some of this state qualifying group. He beat Drake 17-1 to win at Smithville and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Chippewa. Also here is the excellent Dies and Remenaric along with Freiberg. Finally, state alternate Francis is at this weight class and he was very impressive last year. My guess is that Walters and Pajestka qualify easily with Hall next – after that chaos.

It's not nearly that frantic at Steubenville. State qualifier Prather returns up three weight classes from last year. It hasn't hurt this sophomore as he finished 2<sup>nd</sup> to Cawley (by two points) at the Gorman. Bracken and Falk are both good and with Prather make a formidable Columbus contingent. Falk is just back from injury, but was 3<sup>rd</sup> behind Gifford at Grandview Hts. Bracken was a district 6<sup>th</sup> last year losing to Gilmore by four in his go-to-state bout. Porter is yet another of those good Bellaire middleweights that include Canter and Chilson. He's the best along the river now that Jefferis has moved to 145#. Kaiser and, maybe, Hudson (Elgin) should also be role players here.

The district at Fairmont is first-rate, but I just wonder if all of them will stay here. Price was a district runner-up at 160# last year and ended up winning three bouts at Columbus to place 6<sup>th</sup>. He has to be considered as a top prospect to be a finalist at this weight class at States.

Also here is two-time state qualifier and state placer Howe. He was 7<sup>th</sup> two years ago. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Elgin (an up and coming tourney), losing only to Division II favorite McGookey. Rayl qualified last year at 135#, but has spent much of this year at 160#. He's a terrific kid, but you have to wonder who in this group will move to the far, far easier 160# class. Rayl is a pinner. Burns, who was the state alternate, had one of those breaks last year when Mendenhall did not wrestle and he was able to compete. Even better, he won a bout at Columbus. He has had some injuries and seems rather small for this weight, but he will likely qualify. State alternate Fullenkamp just won at Plymouth after finishing 4<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA. This creates an issue since Price, Howe, Rayl, Burns, and Fullenkamp cannot all qualify at this weight. Also here is Chatterton. I saw him last year at Richmond Hts., and, frankly, was very surprised that he failed to qualify. He may struggle this year if this weight class stays as presently constituted. Add in Kunk and Hahn and it will be a tough two days in Kettering.

### 160 #

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: ZACH TOAL (TROY CHRISTIAN)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Utlely (CVCA)	14	Meade (Cuyahoga Hts.)
3	Kwait (Calvert)	15	Leininger (Archbold)
4	Packard (Belpre)	16	Norway (Nelsonville York)
5	Merryman (Shadyside)	17	Angevine (Reading)
6	Dye (Patrick Henry)	18	Elling (Liberty Center)
7	Lewis (West Liberty Salem)	19	Carr (Northmor)
8	Stewart (Mogadore)	20	Zelev (Kirtland)
9	Kapelka (Calvert)	21	Hinkle (Purcell)
10	Kobilarscik (Tuslaw)	22	King (Heath)
11	Gilmore (Indian Valley)	23	Ramage (Wellington)
12	Grine (Van Buren)	24	Cochran (West Jefferson)
13	LaRosa (Ledgemont)	25	Miller (Delphos Jefferson)
		26	Gross (Norwalk St. Paul)

This is one of the stronger weight classes in Division III featuring two-time state champion Zach Toal and a host of strong contenders. Still despite the quality emerging from every district it is difficult to see a healthy Toal being dethroned in his senior year. After all Toal, except for a quarterfinal loss by fall as a 112# freshman (avenged by fall for 3<sup>rd</sup> place) would be going for his fourth state title. He has had the ability throughout his career to win the close bout as evidenced again this year when he twice beat Kyle Lang in close, tough bouts to win at the Ironman and Brecksville. Last year he had two

close state bouts beating Petrella and McCoy by a total of three points and I would anticipate he will have at least one close bout again this year. Still, in future years when we look back at the Troy Christian Era the signature wrestler that we'll attach to that time will be Zach Toal.

There are two excellent challengers to Toal. In other years they might well be favorites. Utley, only a sophomore had a sensational freshman season. He won the Maple Hts. districts with three falls and a comfortable win and then was a state semi-finalist after beating Faunce and Packard. A three-point loss pushed him into the consolation bracket where he had two falls to finish 3<sup>rd</sup>. This year he has rotated between 160# and 171#. He would be seeded away from Toal should he repeat as district champ. The other great challenger is Kwiat. Now a senior he was 5<sup>th</sup> at Columbus last year, but never met Utley. He started the year at 171# and placed 7<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman. Since then he has been at 160# and has been almost unbeatable. His last big win was at the Gorman where he defeated Gallik by nine points. He'd very likely have to defeat both Utley and Toal to win the title.

