

## Division II

While the Division I state results tilted heavily toward underclassmen last year, the same was not true in Division II. Only 12 of the 28 finalists return this year – a somewhat lower figure than normal. Surprisingly, four of those six champions will be competing at 160# or above, meaning that we will have many first-timers wrestling on Saturday night.

As I did in the other division I looked at district tournaments that encompass sectionals from more than one area. The results are shown below:

<u>At Ontario</u>	Northeast	14	8
	Northwest	42	48
<u>At Watkins</u>	Central	28	22
	Eastern	28	34
<u>At Goshen</u>	Southwest	42	44
	Southeast	14	12

### 103#

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

##### Top Contenders

2	Inghram (University)	15	Scavuzzo (Revere)
3	Minnard (Fairfield Union)	16	Hunlock (Elida)
4	Garabrandt (Claymont)	17	Holy (Lake Catholic)
5	Young (Medina Highland)	18	Gould (Lexington)
6	Neff (Miami Trace)	19	Kessinger (West Holmes)
7	Strasbaugh (Orrville)	20	Miller (Beaver Local)
8	McLaughlin (Canal Fulton Northwest)	21	Fisher (Columbus DeSales)
9	Hopkins (Dover)	22	Hahn (Eastwood)
10	Stone (Oak Harbor)	23	Sizemore (Franklin)
11	Lehotay (Meadowbrook)	24	Storts (Springfield Shawnee)
12	Mitch (Aurora)	25	Worthington (Shelby)
13	Miller (Defiance)	26	Brower (Bellbrook)
14	Voss (Canal Winchester)	27	Brooks (Benedictine)
		28	Wilcoxon (Bellefontaine)

Each year the facts become more amazing, more outstanding as David Taylor continues to win at an unprecedented pace. Whether it is Fargo, State, or Ironman, the tide seems irresistible. Soon, if this dominance continues, these facts will be transmuted into stories that will, in time, become legends, and then, when these reports are long forgotten, David Taylor will become some sort of mythical figure – perhaps,

patron saint to those small of stature. All this for a boy still far from physical maturity, but who, nonetheless, dominates as few in the past have done. As a freshman last year, he cruised through the state tournament with a 10-2 major decision his closest bout, despite being one of the smallest boys in the field. Undefeated this year, he has brushed aside the challenge of another Fargo champ, Logan Stieber, with a convincing win at the Ironman. The major difference between Taylor and so many of Ohio's best is his skill on the mat. Once on top he is absolutely brilliant in controlling and scoring. The gap between him and his nearest challengers in Division II is immense, undoubtedly the largest of any of the 14 weight classes. No one here may be able to survive six minutes with him.

Getting 2<sup>nd</sup> place will depend on whether or not you're paired in the opposite half bracket as Taylor, so it's pretty much a matter of luck, although as district champion your odds improve from 50% to 67%. This said, I think that the sophomore Inghram is second best. He was a very impressive 1<sup>st</sup> at North Canton beating Li 16-0 and Foore 9-0. He was also 2<sup>nd</sup> at both Brecksville (to Stieber) and the Top Gun (to Taylor) while finishing 7<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman (losing to Taylor and White). He only loses to the best, but Taylor tech falled him both times. A district semi-finalist last year, he has the talent and experience to be a finalist. Like all four districts, I'm not seeing much state caliber talents at Firestone. In fact, only Inghram has previous district experience. Strasbaugh, champ at Smithville and Chippewa, and 5<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun, and Mitch, 1<sup>st</sup> at Aurora and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Hudson, look like two potential candidates for Columbus with Holy and Scavuzzo as possibilities. McLaughlin and Carpenter (Ravenna) are also thoughts.

Minnard is a returning district champ and state qualifier, but Garabrandt will push him at Steubenville. Minnard won at Wadsworth including a 10-0 win over Giffin and 3-2 over Foore. Garbrandt wrestles a tougher schedule (3<sup>rd</sup> at Top Gun and Medina and 1<sup>st</sup> at Barnesville) which should put him right there with Minnard. He seems to be showing rapid improvement. After that it's going to be close. Hopkins was a state alternate last year and Lehotay, Voss, and Kessinger all have district experience. The ones I'd watch for are Miller and Fisher who might hopscotch the more experienced quartet.

Ontario is the one district that seems to have some depth at this weight class, but middle to low places are probably as much as any of the four qualifiers can expect. Returning state qualifier Young leads the way after being a finalist here last year. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at Medina, losing 7-1 to Garbrandt in the consolation finals. Hunlock pinned Gould last year, but Gould has had a great sophomore year, including a win at the Gorman. Also improving is Stone, who won at Oak Harbor and was undefeated at the Ohio Duals. Hunlock cannot be overlooked, but his 11-2 loss to Voss was surprising. Hahn and Weber (Wauseon) may be better than I think, especially Weber, with Worthington also easily of state qualification. The freshman Miller might be the surprise of the tournament while Heinrichs (Napoleon is a dark horse candidate.

Taylor, who certainly doesn't need the help, has the weakest district of the four. I've struggled to find appropriate names. Neff is second best, beating Seiple to win at Beavercreek and finishing 4<sup>th</sup> at GMVWA. After that nothing is clear cut. I've got Storts,

Sizemore, Brower and Wilcoxon in the grid, but I'm thinking there must be others I've missed.

