

## 2022 OHSAA Wrestling State Tournament Preview

By Josh Lowe, Intermat

March 11<sup>th</sup> will mark the return of the OHSAA state wrestling tournament to the Schottenstein Center on the campus of The Ohio State University. After 21 consecutive years at “The Schott” (1999-2019), the tournament was postponed and then completely cancelled in 2020 before being held at three different Central Ohio high schools in 2021.

The prior longest successive run for the tournament in one location was 19 years at St. John Arena, also on the campus of Ohio State, from 1971-1989. That marked the first 19 years of the state tournament having multiple classifications. It should be noted that in the first three years of three classes (1976-1978), the Class A (small-school) event was held at Otterbein University with Class AA and Class AAA being held at St. John Arena

Five years ago was the last time the state wrestling tournament was conducted on March 11, the date of the 2017 state championship matches. During that program, Kaleb Romero became Ohio’s 29th four-time state champion, which anchored Mechanicsburg’s run to a Division III state championship. Due to the tournament’s cancellation in 2020, there will be no wrestlers in the hunt for a fourth state title this year; however, there are two seniors seeking a third state title.

Seth Shumate (Dublin Coffman) and Gavin Brown (Xenia Legacy Christian Academy), a pair of wrestlers that have signed to compete for Ohio State in college, are those athletes. Shumate won both of his titles in Division I at 195 pounds, and is competing at 195 this weekend, though he suffered a 5-3 overtime loss in the district final to returning state runner-up Camden McDanel (Ashville Teays Valley). Brown has won titles in Division III at 126 and 145 pounds. This weekend is in the 150-pound weight class.

Seventeen additional weight classes across the three divisions have wrestlers looking to repeat as state champion, while Peyton Fenton (Elyria) in Division I at 120 pounds seeks to regain a state title that he earned in 2019. The five additional returning state champions in Division I include Ryan Bennett (Lakewood St. Edward) at 126 pounds, Ty Wilson (Dublin Scioto) at 132, Joey Blaze (Perrysburg) at 144, Connor Euton (Westerville North) at 157, and Dylan Russo (Powell Olentangy Liberty) at 215. The six in Division II include Beric Jordan (106) and Nolan Gessler (144) from St. Paris Graham Local, Brody Conley (Tiffin Columbian) at 175 pounds, Dylan Fishback (Aurora) at 190, Kyle Snider (Cuyahoga Falls CVCA) at 215, and Todd Allen (Medina Buckeye) at 285. Then the six in addition for Division III include Max Hermes (Milan Edison) at 113 pounds, Dillon Campbell (120) and Cameron Lacure (138) from Legacy Christian, Max Shore (Casstown Miami East) at 126, Jarrett Hornish (Haviland Wayne Trace) at 144, and Austin Kohlhofer (Delta) at 285.

### **Division I**

St. Edward has won this tournament the last six times it has been contested (2015-2019, 2021), and has now won 22 of the last 24 contested titles. The Eagles will come to the tournament with 12 participants, which is the most from any team in the big-school division, and joint most for any team statewide. Leading the way will be five wrestlers that won district championships, including returning state champion Ryan Bennett. Joining him as district champions are returning state runner-up Luke Geog (175), returning state placer Johnny Slaper (190), along with freshmen Bradley Eaton (138) and Jarrell

Miller (157); six additional wrestlers took second at the district tournament, including returning state placer Wyatt Richter (113) and returning state runner-up Evan Bennett (165).

It should be noted that the five district champions for St. Edward were not the most from any team in Division I. In fact, there were two teams that had more individuals win district titles: Dublin Coffman won seven of eight district championship bouts, while Perrysburg swept all six of theirs on the way to qualifying nine wrestlers respectively to the state tournament.

Perrysburg, which was runner-up in the 2014 Division I state wrestling tournament, is led by returning state champion Joey Blaze and his younger brother Marcus (113), who is the only undefeated wrestler in the big-school division. In fact, the Blaze brothers are the only two wrestlers in the division to have 50 wins entering the state tournament. Also winning district titles for the Yellow Jackets were freshman Cole Evans (106), returning state placer Ryan Avalos (120), junior Wynton Denkins (150), and now two-time state qualifier Myles Takats (165). Evans, Marcus Blaze, Denkins, and Takats beat opposition from St. Edward in the district final. In total, a school-record nine wrestlers advanced to state for Perrysburg.