Toal does not face overly stern competition at Fairmont. If Rayl stays at 152#, and why wouldn't he, state qualifier Lewis is the only possible threat. He was the district champion at the weight class last year winning three close battles, but the pairing gods pulled an evil trick. He drew eventual champ Heasley in the first round and ended up failing to place. This year he remains a constant finalist with his most recent win at Valley View. Angevine and Hinkle are leading candidates for the last two state slots with the younger Miller a possibility.

Utley should not have an inordinate number of problems at Maple Hts. Stewart and Kobilarscik are both state qualifiers, but they will not match up well with him. However, they both should qualify again. Kobilarscik was an overtime loss away from placing last year at 152#. He was 6<sup>th</sup> at Medina and 5<sup>th</sup> at the Dies. Stewart qualified at 160#, but drew state runner-up Yant in the first round and was out Thursday night. Stewart was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Dies with he and Kobilarscik both losing in the semi-finals. State alternate LaRosa and Meade are the principal contenders for the last spot. I wouldn't count out Zele or Ramage both of whom recently dropped down from 160# and could be a threat for the last spot.

The principle threat to Kwiat at Owens is the sophomore Xavier Dye. A former junior high state champion, he qualified at 140# last year, but went 0-2 in Columbus. He has won at Arcadia and Woodmore, but I believe Kwiat will overpower him. I think Kapelka has made giant strides this year and he and Dye are about even. Winning at Tiffin just validated what I heard about him this year. That leaves state alternate Grine, Leininger, Elling and Sheets (Edgerton) all at about the same level. Solid journeyman wrestlers with high productivity and a reasonable shot at state qualification.

I talked a lot about it being a three-man battle, but there is one wrestler who may barge into this weight class and make it a quartet. Packard qualified 3<sup>rd</sup> out of the Steubenville district losing a semi-final double overtime decision to state champion Steve Wilson 9-8.

An easy first round state winner he met Utey in the quarterfinals losing 1-0 and then was eliminated by Kwiat 12-5. So, he's seen two of the top three. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina losing a 9-7 overtime bout to Rosch. Clearly, his weakness is high scoring overtime bouts. These top four all exit different districts so the pairings should be great. One upset and Packard could be in the finals. There is a lot of depth at Steubenville. Merryman was a state placer at 152#, beating Kobilarscik in overtime in the critical go-to-state bout, and remains a high performing wrestler along the river. State qualifier Gilmore is a very solid wrestler for a much improved Indian Valley team. Who would have guessed just a couple of years ago that they would give Claymont a real battle. Norway is the best from the southeastern part of the state, winning the small tournaments and placing in the big ones. The best wrestlers from the Central District all seem to have "hard C" names with Carr, King, and Cochran in the forefront.

### 171 #

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: CHRIS PHILLIPS (MONROEVILLE)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Beam (Waynedale)	14	Amos (Tusky Valley)
3	Rodgers (Mechanicsburg)	15	Thompson (West Liberty Salem)
4	Brettrager (Kirtland)	16	Kwiat (Calvert)
5	Bowden (South Range)	17	Boyce (Edison)
6	Akins/ Kepplinger (Troy Christian)	18	Kucera (Sparta Highland)
7	Mickle (West Jefferson)	19	Hainline (Norwalk St. Paul)
8	Ackley (Elmwood)	20	Hochstetler (Garaway)
9	Wagner (Greeneview)	21	Kleman (Lakota)
10	Marthey (Tuslaw)	22	Scott (River Valley)
11	Hrabrak (Fostoria St. Wendelin)	23	Bonifas (Lincolnview)
12	Hunter (Manchester)	24	Oberdick (Martins Ferry)
13	Hursey (Indian Valley)	25	Parsons (Ledgemont)
		26	Richardson (Blanchester)