## 112#

### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: KYLE GILCHRIST (JEFFERSON)**

#### Top Contenders

2	Neibert (Graham)	15	Jacobs (West Holmes)
3	Papesh (Aurora)	16	Rumple (Galion)
4	Garabrandt (Claymont)	17	Murphy (Alliance)
5	Westfall (Lake Catholic)	18	Unger (Hamilton Ross)
6	Nycz (Holy Name)	19	Munafo (Perkins)
7	Morris (Ravenna Southeast)	20	Bolton (Bellbrook)
8	Cisco (St. Marys Memorial)	21	Perez (Wauseon)
9	Weisman (Bexley)	22	Dennis (McNicholas)
10	Rosch (Canal Winchester)	23	Sommers (CVCA)
11	Garringer (Miami Trace)	24	Erwin (Watkins Memorial)
12	Gray (Ravenna)	25	Stepp (Jackson)
13	McGovern (Columbus DeSales)	26	Montoney (Walsh )
14	Lynch (Napoleon)	27	Campbell (Marlington)

This is going to look a like what we saw at 103# last year. Substitute Neibert for Taylor as the Graham entrant. Factor in an excellent freshman, add a couple of holdover 112's and you've pretty much described this weight class. Given that level of congruency one might expect more definition than we find here. The big difference is with Taylor still at 103# the title is up for grabs.

The real depth is at Firestone. Gilchrist ended up 45-1 last year, losing only to Taylor in the state finals. He defeated Westfall and Cribari twice during the tournament process and looked dominant on his feet. It just showed that strength of schedule during the regular season isn't always a defining factor. The one matchup I would have loved to have seen was Gilchrist versus Papesh, but it never happened. The latter ended up 3rd at States, losing only to Taylor, but an upset loss to Cribari (his only other defeat) prevented a district confrontation with Gilchrist. Westfall was 4<sup>th</sup>, losing to the two above boys, but winning three other bouts impressively. This year Gilchrist had a smashing win at Riverside, but continues to wrestle pretty much an invisible schedule. Papesh and Westfall met for 5<sup>th</sup> place at the absolutely brutal 112# class at Brecksville, with Papesh winning in overtime. They were the highest placing Division II wrestlers.

That would leave only one state berth open to the rest of the Firestone field. Three names stand out as possibilities, Morris, Gray, and Murphy. Of this group I like state alternate Morris the best and he has not disappointed this year. He won big at the WIT majoring Jacobs in the finale. Gray is the backup choice here, but two to watch are the freshman Sommers, whose results vacillate dramatically, and Montoney, who was at his best in last year's district and may be so again.

Someone the Firestone qualifiers will really have to watch is Cody Garbrandt. Only a freshman, he has tremendous talent. He crushed the field at Barnesville and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina (beating Zupancic and Mattingly). Then at the Top Gun he was dominant with three falls and a 5-1 decision over Neibert. State qualifier Weisman looked to be the best at this district at the beginning, but that no longer seems true. Still he should qualify and could be a factor at Columbus. Rosch is something of a mystery to me. He crushed the field at Tiffin, but it was not a strong weight class. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Watterson at 119#. McGovern is still young, but is really improving. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT and beat Gray at the Ohio Duals. He is still not ready to go against the real strong boys. Jacobs and Erwin are other possibilities with no obvious candidate from along the river.

Neibert could still win it all. He has a room of great workout partners, a tough schedule, and, most importantly, lots of talent. He won the GMVWA over Garringer and pinned Crasto in the semi-finals. He placed at the Ironman, was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Top Gun, and had all falls at the Ohio Duals. A Division I district champ last year, he finished 6<sup>th</sup> in Columbus in what was a very strong weight class. State qualifier Garringer is second best here and has another outstanding season. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at GMVWA, won at Hamilton Twp. and Beavercreek, and had three wins at the Ohio Duals. There is a big drop-off after this duo. Unger, a state alternate last year, could capture a state berth this year with Bolton and Dennis also experienced. Stepp, 15-1 right now, looks second best out of that southeast sectional and is a long-shot to qualify.

The Ontario District is uncharacteristically weak at this weight class. A major exception is state alternate Kevin Nycz, who should gain a high place. He won at Wadsworth and was second to Westfall at the CIT. Also here is district runner-up Josh Cisco, a state quarter-finalist last year. In that bout he wrestled eventual champ Dennis Roche, losing a titanic struggle 14-12 in overtime. He won at Marion Harding, but does not wrestle the difficult schedule that Nycz does. Rumble and Lynch may well be conventional choices for the last two spots, but watch for the sophomore Perez.

**119#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: CORDELL LONGSTREATH (GRAHAM)**

*Top Contenders*

2	Wukie (University)	15	Keller (Carroll)
3	Cribari (West Geauga)	16	LeForce (Franklin)
4	Knotek (Walsh)	17	Palladino (Padua)
5	Flores (Eastwood)	18	Parker (Whitehall)
6	Rose (Cambridge)	19	Rininger (Medina Highland)
7	King (Benedictine)	20	DeVito (Lexington)
8	Ditcher (Claymont)	21	Allen (Benjamin Logan)
9	Campbell (Perkins)	22	Diglia (Elida)
10	Lay (Greenon)	23	Jordan (Ravenna)
11	Payne (Orange)	24	Plavka (Carrollton)
12	Randazzo (Lake Catholic)	25	Trimbach (Roger Bacon)
13	Reeser (Miami Trace)	26	Zappitelli (Conneaut)
14	Risdon (Harrison Central)	27	Thompson (Beaver Local)
		28	Powers (CVCA)

As presently constituted this is easily the weakest weight class in Division II. There are only a handful of returning state qualifiers, including two wrestlers who placed 8<sup>th</sup> last year. Adam Tinnel, two-time state runner-up, might have been the logical favorite, but is, apparently, not competing this year. It is a weight class that provides limitless opportunities for any number of contenders; one ripe for the taking.