Dublin Coffman is seeking to become the first Central District team to finish first or second in the standings of either the big-school (Class AAA or Division I) or single-class state tournament. The highest finish is third, most recently by Powell Olentangy Liberty in 2017. The seven district titles were an all-division high for this season, and two-time state champion Shumate was the only Shamrocks wrestler to lose his district championship bout. Qualifying as champions from district were returning state placers Omar (126) and Ismael (138) Ayoub, Ethan Birden (144) and Dez Gartell (165); now two-time state qualifier Mitchell Broskie (175); now four-time state qualifier Riley Ucker (285); along with sophomore Joseph Baumann (120). In total, nine advanced to state for Dublin Coffman, which tied a school record set back in 2011.

Arguably the deepest weight class in the whole tournament this weekend is the 126-pound class in this division, which features eight returning Ohio state placers (tied for the most in any weight class). It is a weight that features returning state champion Bennett, returning state runner-up Ayoub, along with Kaden Jett (Brecksville) and Mason Brugh (Wadsworth) each placing third at state last year; Bennett, Ayoub, and Jett exit as district champions with Jett beating Brugh 2-1 in a district final.

Ayoub and Jett each face returning state placers in their opening bout. Ayoub against Charles Curtis (Massillon Perry), and Jett against two-time placer Drake Cerny (Marion Harding); those four are in the top half of the draw. Brugh opens his tournament with Brennen Cernus (Pickerington Central), who has an Indiana state title and a National Prep championship earlier in high school career, with two-time state placer Luke Acuna (Centerville) the district champion in that quarter. In the other first round match of Bennett's quarter, you have now two-time state qualifier Vinnie D'Alessandro (Mayfield Village Mayfield) facing returning state placer Colton Spurgeon (Mount Vernon).

Three other first round matches in Division I feature returning/previous state placers facing each other. At 120 pounds, Ryan Avalos (Perrysburg) faces Austin McBurney (Massillon Perry), while returning state runner-up Jaxon Joy (Wadsworth) faces Peyton Fenton; then at 165, it is Jakob Hurley (Galloway Westland) facing Ronald Dimmerling (Canton Glen Oak).

Joining St. Edward and Dublin Coffman as district champions this past weekend were Massillon Perry and Cincinnati LaSalle. The Panthers qualified 10 to state, led by returning state runner-up Aidan Fockler (285) as well as returning third-place finishers in Austin McBurney and Logan Shepherd (215); Fockler

and Shepherd were the lone district champions. The Lancers advanced nine to state, led by returning state runner-up Jake Niffenegger (138), who won a district title as did freshman Holden Huhn (113) and multi-time state qualifier Chase Stein (175).

Qualifying seven to the state tournament were Cincinnati Archbishop Moeller and Wadsworth; the Crusaders did not advance a district champ, while the Grizzlies had a pair in returning state placer Chris Earnest (150) and Coen Grimm (190). Four teams advanced six to state, among them is Brecksville-Broadview Hts. The Bees advanced four as district champions, returning state placers Jett and Luke Vanadia (175), along with sophomore Brett Stanley (106) and Manny Scordos (144).

## **Division II**

St. Paris Graham has now won the last 20 contested individual state tournaments (2001-2019, 2021), including last year when the margin was 86-1/2 points between the Falcons and second-place Louisville. It might shock the system to some, but a full half of those tournaments have been won by a margin of more than 100 points. This edition of the Falcons is again strong, as they advance 12 wrestlers to the state tournament from the Wilmington district. It is joint-most in the state with St. Edward (Division I), and the same number that qualified to state last year.

Six of those come into this weekend as district champions, led by returning state champion Beric Jordan; returning state runner-up Carter Neves (215); returning state placers Gunner Cramblett (157), Zack Burroughs (175), and Nolan Neves (285); as well as freshman Brogan Tucker (113). Returning state champion Nolan Gessler was among three to finish second at the district tournament, losing 5-2 to freshman Mitchell Younger (Columbus Bishop Watterson) in the final.