Ohio has produced some sensational upper weight wrestlers. High school superstars like Rex Holman, Mike Davies, Tommy Rowlands, Luke Fickell, Mike Coleman, come quickly to mind, and the list goes on and on back through the years. It looks ever more likely that Chris Phillips will join this legendary group, perhaps, in the fullness in time to become the first of equals. Last year he won at the Ironman and Brecksville, went 51-0, and dominated the state tournament. A Division III wrestler he nonetheless, comfortably defeated both Division I state finalists en route to the finest freshman year ever experienced by a freshman upper weight wrestler. This year its been more of the same with one hiccup losing at the Ironman to the excellent, defensive wrestler Ed Ruth of Blair Academy who frustrated Phillips' many takedown attempts and made it a one-move match handing Phillips his only high school defeat. Still the bout I remember was Phillips beating the excellent Nick Heflin for 3<sup>rd</sup> place in a bout of two aggressive wrestlers. No one in Division III can challenge Phillips and, if healthy, he won't go six full

minutes very often. He'll protect Division III's longest district streak by giving the Northwest District its sixth consecutive title at this weight class.

The awesome shadow of Phillips has caused some to find greener pastures and seek other, more comfortable weight classes. That will make the battle for placement no less energetic or passionate, but, perhaps, at a somewhat less lofty level. Part of the issue is that the 171 # bracket last year had only three underclassmen contained within it. One of those Dahs is not wrestling and (unsurprisingly) none of the 160# state qualifiers moved up and none of the 189# state qualifiers moved down. I'm not sure I've ever seen a weight class this lacking in past state experience.

There are a number of solid wrestlers at Owens with good district experience. I've developed a list of eight possible qualifiers, but have had little luck in ranking them. Ackley was 7<sup>th</sup> at Medina while Hrabak won at Norwalk. Both boys have lots of experience, Kwiat is good, but he really, like his brother, is a 160-pounder. Boyce has been a finalist at least twice while Hainline won at the Gorman. This is my top five in no particular order with Kleman waiting in the wings. No matter how the ranking at the top of this essay reads we all know that everyone here is about even. So what will decide this issue; my guess is good health, bracketing that is favorable and keeps one away from Phillips, refereeing breaks and good fortune and, oh, a hot weekend on the mat.

I see five solid choices at Maple Hts. with all of them having placement opportunities. I like Beam the best after watching him compete last year at Richmond Hts. Now a junior he should be in the very top echelon of contenders looking to reach the finals. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Elgin behind Kuechler and Brankamp, and 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Dies losing to the excellent Taylor, 10-7. State alternate Brettrager has been off my radar screen, but I saw him pin Beam last year in a consolation round. He has some deadly moves. He has been as high as 189#. Bowden is a returning state qualifier, the only one besides Phillips. He failed to win at Columbus, but this year should provide him with some ample opportunities. Marthey was 6<sup>th</sup> at Medina and that should serve as enough credentials at this weight class. Hunter was a surprise finalist at the North Canton and won handily at Woodmore. Parsons has an outside shot, but I wouldn't be surprised to see one of the excess 160's move up.

Steubenville is another district where few wrestlers stand out. I didn't see Mickle at the Gorman, but I am assuming he will compete. He won three district bouts last year and missed qualification by one bout. Hursey and Amos both have district experience with the latter boy winning their matchup last year (2-1) and ending up 6<sup>th</sup>. Hursey did win two district bouts, but I'm looking for Hochstetler to play a role here as well. Kucera seems second best out of the Columbus area. Scott might be a long-shot threat as well.

Rodgers was 2<sup>nd</sup> (to Xavier Dye) two years ago in the Junior High States and had an exceptional freshman year. He was a state qualifier at 152 #, but lost quickly at Columbus. This year he has moved up two weight classes and been even more successful. He was 1<sup>st</sup> at Xenia. Akins was the state alternate at this weight class last year missing qualification by two points. He has missed some time, but is healthy now.

He has been at 189 #, but this looks like a golden opportunity. If not, Kepplinger will fit in here, as well. Wagner lost a consolation overtime bout to the eventual state qualifier last year so he was close. This year he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Elyria Catholic forfeiting his final bout to Phillips and 8<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA losing to Kwiat in the 7<sup>th</sup> place bout. I see three other potential qualifiers, district 6<sup>th</sup> place finishers Thompson, Bonifas, and Richardson. Undoubtedly, I'll be surprised.