My choice is the Graham senior, Cordell Longstreath, who continues to get better. A state qualifier last year at 112#, he upset Travis Barnard in the first round before losing a close 10-7 bout to Tinnel and failing to place. He is a scorer, not afraid to accept risk for a greater reward, and consequently has a lot of high scoring bouts. He won the GMVWA, but was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun losing a one-point bout to Radsky. He has not lost to a Division II foe this year.

His district competition will be good. State qualifiers Lay and Keller both return, but neither is a sure shot to qualify again. Keller was 7<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA and failed to place at the CIT. We may see him at 112#. Lay was 7<sup>th</sup> at Medina, losing twice to Powers and did make the finals at Beavercreek. The freshman LeForce could be a real factor here, winning at Franklin and a highly touted youth wrestler. Reeser, 4<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA, lost to Lay last year, but may have passed this season. His one point loss to the excellent Stoll points in that direction. Trimbach was a state alternate last year, but despite winning four bouts did not place at the CIT. Allen or Alsip (Norwood) could possibly pull an upset and qualify.

The Firestone District is the best and most interesting of the four venues. Ricky King was 8<sup>th</sup> at this weight class last year after wrestling very well at the district level. He lost 4-3 in the CIT final and was 6<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville – losing to Flores and Wukie. He is going to have to pick it up to do better than 8<sup>th</sup> place finish. Cribari seems always to be hurt or

overweight or something, but he can wrestle. He was 8<sup>th</sup> last year, losing in the quarter-finals and then defaulting out once he placed. This year he won at Kenston and pinned St. Edward state qualifier Cobos in 61 seconds. A perfectly healthy and conditioned Cribari is perfectly capable of winning it all. The freshman Wukie is terrific. He got bounced by Rini in the first round at Brecksville and came back to get 5<sup>th</sup> with that win over King. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Top Gun against the much stronger Radsky and won at North Canton. He could be a state champ soon – maybe this year. Payne is a rugged competitor who missed state qualification by a single point last year. I'd like to see more consistency from him. Knotek, only a sophomore, just started wrestling last week at the CIT. He lost to Randazzo and then defaulted out. A state alternate last year, he has a world of talent, but whether that'll happen by tourney time is still up in the air. Randazzo, Powers, and Jordan are all possibilities in what should be a real dogfight. A wildcard here is May (Kenmore), who could spring the big upset.

The Ontario District is also crowded, but it is at a lower level than Firestone. Division I state qualifier Flores has moved to Eastwood with some success. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville, defeating King and Jordan, but Longstreath tech falled him at the Ohio Duals and he barely escaped Reeser in overtime. Tiffin champ Campbell is probably second best, but lost two very tough bouts at North Canton to finish 5<sup>th</sup>. I like Palladino for a state berth with the last spot wide open. The freshman, Rininger, second at Gorman, Devito, and Diglia could also jump into the fray on a hot weekend.

State placer Rose and state qualifier Ditcher lead a very weak Steubenville District. Rose was 8<sup>th</sup> last year, beating Lay and pinning Longstreath. Yes, that Longstreath. This year he is currently 22-4, with most of those losses at 125#. Now at 119# he won by tech fall over Stemen to take the title at Sheridan. Ditcher was a semi-finalist at Medina and missed by one point of being a finalist. He won at Barnesville and was 5<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun – losing two close low-scoring bouts to Flores. If Rosch stays at 112#, the Columbus sectionals will be very weak. That means Risdon and Plavka will have a good chance of qualification, with Parker or Thompson, perhaps, in contention.

**125#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: BRIAN DEAN (AKRON ST. VINCENT)**

Top Contenders

2	Stephens (Graham)	15	Hogue/Kidd (Bellevue)
3	Ulinski (Eastwood)	16	R. Nakama (Big Walnut)
4	Romeo (Lake Catholic)	17	Henline (Coventry)
5	Vaughn (Columbus DeSales)	18	Cartwright (Licking Valley)
6	Brown (Walsh)	19	Hoopes (West Branch)
7	Meyer (Ravenna)	20	Becker (Minerva)
8	Hildenbrand (Franklin)	21	Sully (Van Wert)
9	Baxter (Perkins)	22	Jameson (Indian Valley)
10	Chapman (Kenmore)	23	Mitchell (Padua)
11	Severance (Sheridan)	24	Ferris (Jackson)
12	Silvers (Eaton)	25	McClintock (Galion)
13	McQuillen (Lexington)	26	Wellbaum (Valley View)
14	McLaughlin (Canal Fulton Northwest)	27	Springer (East Liverpool)
		28	McIntosh (Buckeye Local)

This is a weight class somewhat lacking in “up-top” firepower, but possessing substantial depth. It also has the merit of geographical diversity, with contenders emerging from every part of the state. All four districts should be hotly contested, with Firestone District, in particular, loaded with good, solid wrestlers. While always important, factors like the bracketing, officiating, and nagging injuries will play even a bigger role given the parity evident at this class. One fact to keep in mind is that a wrestler representing St. Paris Graham has won this class the past four years (Schlatter, Doggett (2), Jordan) – an omen that should hearten Stephens.

As I look at it, there are five possibilities. If somehow we were able to run a controlled experiment that replicated the tournament hundreds of times not one of them would be so dominant as to win more than 40% of the time. That means random factors will be a critical component in determining the eventual champ. Let’s take a quick look at each of my top five.

Dean, despite seven regular season losses, was a district champ at 119# and finished 4<sup>th</sup> losing to Pelton in the semi-finals. This year he did very poorly at the Ironman, but was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Brecksville beating Ulinski and pinning Romeo. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT (losing to Romeo), and these kind of topsy-turvy results are symptomatic of this weight class.