Some of these Graham district champions feature in notable weight classes at the state tournament. Jordan is part of the only weight class across all three divisions to have multiple undefeated wrestlers, as sophomore Jacob Ohl (Ontario) joins him. They sit in opposite half-brackets. Tucker could have to beat three returning state placers on the way to a state title: Billy Smith (Sandusky Perkins) in a possible quarterfinal; Codie Cuerdo (Aurora) in the semifinal, who was runner-up last year at 106 to Jordan, and an opponent Tucker beat in overtime one month ago; and then undefeated district champion Tyler Hisey (St. Mary's Memorial), third at state last year, is in the opposite half-bracket.

Carter Neves comes into the state tournament off a 12-5 district final victory over returning state fourth-place finisher Max Shulaw (Columbus St. Francis), an opponent he had lost to by an 11-3 score three months ago at the Walsh Jesuit Ironman. In the Perry District, it was a rematch of last year's 220-pound final, as Kyle Snider replicated that result with a pin in 1:04 over Bryson Getz (Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary). The potential resides for semifinal matches pairing Neves vs. Getz, and Snider vs. Shulaw, neither of which happened during the season; for reference purposes, Neves beat Snider twice by 5-2 decisions at that Walsh Jesuit Ironman.

Last year's returning runner-up in Division II, Louisville has positioned itself for the chance to get another trophy, as the Leopards advanced a school-record nine wrestlers to the state tournament in winning their district tournament. It is a group led by a pair of district champions in returning state runner-up Pablo Castro (132) and now two-time state qualifier Noah Peterson (175); returning state placers Brenden Severs (157) and Blake Schaffer (190) were district runners-up; while Dominic Hoffarth (138) and returning state placer Cameron Brazek (285) also each qualified for a second state tournament.

Also winning district tournament titles were Medina Buckeye and Minerva, each of whom qualified six wrestlers to state. The Bucks are led by a pair of district champions in returning state placer Eddie Neitenbach (150) and returning state champion Todd Allen, while Kaiden Haines (215) was the lone district champion individual for the Lions.

Qualifying the third-most wrestlers to state in Division II was Wauseon with eight, though the Indians did not have a champion advance out of district. The team is led by returning state placers Collin Twigg (113) and Lawson Grime (138), each of whom finished as runner-up at district, Twigg losing 5-4 in the final to the undefeated Hisey.

Advancing seven each to state were Aurora and Columbus St. Francis DeSales, runner-up finishers at their respective district tournaments to Louisville and St. Paris Graham. Leading the contingent for the Greenmen are four district champions: returning state runner-up Codie Cuerdo, Ashton Smith (157), Tyler Lillard (165), and returning state champion Dylan Fishback who is undefeated on the season. Anchoring the Stallions' contingent is their lone district champion David McClelland (132), who beat returning state runner-up Alijah Stevens (Newark Licking Valley) for the second straight week in his finals match, along with the previously mentioned Max Shulaw.

The deepest weight class in this division with respect to returning and/or previous state placers is 126, which features six such wrestlers. District champions Josh Carman (Carrollton), Cameron Deiter (Bowling Green), TeAndre Allen (Pepper Pike Orange), and Matt Ellis (Waynesville) are among the six and appear in that order on the state bracket. Should either Deiter or Ellis win the tournament, they would become the first wrestler for their school to win an individual state title. The additional returning state placers in this weight bracket are Brandon Sauter (Batavia) and Cooper Rathburn (Columbus Bishop Hartley). Sauter, the highest returning placer, is in the same quarter bracket as Carman; while Rathburn has an opening round match against Allen, the wrestlers both placing seventh at state last year.

### **Division III**

The tournament featuring the state's smallest schools also happens to feature some of the most accomplished wrestlers across the three classifications. The seven returning champions is the highest among the three divisions, while eight out of the 14 weight classes feature five or more returning and/or previous state place-winners; by comparison Division I only has three such weight classes, while Division II has five.