### **189 #**

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: KURTIS SCHAEFER (WEST SALEM NORTHWESTER)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Bowers (Pleasant)	16	Williams (Ontario)
3	Dues (Allen East)	17	Hayes (Dixie)
4	Hojnacki (CVCA)	18	Schafrath (Chippewa)
5	Running (Clinton Massie)	19	Neuenschwander (Archbold)
6	Shook (Newark Catholic)	20	Kahl (Shadyside)
7	Cheesman (Crestview)	21	Melvin (Brooklyn)
8	Crabtree (Wellsville)	22	Teach (Grandview Hts)
9	Zody (Triway)	23	Drumm (Heath)
10	Shreve (Martins Ferry)	24	Stockmaster (Buckeye Central)
11	McKnight (Carlisle)	25	Barrett (Chanel)
12	Klemp (Manchester)	26	Smithson (Blanchester)
13	Stacy (Liberty Center)	27	Blake (Tinora)
14	Akins/Kepplinger (Troy Christian)	28	Alig (Coldwater)
15	Kleman (Lakota)	29	Stewart (River)

It seems to be either feast or famine in Division III and this is one of those weight classes where it will be a feast of interesting wrestling. There is a nice mix of young and old, a wide range of geography, and no dominant superstar, but instead, a lot of good wrestlers. Let's first look at each district.

Kurtis Schaefer is on many days the best wrestler at the weight class in Division III. Whether those days will coincide with the days where the state title is decided is still an unanswered question. A Junior High State Champion two years ago he wrestled up a weight last year and was the state alternate. I thought, watching him, that he might have had injury issues. This year he won at Black River and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Medina to Division I choice Tumlin. Most of the best kids at this weight class come from the two southern sectionals, and they keep beating each other up. For example, Zody beat Hojnacki and Klemp beat Zody and, of course, Hojnacki has beaten (pinned) Klemp—and thus we just disproved the Mathematical Law of Transitivity. I'm putting my faith in Hojnacki's 7<sup>th</sup> place finish last year and his 4<sup>th</sup> at Medina—where Schaefer defeated him, 8-4. I also like Schafrath from the southern region with Melvin and Barrett, maybe, the two best from the North.

The Owens District is not nearly as deep. The standout this year has been state alternate Cheesman who has won everywhere, most recently at Elgin over Burrell. I think Stacey is probably next with Kleman, Williams, and Neuenschwander as possibilities and with Stockmaster or Blake as long shots.

The top four districts placers at this weight class are back again. I can't even remember that happening at an upper weight class. That should make this easy. Last year, at least, Bowers was ahead of Crabtree and Shook who were equal with Shreve slightly further back, and Bowers was the only one to place. Has that changed? It's difficult to tell because they don't often compete against one another. Bowers is still ahead, but Shook seems to have improved more than the others as shown by his runner-up finish at the CIT. Kahl, Teach, Drumm, and Stewart all have significant district experience, but it's going to be tough to move up here. I wonder whether some are considering the far easier 215# weight class.

A wrestler that seems to be overlooked is Dues. He was the state alternate at Fairmount last year—losing a 4-3 squeaker to Running. The latter boy went on to take 6<sup>th</sup> at Columbus and I think Dues might have done as well. An explosive wrestler and pinner, I think he could easily win this district. He was 1<sup>st</sup> at Allen East and won at Marion Harding beating Sanders. Running hasn't been standing still. He won at Barnesville pinning Howell who easily beat Shreve. Also here is McKnight and Hayes as top choices for the last two berths. However, don't overlook state alternate Akins, should he come to rest here. He was a strong 2<sup>nd</sup> at Wapakoneta losing in overtime and, if here, would battle McKnight for that third slot. If not, Smithson might be the dark horse candidate.

**215 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: STUART MILLER (DELPHOS JEFFERSON)**

Top Contenders

2	Bondy (Monroe Central)	16	Boney (Caldwell)
3	Barnes (Spencerville)	17	Walter (Cory Rawson)
4	Fabry (West Jefferson)	18	Hartfield (Newark Catholic)
5	Clawson (Jackson Milton)	19	Janas (Chippewa)
6	Ritz (Edison)	20	Curry (Blanchester)
7	Fields (Allen East)	21	Bellamy (Sandusky St. Mary)
8	Kelly (Manchester)	22	Garofolo (Columbia)
9	Sousa (Crestview)	23	Girard (Middletown Christian)
10	Skleres (Pymatuning Valley)	24	Lyell (Warren JFK)
11	Jackson (Hartley)	25	Wells (Montpelier)
12	Slee/Schwab (Liberty Center)	26	Uhlenhake (Coldwater)
13	Young (Seneca East)	27	Romick (Huron)
14	Holcomb (St. Clairsville)	28	Peters (Cuyahoga Hts.)
15	Costlow (Steubenville Central Catholic)	29	Hale (Preble Shawnee)