Stephens was a Division I district champ last year and finished 6<sup>th</sup> at 112# before transferring to Graham. This year he was 8<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman (losing to Kolodzik 1-0), and a strong 1<sup>st</sup> at the GMVWA, beating Kolodzik by a point in the semi-finals. He gave Palmer a solid bout in the dual with St. Edward, but was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun, losing to Kolodzik, 8-0.

Ulinski was injured much of last year, but came back to finish 7<sup>th</sup> in the State at 119#. This year he was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Brecksville (beating Romeo and losing to Dean) and 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Top Gun, but losing to Kolodzik in the finals 17-5.

Romeo is kind of the wildcard here. He was only 3<sup>rd</sup> at Coffman, but the 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville including wins over Meyer and Konstandaras and a narrow loss to Ulinski. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the CIT, beating Brown and Dean, but losing narrowly to Vaughn.

Vaughn, only a sophomore, won the CIT, but was 7<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville. He was a district runner-up last year and after a double overtime loss in the first round won four consolation bouts to finish 5<sup>th</sup>. He has, in my view, outstanding long-term potential.

This could well turn out to be the best of all possible worlds with Brian versus Brian in the finals at Columbus. That way whether Dean or Stephens won, the right first name would have triumphed. It would also be a "significant" first in Ohio wrestling history with both finalists having that first name.

The Firestone District is loaded. We've already talked about Dean and Romeo, but there is much, much more. I kind of lost track of Brown who qualified two years ago at 130#, but he is back and still as tough on top as anyone. He lost two one-pointers at the CIT, but gave Novachkov a real battle at the Ironman and pinned Horner. His style can win at tourney time. Chapman and Meyer both qualified at 112# last year and these two juniors have knocked heads several times. Meyer was 6<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun in a very tough weight class, but did not place at Brecksville. Chapman wrestles an easier schedule, but did win at the WIT and Wadsworth. State qualifier McLaughlin was at 130# last year, but should play an important role here. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at North Canton and 1<sup>st</sup> at Northwest. Hoopes is yet another returning state qualifier (that makes six so far) who won at Riverside, but loss twice at the Ohio Duals to Stephens and Meyer. Add in Becker and Henline, both good, and we're talking nine bonafide contenders.

Stephens will have it somewhat easier at Goshen. The big threat is state qualifier Hildenbrand who went 1-2 at Columbus last year. He won at Franklin and was a semi-finalist at Medina before losing to Palmer in 31 seconds and falling to 6<sup>th</sup>. State qualifier Jameson also returns and is undefeated, but wrestles a rather weak schedule. I think a better bet might be state alternate Silvers (although Jameson beat him 3-1 in OT last year) who was 5<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA, losing only to the excellent McGuire and the omnipresent Kolodzik. I also think it's time for Bellbrook champ Wellbaum to reach the state level. The wildcard here is state qualifier Ferris who has wrestled little so far this year and all if it at 130#, I suspect he might end up here.

State qualifiers R. Nakama, Cartwright and Severance join Vaughn at Steubenville. Nakama had a very tough draw at Columbus and was "two and out" after an excellent season. He failed to place at the Top Gun, losing to Becker in the consolation rounds, but has had an otherwise successful season, including a win at Marion Harding. Cartwright was a district 3<sup>rd</sup> at this weight last year and finished 8<sup>th</sup>. However Severance beat him 11-3 at Sheridan. Severance was also beaten by Becker, but won

at Sheridan, but has had a shaky dual meet season, losing a number of times, almost always, though, at higher weight classes. Add in Springer, McIntosh, and, maybe, Layman and it will be a good competition.

Ulinski should win at Ontario. State qualifiers Mitchell and Sully have previous experience, but should not threaten him. Mitchell, however, does have a win over Dean. Hogue, McQuillen, and McClintock, I think, might be stronger candidates. McQuillen won the Gorman, beating McClintock, 3-1, and took the title at Northwood. Hogue was hurt at Brecksville just before a meeting with Ulinski, which would have been interesting. The unknown factor is Baxter. As I rewrite this he will be wrestling for the first time tonight at 130#. I am assured he will eventually compete at 125#. He is talented and in good shape and might be in the top three here. For example he beat Sully 12-0 last year.

### 130#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: CHASE SKONIECZNY (WALSH)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Espinoza (Rossford)	15	Johnson (Milton Union)
3	Pelton (Bellevue)	16	Riedy /Kidd(Bellevue)
4	Dukes (Ravenna)	17	Chappalear (Indian Lake)
5	Fondale (New Lexington)	18	Brice (Columbus East)
6	Sulzer (Holy Name)	19	McHugh (Bellbrook)
7	Melillo (Padua)	20	Mellor (River View)
8	Shell (Greenon)	21	Androsko (St. Clairsville)
9	King (Minerva)	22	Owens (Geneva)
10	McDole (Tiffin Columbian)	23	Beemer (Wapakoneta)
11	Sheppard (Kenmore)	24	Rector (Carrollton)
12	M. Nakama (Big Walnut)	25	Van Wey (John Glenn)
13	Osterloh (McClain)	26	Benedict (Canfield)
14	Lucas (Fairless)	27	Pazyniak (West Geauga)
		28	Bernardo (Columbus DeSales)