Returning state champions of the individual state tournament Legacy Christian are very well-positioned to repeat, as the Knights qualified a school-record nine wrestlers to the state tournament, including four district champions. That group is led by two-time state champion Gavin Brown, returning state champions Dillon Campbell and Cameron Lacure, as well as returning state medalist Nick Alvarez (165). Also featured among the state qualifiers are returning state runner-up Eli Campbell (113) and returning state placer Logan Attisano (126).

Joining Legacy Christian in winning a district tournament this past weekend was North Lima South Range, which also won the OHSWCA dual team state tournament last month. The Raiders qualified a school-record eight to the state tournament, though returning state placer Raymond Cmil (132) was the only district champion; Michael Markulin (138) and Logan Cornell (165) have also placed at state before among the other state participants.

Milan Edison was runner-up to Legacy Christian in last year's state tournament, the highest finish in program history at the individual tournament. The Chargers won a district title for the third consecutive time, this time qualifying six to the state tournament despite losing two returning state placers to season-ending injury in December and another returning state qualifier suffering injury during the district tournament. Four advanced to state as district finalists, returning state champ Max Hermes and returning state placer Logan Lloyd (190) won titles, while returning state placer Remington Bauer (157) and multi-time state participant Jacob Thompson (215) each took second.

Barnesville rounds out the quartet of district champions, as the Shamrocks pushed all five of their state qualifiers into finals matches last weekend. Entering state as district champions are returning state placer Dakota King (120), Skyler King (138), Ayden King (144), and Logan Tague (150). Other teams to qualify five to state include Covington, Liberty Center, and Marion Pleasant (district runners-up to Barnesville); while Apple Creek Waynedale (runner-up to South Range at district) and Mechanicsburg (runner-up to Legacy Christian at district) have six on the state tournament bracket.

Despite the presence of a returning state champion in sophomore Dillon Campbell, the 120-pound weight class features eight prior state placers in total, joint most across the three divisions. Two-time medalist Patrick Reineke (Gates Mills Hawken) could face Campbell in a quarterfinal, while Brock Durbin (Ashland Mapleton) and Dakota King sit in the other part of that same half-bracket. In the lower half, returning state placer Landen Duncan (Southington Chalker) and freshman Phoenix Contos (Genoa Area) are the district champions. Gavin Caprella (Lima Central Catholic), runner-up at district to Campbell, sits in the Contos quarter; while Nathan Parks (Attica Seneca East) draws Duncan in the opening round, with Michael Hagan (Covington) possibly awaiting the winner in the second round.

The 132-pound weight class has three wrestlers that return from finishing top three at the state tournament last year. However, none of them won their respective district tournament weight classes. Will Davidson (Kirtland) and Hayden Kuhn (Ashland Crestview) both were third at state last year, and now face each other in the opening round, with returning state placer Daxton Chase (Marion Pleasant) as the district champion in that quarter-bracket. Hunter Long (Haviland Wayne Trace) is the district champion in the other quarter of that same half.

Down in the lower half bracket, the district champions are returning state medalist Cmil and two-time state placer Alec Homan (Monroeville); Cmil beat Davidson 3-2 in the semifinal at district, while Homan upended Kuhn 2-1 in the tiebreaker of a district final. Returning state runner-up Trey Allen (Mechanicsburg) is other state medalist in this weight class, and is in the same quarter bracket as Homan after losing 4-0 in the tiebreaker to Long in a district semifinal.

Among the three weight classes in Division III with six returning state medalists is the 157-pound weight class, which happens to feature competitors that finished second, third, and fourth respectively at 152 last year. Each won their respective district tournament this weekend. Returning state runner-up Tate Geiser (Dalton) and state fourth-place finisher Connor Smith (Gibsonburg) are paired in the same half, while third-place finisher Jake Hurst (Mechanicsburg) is in the other half-bracket.

Geiser became the first state finalist in program history for Dalton last season, while Gibsonburg's only finalist came 40 years ago when Paul Sanchez earned state gold at unlimited in Class A. Returning state placer David Davis (Miami East), who lost 2-0 in overtime to Hurst in the district final, sits in the same quarter bracket as Smith. The other two returning state medalists are in the same half as Hurst but the

other quarter bracket, district champion Niko Christo (Galion Northmor) and Remington Bauer (Milan Edison).