There were only four underclassmen in the state bracket at 215# last year and the only one that placed (Schuyler Bondy – 8<sup>th</sup>) apparently will be competing in the 285# class. That would appear to leave a vacuum at the top of this weight class, but that will be ably filled by the powerhouse from Delphos Jefferson, Stuart Miller. He was 4<sup>th</sup> as a sophomore at 189# and the runner-up last year winning 44 bouts in the process. While there are a substantial number of wrestlers at this weight class with placement potential, it would be a major upset if any were to defeat Miller. Delphos Jefferson has never won an individual state title in wrestling, but that categorization should disappear this March.

Miller should have few problems at Fairmont. State quarter-finalist Barnes has solid credentials, but Miller pinned him in the finals at Allen East. In fact that Lima Central Catholic Sectional has a number of good 215's. Miller and Barnes stand out, but Fields, 4<sup>th</sup> at Marion Harding, Walters and Uhlenhake are all solid performers. Fields won two district bouts last year while Walter won one. Salyers might be the best out of the southwest district, but there doesn't seem to be a lot of consistent results. Perhaps Curry or Girard will be factors, but it looks like that northern sectional will dominate.

It now appears that state placer Bondy will move down to this weight class and, as such, would be a solid favorite to capture the district title. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> here last year and then had a nice consolation run at States, pinning Ritz and Barnes, to finish 7<sup>th</sup>. He has won at Barnesville (285#) and Shadyside (215#) and has high placement potential in Columbus. Costlow is also good, (he pined Fabry last year) with Holcomb and Boney good back-ups along the river. Fabry, 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Gorman, and Jackson seem the best out of Columbus, with Hartfield also in the picture. Jackson was 4<sup>th</sup> at the CIT and Hartfield defaulted to 6<sup>th</sup>. Jackson was also 2<sup>nd</sup> at Marion Harding and Hartley always

seems to have one or two excellent wrestlers. However don't overlook McAfee who wrestles in something of a low profile area, but has good ability.

This is a weight class in disarray at Owens. Ritz is the only returning state qualifier, but he will be severely challenged. This year he has won at Edison and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Bellevue and Plymouth, losing to Miller at the latter event, 13-2. A solid pinner he should still qualify and have low placement potential. Sousa has probably made the biggest step forward of this group. He had two district wins last year, but Ritz eliminated him with a quick fall. This year he was most recently 2<sup>nd</sup> at Elgin losing only 6-5 to the excellent Erb, an impressive result. Young is back and was 4<sup>th</sup> at Plymouth losing on a DQ for 3<sup>rd</sup> behind Miller and Ritz. Liberty Center has two high performance 215's. Slee was effective early in the year finishing for example, 5<sup>th</sup> at Marion Harding, but lately we've seen Schwab move down from 285 # and do equally well. Either will be a factor here. There are a lot of wrestlers on the periphery of qualification at this district and you'd have to expect one or two of them to spring a big upset. In that number include Bellamy, Wells, and Romick.

This will probably be the weakest weight class at Maple Hts. There are no returning state qualifiers and few who have put up big numbers. Top man here is Clawson who has wisely moved from 285 #, which is crowded, to this weight class. He was a district semi-finalist at the higher weight, but eventually defaulted to 6<sup>th</sup>. Also down from 285 # is Lyell who had a district win at that weight class last year. He was one bout from placement at the CIT. However, Clawson's top challenger will likely be Kelly who was 4<sup>th</sup> at North Canton and won at Manchester and Woodmore. He was beaten a number of better 215's in the area. Skleres wrestles an invisible schedule but was an excellent junior high wrestler, and last year, as a freshman, was one bout from state qualification. Also here are Janas, 1<sup>st</sup> at Chippewa and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Manchester (to Kelly), Garofolo, and Peters.