In his first two years of high school competition Chase Skonieczny has landed in weight classes loaded with top tier talent. As a freshman there was Doggett, Saxton, and Cumberly (all Division I recruits) and he finished 4<sup>th</sup>, and then last year it was Kriwinsky, Saxton, and Boyd and a 5<sup>th</sup> place finish. Originally, I thought the Fates had been far kinder to him this year as 130# seemed to be a nicely competitive weight class with him as top dog. But, alas, it seems to have been a cruel trick as it now begins to look far, far more difficult. Despite all the confusion here is what I think may happen. Espinoza has already dropped to 130#. He has made the requisite weigh-in and while it is a very tough cut for him it is, by our current rules, a healthy one. Now the ball is in Pelton's court. His alpha weight is, apparently 130# and he intends at least to provide that option by weighing in at that level. They now have until the sectionals to make a final decision. Should both opt for 130# it would leave Jordan in complete control at 135#. Though,

and I'm just speculating, you might see Fondale going back to 135#. Anyway Skonieczny has been a finalist at both the Ironman and the Powerade and looked ready to compete for his first state crown since his 7<sup>th</sup> grade win at the Junior High States. Then at the CIT – competing with two of his closest rivals, he hit a speed bump losing to Melillo in overtime, but beating SuLzer. Still, with an impressive portfolio of wins, including two over Birt, he has to go into the tournament process as, at least a co-favorite with Espinoza and Pelton.

Espinoza was 43-1 last year, losing only to Keyes In the state semi-finals—a match-up that started badly and got no better. Virtually none of his 43 wins were close. At the State Meet all four of his wins were one-sided. Note that he beat Salyer, 10-3, while Jordan beat that same opponent, 9-8. Still his problem is a weak schedule that does not provide the tough competition each week that others enjoy, and a room that does not provide the workout partners that will challenge him. You'll want to catch him early because he will be a huge 130-pounder on Saturday night.

Pelton has now twice been a state runner-up, losing both times to physically dominating wrestlers (Earley and Hart). That is why I'm not sure he will want to come down and meet Espinoza. This year he has crushed everyone (including D-3 runner-up Casey Thome) with the exception of two-time champ Tony Jameson. I've rated him at this weight class, but I am not as sure as I am with Espinoza about his final destination. There would be no seeding at this class, but there would be at 135#.

The two top districts are in the north. Without question, Skonieczny's biggest challenges will come from Ontario. If both Pelton and Espinoza are here it would be a truly incredible district—one of the toughest in recent memory. We have already talked about Espinoza and Pelton but there is much, much more. Sulzer was the district runner-up last year and then was 7<sup>th</sup> at Columbus losing to two-time champ Jordan and defending champ Llanas (in double overtime). This year he won at Wadsworth and was 5<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman, with both losses to out of state boys. Like Skonieczny he did not have a good CIT, losing close bouts to Boing and Skonieczny. Melillo was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the CIT with that huge semi-final upset. He, too, was a state qualifier last year, but did not wrestle well losing two bouts by identical scores of 13-5. I thought the two bouts were aberrations and not typical of his wrestling. He has missed part of the year with injuries, but now is returning to form. He was 5<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville, losing in the first round, but winning seven consolation bouts. If Pelton opts for 135# we would likely see the excellent Riedy or, possibly, state qualifier Kidd. Both are very good. These latter two boys may well have been passed by the fast-improving McDole, who blitzed the field at Tiffin and was 2<sup>nd</sup> to Division I third place finisher Dennis at Perrysburg. Add in Beemer, Jewell (Galion) and Toler (St. Marys Memorial) and it's an incredible weight class.

The Firestone District is also very tough, but does not seem quite as ridiculous as Ontario. Skonieczny leads the way, but Isaac Dukes is getting very, very tough. I saw him at Brecksville and whooey. He was a state alternate last year, losing his go-to-state bout 4-2, to Ryan King. This year he was 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville, losing twice to Palivoda, once in overtime, and the other time 2-1. In the consolations he pinned McHenry, beat

state qualifier Green 18-7, and whipped Demas 9-2. He then won the Top Gun, admittedly at a relatively weak weight class, including major decisions in the last two rounds over King (ah, revenge) and Lucas. At this rate he could be a district finalist. That leaves King and Lucas, or Sheppard as favorites for the last two berths. Watch out for Sheppard. A district semi-finalist last year, he won big at the WIT and was 2<sup>nd</sup> to Sulzer at Wadsworth. I haven't seen state qualifier Tony Owens name yet in the Geneva results I receive, but I'm guessing he must be here. I'm thinking sophomore Mike Fee Lake Catholic) might have been a factor here, but a serious injury destroyed his season in the first week. Benedict and Criss (West Branch) could also be factors here.

A real threat to the northern boys will come from Steubenville. Fondale was 4<sup>th</sup> at this weight class last year losing twice to Boyd and beating Melillo in the first round. He has been at 135# all year faking us out in terms of his ultimate destination. At Medina he was 4<sup>th</sup> at 135#, losing twice to St Ed's precocious sophomore Andrew Gasber. The drop came in the dual against Sheridan, and if he is effective at this weight he'll be a top contender—though at which weight may yet to be decided. Nakama is best in the Columbus area. He was the state alternate last year, but made the field when Kovach was injured. He went 1-2 and was one point from placement. He was 5<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun, losing to Lucas and Crispin and won the title at Tiffin. Also here are state alternate Van Wey, Brice, and Androsko. The last named is 21-2 with both losses by a single point. Also watch for Mellor and Rector, and possibly Bernardo. He was a shaky 6<sup>th</sup> at the CIT, but had some good early season wins.