**285#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: TYLER OBRINGER (SPENCERVILLE)**

Top Contenders

2	Morosko (Tuslaw)	16	Stenger (Clinton Massie)
3	Thornton (Oberlin)	17	Schenkel (Caldwell)
4	Hamilton (South Central)	18	Brown (Grand Valley)
5	Treon (Versailles)	19	Pryer (Allen East)
6	Edington (Pleasant)	20	Van Winkle (East Knox)
7	Dailey (Independence)	21	Majoy (Huron)
8	Charlton (Bucyrus)	22	Cunningham (Newark Catholic)
9	Doughty (Norwalk St Paul)	23	Castillo (Ayersville)
10	Woodford (Martins Ferry)	24	Carr (Belpre)
11	Lytle (Swanton)	25	Ruckman (Beallsville)
12	Schwab (Liberty Center)	26	Duscherer (Cardinal)
13	Galvan (Fostoria St. Wendelin)	27	Lauer (Fenwick)
14	Tschour (Lima Central Catholic)	28	Endicott (Crestview)
15	West (Bridgeport)	29	Kelbly (Smithville)

This should be one of the more interesting competitions that we've had in the heavyweight division in recent years. There is an interesting mix of possible champions, some intriguing long-shot possibilities, and some major question marks that are unlikely to be answered until we reach Columbus.

The exciting new face is the Oberlin move-in, Hugh Thornton. At 6'5" and 285 pounds he is enormously big and has an equal measure of athletic talent. He has already accepted a full ride for football at the University of Illinois, and comes of a successful state title run in Idaho last year. Prodigiously quick he opened the season with titles at Avon Lake and Elyria Catholic pinning his first thirteen opponents, almost all in less than 60 seconds. Then at Black River, against state qualifier Nick Hamilton, he again appeared headed for another quick fall, but his upper-body throw was ruled illegal. After that Hamilton methodically won a 6-0 decision as Thornton showed less than championship stamina. No question that issue will be rigorously addressed. Still, he is an incredibly dangerous opponent.

Exiting with Thornton out of the Maple Hts. district is another talented senior, Josh Morosko. A far more conventional opponent than Thornton he has shown steady improvement over his career. Last year he lost only to eventual state champ Don Stocum at districts and then won three state bouts to finish 6<sup>th</sup>. His signature event this year was taking the title at the always enormously difficult Medina Tournament. This included a startling 1-0 win over three-time state placer and Division II state runner-up Adam Walls. Interestingly the last four heavy weight champions have all emerged from the Maple Hts. district.

Nick Hamilton, yet another solid senior, also has to be a strong contender for top honors. He won 44 bouts last year as a state qualifier while going 1-2 in Columbus. Both of those losses were by one point (10-9 and 5-4). This year he was sensational at Black River, not only beating Thornton in the finals, but nipping Division I state placer James Meder in the semi-finals. Along with Oney at 135 # he gives South Central a very strong "one-two punch" at the state level.

Despite the credentials of the above mentioned threesome, the wrestler who has the best Ohio credentials is the Spencerville junior. Tyler Obringer. A district champ and state semi-finalist last year, Obringer was just two points from being a finalist losing to Hesson, 6-4. He dominated his area and district last year and is even stronger this time around. He pinned Morosko to get 5<sup>th</sup> place last year. His only loss was to Marcus Neal at Marion Harding, but he then defeated the very tough Gladstone to finish 3<sup>rd</sup>. A possible issue here is a schedule that rarely challenges him.

The Maple Heights District would seem to have already allocated two state slots to Thornton and Morosko. A third very competitive contender is Dailey. He, too, is a move-in after winning two Division I district bouts for Parma last year. I saw him win at North Coast and he should challenge both of the top two boys at this district. State alternate Brown is also back and would seem to be fourth best in this always uncertain weight class. Most recently he was second at Perry. After this quartet there is a large fall-off in ability. However, somebody like Duchscherer or Kelbly might have upset possibilities.

It's a much more crowded district at Owens. Hamilton is my favorite, but I wish he wouldn't wrestle so many one-point bouts. It's a prescription for pain. Doughty and Charlton are returning state qualifiers, but neither are safe here. Neither won a state bout last year in that difficult weight class. I like the mammoth Doughty's persistence, and he gave Hamilton a tough bout losing 4-3. Charlton was second at the Gorman while Doughty was fourth, but the bracketing was an important factor there. However, Charlton did win their District Match-Up last year. If Schwab is at 285, he'll be right in the mix with this group. He was a district semi-finalist and lost his go-to-state bout to Charlton 1-0. Galvan was second at the CIT while Majoy has won some big bouts including one over Galvan. Castillo and Endicott are other possibilities. Someone to watch is Lytle from Swanton, who is, I believe, only a freshman. He was first at Toledo St. John and second at Elyria Catholic to Thornton. He is, in some way, almost surely distantly related to me.

Edington towers over the field at Steubenville. A two-time state qualifier it is now his turn to stand high on the podium. He missed placement last year in an overtime loss to Treon. He was fifth at Brecksville losing to probable Georgia state champ Wesley Mena in the semi-finals. His job at this district has been made somewhat easier by the apparent defection of Bondy and Holcomb to 215#. That still leaves state qualifier Woodford, state alternate West, and several other quality heavyweights to subdue. Schenkel and Carr are also good with the latter grabbing a district sixth last year. Also factor in the always dangerous Ruckman with Van Winkle and Cunningham central

district stalwarts. As I write this I'm beginning to notice how really deep this field is--even without Bondy and Holcomb.

Obringer is not the only returning state placer at Fairmont. Treon was the 8th last year defeating both Edington and Charlton. He also nipped Hamilton, 2-1, to win at Plymouth and make a bid to be considered as a top four wrestler at this class. Also returning are the two wrestlers who went overtime in the fifth place bout at last year's district. Stenger got that win, but Pryer was also nearly as strong. However Tschour who was third at the CIT and second Allen East may have vaulted past both of them. Finally Lauer—also a placer at the CIT may have some part to play at this weight class.

## TEAMS

1. Troy Christian

They have created a mini-dynasty finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> three years ago and winning the last two years. To win a third time they have to hit just one target—score more than 115 points. That is how many Monroeville scored last year and as I'll shortly explain I don't think they can better that number this year. I figure Thome, Toal, Z. Hancock and C. Burns can put up about 100 points—that's not rock-solid since the Burns part might be a little sketchy. That means Campbell, J. Hancock, K. Burns, and Akins have to put up, maybe, 20 points. —just to be on the safe side. I think they have just enough to make that doable.
2. Monroeville

They had four state champions last year, and they will have four state champions this year. They scored 115 points last year and they'll score just about 115 points this year. Putting Stieber up a weight class was a solid team move, but I just don't see Johnson or Clark (this year) able to help.
3. CVCA

There will be a sharp struggle for third place between CVCA and Pleasant, but I just don't see either squad having quite enough firepower to challenge the top two. CVCA has more scoring options than Pleasant, but ones in my mind that seem a little less sure. Utley seems to be the centerpiece for this team, but Sommer, T. Powers, Vargo and Hojnacki are all capable of scoring a lot of team points. Add in S. Powers, Retay, and Hickin and they should be in the 80 point range.
4. Pleasant

This is the team that I picked to win the last two years, but somehow it just got away from them. However, two runner-up trophies is a marvelous achievement and they still retain a quintet of solid State scorers. Reynolds, Coomes and Bowers could all be finalists and you have think that Cooperider and Edington will help—a lot. They could still have one huge effort left and make a play for more than third, but the firepower just doesn't seem to there in sufficient quantity.
5. Chanel

This team is still struggling to put it all together in terms of health and performance. They have a great first nine (unlike my golf game), but it hasn't quite jelled yet. Kovach is the primary cog, but they should be getting scoring from almost everyone up to 152#. Of course, that means Tchantz and Orrill have to be back and everyone else priming for high district places.

6. Tuslaw They should get big time points from Morosko and Donahue and Hall has to return to his form of two years ago. Add in Kobilarscik and Remenaric and this team might just reach Top Five status.
  
7. Elmwood The top six squads are teams in the sense that they have a reasonable expectation of state scoring ability from a number of their wrestlers. From this point on we'll be talking about teams that hope they can get scoring from three or four of their wrestlers. The best of these might be Elmwood which features Betts and Goebel as top hopes and Alexander, Ackley, Lee, and Hernandez for backup scoring.
  
8. Mechanicsburg This is a team with some possibly realizable upside. Price and Ziegler are consistent performers and Rodgers will shortly be a strong candidate for a state title. Add in Klaus and Salyer and there is some scoring to be had here.