This is one of the weight classes where the Graham entrant will not be a huge favorite at this district. There are four returning state qualifiers (including one from Illinois) and at least two other solid competitors. Shell was a finalist at Medina and might well have won the title in his 9-7 loss. A state qualifier from Illinois, he looks good. Osterloh, Johnson, and Chapplear all qualified last year, but only Johnson won a bout (he went 1-2). At GMVWA Johnson was 2<sup>nd</sup> and Chapplear 3<sup>rd</sup> though they did not meet. Also at that tournament was Bellbrook champ McHugh who was 5<sup>th</sup> and Rowe (Graham) who finished 6<sup>th</sup>, but did knock off Chapplear. Much the same pattern emerged at Troy with Johnson 2<sup>nd</sup>, Chapplear 3<sup>rd</sup>, and Rowe 5<sup>th</sup>. This will be a sharp set of confrontations at district. Don't forget Osterloh who is 17-3 and beat Johnson and Harman at last year's district, and went 14-9 with Jordan. Raabe (Roger Bacon) and Armstrong (Miami Trace) are real long shots here.

**135#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: BEN JORDAN (GRAHAM)**

Top Contenders

2	Zimmer (River View)	15	Pearce (Poland)
3	McGookey (Perkins)	16	Gaskins (New Lexington)
4	Gayheart (Willard)	17	Von Neumann (Carroll)
5	Canty (Columbus DeSales)	18	Sciortino (Walsh)
6	Sigurdson (Oak Harbor)	19	Delpra (West Geauga)
7	Horne (Hillsboro)	20	Citino (West Branch)
8	Stevenson (Chaminade)	21	Hughes (Buckeye Valley)
9	Fraley (Miami Trace)	22	Overholt (Elida)
10	Leonard (Norton)	23	Hayes (Holy Name)
11	Riedy/Hogue (Bellevue)	24	Harmon (Indian Lakes)
12	Kovach (Claymont)	25	Keep (Ashtabula Edgewood)
13	Ray (Cambridge)	26	Penhorwood (Benjamin Logan)
14	D. Gifford (Logan Elm)	27	Maiwurm (Orrville)

Often when a wrestler wins state titles both as a freshman and a sophomore he finds the respect engendered provides him with somewhat easier weight classes as an upperclassman. Potential opponents opt for other weight classes that seem somewhat less formidable. As it currently stands that could well be the case here. At the moment it appears that Pelton, Espinoza, and Fondale may all drop from this weight class and compete at 130#. Life suddenly is looking real good for the Jordans. Win the election in November and have the three highest rated competitors leave for more congenial locales. I expect at least one of that number to return, however. All in all it does seem to set up nicely for a triumphal 2008 campaign. Like his forbearers, Jordan has proven to be extremely adaptive and resourceful. As a freshman (and underdog) he won two one-point bouts and then frustrated a defending state champion with his defense in the final. Last year was somewhat easier, except for the semis – and he was very impressive in beating Keyes in the final round. Perhaps he is most susceptible to an upset in the semi-finals, winning the last two years at that juncture 11-10 and 9-8. This title by Ben made he and dad, Jim, the first father-son combination to both be multiple titlists. Think about it. The Jordan trio (father, uncle, and son) are a combined 40-0 at the state level. Only two of those victories went into overtime (one each for Jim and Jeff) and both times the overtimes were scoreless with one win by referee's decision, and one by criteria. It is truly a remarkable accomplishment.

It will be a real donnybrook at Goshen. First of all, Jordan will have little trouble winning. Nobody here is going to come close. However, those last three spots will be a struggle. State qualifier Fraley won a state bout last year and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the GMVWA, splitting two bouts with Horne. He won at Beavercreek and was undefeated at the Ohio Duals beating Canty. Stevenson was 2<sup>nd</sup> at GMVWA, beating Von Neumann, but somehow missing the rest. He was 5<sup>th</sup> at the CIT, losing to Von Neumann, 11-5. State qualifier Von Neumann also has to be figured into this class. The unknown factor is

Daniel Gifford. Undefeated this year he has not wrestled the schedule that the others have endured. Factor in Harmon and, maybe, Penhorwood and it should be really exciting.

There is a huge void at Firestone. It is so open that some of the 130's on the fringe of qualification and, maybe, a couple of 140's who have a lower alpha weight, will drop to this weight class. There is real opportunity here. In no particular order I have identified Pearce, Delpra, Leonard, Keep, and Citino as possible qualifiers. None have a long history of tournament success so you might see a Criss (West Branch) or a Maiwurm sneak in. The one unknown is Sciortino. Never paid him much attention until he placed at the CIT and then won the Big Eight.

With Pelton and Espinoza, in theory, at least both at 130# the door swings open for a lot of 135-pounders to visit our state capital. If Shawn Gayheart eventually makes this weight he could appear to be the odds on favorite for the qualification spot. He grabbed a district 3<sup>rd</sup> last year, losing only to two-time state champ Pat McLemore, but went just 1-2 at Columbus after winning an exciting first round bout. He has been all over the map this season as Willard (like Bellevue) works to maximize their middleweights. The next spot should fall to the recently appearing McGookey. He won at Tiffin in very fine fashion and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at North Canton including a huge win over Tucker Guy. He could win this district. The third state spot will probably be headed by a wrestler to be named later—maybe, Riedy The last berth should be a battle between three boys with substantial experience, Sigurdson, Hayes, and Overholt. I favor the first named wrestler given a tougher schedule and slightly better results.

There are five solid candidates for the four state berths at Steubenville. Zimmer, of course, comes first to mind winning this district last year and then reaching the state semi-finals before getting pinned by McLemore and falling to 6<sup>th</sup>. He has missed some of this year which will make him fresh and strong at tourney time. State qualifiers Canty, Gaskins, and Kovach all return and must be accounted for. Canty was 7<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville and 4<sup>th</sup> at the CIT and should qualify. Kovach and Gaskins both qualified at 125#, but Kovach was injured and did not compete at the state level. Both he and Canty have beaten state alternate Jon Ray, who did defeat Gaskins, 9-4, earlier in the year. That could mean Gaskins is the odd man out. I also like Hughes and Sluga, but they'll have to be red-hot to get out here.

**140#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: MATT REEDY (RAVENNA)**

Top Contenders

2	Andrews (New Albany)	15	Pressley (Oak Harbor)
3	McGovern (Columbus DeSales)	16	Seeley (Benjamin Logan)
4	Cavello (Willard)	17	Neill (Vincent Warren)
5	Newland (Graham)	18	Brassfield (Hebron Lakewood)
6	Cunningham (Miami Trace)	19	Blike (Hoban)
7	Teter (Triway)	20	Ringle (Norwalk)
8	Taylor (Eastwood)	21	Walters (West Geauga)
9	Szucs (Holy Name)	22	Becca (Buckeye Valley)
10	S.Gifford (Logan Elm)	23	Kondray (University)
11	Riedy/Hogue (Bellevue)	24	Shiff (Fostoria)
12	Regula (Claymont)	25	Scaglia (Kenton Ridge)
13	Suggett (Norton)	26	Bryan (Dover)
14	Ray (Cambridge)	27	Gregor (Buckeye)

Matt Reedy has been a superior performer during his four year high school career and, yet, has never placed at states. It's been a combination of bad luck, injuries, and the like that have stopped him just short of the podium. This year I believe he'll erase all those frustrations and capture the title at 140#, but it won't be easy. There are plenty of obstacles for the unwary, with a number of other excellent seniors lurking in this bracket, but Reedy has gotten past mis-steps and mistakes and has too much firepower this year. He was brilliant at Brecksville, defeating his last three opponents by a combined score of 26-1, and this at 145#. He was just as good at the Top Gun, winning at 140# over a good field. There'll be some tight bouts, but Reedy should prevail.

His biggest challenges will emerge from the Steubenville District. Andrews has twice been a state runner-up, losing to Scaletta in the 30 second tiebreaker and to McLemore by two points. He wrestles very defensively and conservatively, keeping the score low and close. In his four state bouts last year he scored a total of 12 points, one of which went to the 30 second tie-breaker. This year he was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina, including close wins (what else) over Cavello and Harker. Against Shawn Harris of St. Edward it was 1-1 until a very late takedown (and back points) decided the bout. Rarely called for stalling, he is very tough to beat. McGovern was 5<sup>th</sup> two years ago, but then failed to make weight at sectionals last year after another excellent season. This year he won at Brecksville, swept through the Ohio Duals and was 2<sup>nd</sup> to the powerful Lindsey at the CIT.

That leaves just two spots at Steubenville. I believe state qualifier Regula gets one of them. He won a state bout last year and has had some success this year, finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at Barnesville and 6<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun, losing three close bouts. He beat Dan Ray in the 30-second tie-breaker to go to States last year, and, maybe, it's Ray's turn to go. He is 14-4, but will need at least one big win to qualify. If not, Brassfield should step right in

and this senior is overdue to make it to States. Other possibilities are Becca, Bryan, and, perhaps, Stout.

Reedy should not have much to worry about at Firestone. Only Teter has past state experience and there is not much depth either. For some reason this is the second consecutive year where Firestone has had little depth at this weight class. At any rate, Teter won it last year in a runaway style, outscoring his opponents 57-18. However, he lost both his state bouts and was out Thursday night. Teter won this year at the WIT and was 4<sup>th</sup> at North Canton. Suggett might be third best here with Blike another half step behind, but there are bound to be some real surprises. Maybe, a Walters or a McCollie (Warrensville Hts.) can be the ones to do so.

There is all kinds of depth at Ontario. Cavello was a dominating district champ at this weight class last year, and leveraged that to a 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish at States. Somehow I'm not seeing the same results this year. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at Medina, losing to Heflin and then being bored to death by Andrews, 3-2, and he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at DeSales to Vaccari. District champ and state qualifier Taylor is next after a 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville and a 5<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun. Right behind this duo are Szucs and Pressley who have jumped up in the ratings. Szucs was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT and won at Wadsworth. He was the state alternate last year. Pressley lost his go-to-state bout in the 30 second tie-breaker and is just now rounding into form. He could do some damage here. That still leaves half dozen wrestlers with possible state potential. In this group are Gregor, Shiff, and Ringle. Also remember Bellevue can put any of three wrestlers at this weight, all of them have good qualification potential. I'm guessing it'll be another Riedy – this one spelled with an "I".

Newland's accomplishments are dwarfed by the galaxy of stars that surround – Jordan on one side, Boyd on the other – but he is very good. A district runner-up last year, he won his first state bout then lost to two-time champ McLemore and four-time placer Ryan Cubberly back-to-back. Very unfortunate luck. This year he was a close 2<sup>nd</sup> to Tucker Guy at the GMVWA. He beat Taylor at the Ohio Duals, but lost to McGovern, and then missed the Top Gun. He should be the favorite here. State qualifier Cunningham is also under-rated. He won at Beaver Creek and was 4<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA, losing to Guy by about the same margin as Newland in the semi-finals. He beat Pressley at the Ohio Duals, but lost close bouts to McGovern and Taylor. The sophomore Shane Gifford is 15-1 and should be a factor. He hasn't wrestled a lot of tough competition up to this point. Seeley and Neill are looking at just one spot with Scaglia, champ at Bellbrook and Troy and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Northeastern, and Adams as long shots. Neill missed state qualification last year when he lost an overtime bout to Neff.

**145#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: COBY BOYD (GRAHAM)**

Top Contenders

2	Tank (Oak Harbor)	15	Carlo (Fairview Park)
3	Michaels (Clyde)	16	Ferguson (Geneva)
4	Windom (CVCA)	17	Dynes (Claymont)
5	Neff (Miami Trace)	18	Spence (Walsh)
6	Wagers (Willard)	19	Cintron (Alliance)
7	Hoover (West Holmes)	20	Pool (Benjamin Logan)
8	Kramer (Ravenna)	21	Yingling (Bellevue)
9	McEntire (Medina Highland)	22	Clunk (Buckeye Valley)
10	Block (Crestwood)	23	Hammor (Roger Bacon)
11	Severance (Sheridan)	24	Piechuta (Marlington)
12	Bragg (Morgan)	25	Redden (Washington CH)
13	Pencil (Springfield Northeastern)	26	Dulaney (Whitehall)
14	McFadden (Circleville)	27	Stine (Edison Local)

This is the third year that Coby Boyd has been a prime-time player and one has to believe that his time has come. An exceptional schoolboy talent and ferocious pinner, he was the wildcard at 130# his freshman year. He upset senior favorite Jordan Lipp in the first round, but eventually succumbed in the semi-finals to eventual champ Shane Friery. Last year, at the same weight class, he was again a semi-finalist, losing in the 30 second tie-breaker to former champ Adam Krwinsky. This year, up three weight classes and looking far more comfortable, he should defeat that semi-final jinx and the rest of the field as well. Things wouldn't have had to be much different for Boyd to already own at least one state title, but it's his for the taking this year. Already he has defeated Division I runner-up Dan Gonsor twice this year and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Ironman losing a close final bout to the #1 ranked wrestler in the country. There is some good talent here, but a focused Boyd should prevail.

The best district is at Ontario with a top trio of contenders. The most successful has been Kirk Tank. Only a junior he is already a two-time state qualifier, finishing 4<sup>th</sup> in that very difficult 145# weight class last year. This year he won at Medina and Oak Harbor, beating Gonsor in overtime after being dominated for much of the match. Tank has so much talent it's difficult to watch him spend great stretches of the first and second period doing very little and not being warned. Michaels, also a junior, is very active, but has, after great regular seasons, failed to qualify for Columbus. That will change this time. Last year he lost twice to Melillo and finished 5<sup>th</sup>. This year he won at Coffman, Clyde, Lorain Southview without being appreciably challenged. Wagers, also a state qualifier, is a full step behind this duo, but still has state placement chances. He defaulted down to 8<sup>th</sup> at Medina after losing to two of the best Division I contenders – Gonsor and Dong. There are four other possibilities. The almost unknown Carlo is very good. Tank beat him 14-9 and Michaels 10-5. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Southview and 1<sup>st</sup> at

Buckeye. McEntire and Yiungling are experienced and solid with Hoffman a dark horse candidate.

Nobody at Goshen will place Boyd in peril. State qualifiers Neff, Pencil and McFadden all return so it should be an exciting battle for 2<sup>nd</sup> place. Neff was 1<sup>st</sup> at Hamilton Twp. and Beavercreek and 2<sup>nd</sup> at the GMVWA, losing to Boyd 19-7. Tank beat him by three at the Ohio Duals and he, in turn, beat Hoffman. Pencil was a district 2<sup>nd</sup>, but it was "two and out" at Columbus. He does not wrestle a strong schedule and may be vulnerable. He was champ at Northeastern, winning at 152# and taking home the Outstanding Wrestler trophy. However, Pool beat him at 145# at Tipp City. State qualifier McFadden also returns. He won at Circleville and Logan, but wrestles a low profile schedule. So this trio are the favorites, but Pool, Hammoor, and Redden are a second trio with upset hopes. As mentioned, Pool beat Pencil, who was not sharp, and Hammoor was 4<sup>th</sup> at the CIT. Redden's only loss was to McFadden. Deer and Wright also have hopes.

The powerful Windom heads the Firestone District. He barely made it to states last year, beating Finlaw and Peacock by one point and finishing 4<sup>th</sup>. It all changed at Value Center. After an opening loss to Cavello he beat Pencil and three others ending up 5<sup>th</sup>. He had a great weekend. He looked rusty at the Ironman, didn't wrestle at Medina or the Top Gun. It leaves one nervous about the general direction here. Behind are a covey of wrestlers who have, heretofore, been district quarter-finalists or so. Kramer, who has been at 140#, is good as are Block and Ferguson. Someone to watch is the onrushing Spence who was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the CIT. Also possibilities are Cintron and Piechuta. Right now this weight class seems a little unsettled and out of synch.

It is much the same at Steubenville. State qualifier Hoover was 1<sup>st</sup> at the WIT and 7<sup>th</sup> at Medina. At the Top Gun he was 2<sup>nd</sup> to Boyd (by fall), but beat Cintron (in overtime) and Dynes. State qualifier Severance beat McFadden 10-4 to win at Sheridan. In the dual meet with West Holmes he was at 152#, losing to Collett. Dynes was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun, but failed to place at Medina. Bragg beat him badly at Barnesville and he may be third best at this district. Clunk and Dulaney are probably the best in the Columbus area. I think Clunk has a chance here, but Dulaney will need a really hot weekend to place. Also don't overlook Stine.

**152#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: ERIC CUBBERLY (EASTWOOD)**

Top Contenders

2	Kusar (CVCA)	15	Johnson (Roger Bacon)
3	Myers (Indian Creek)	16	Drummond (Napoleon)
4	Schwartz (Clyde)	17	Bragg (Morgan)
5	Collett (West Holmes)	18	Miller (Chaminade)
6	Mannier/Luster (Graham)	19	Tharp (Fairfield Union)
7	Erdman (University)	20	Colman (Ravenna Southeast)
8	Mahley (Cambridge)	21	Harris (Kenmore)
9	Croasmun (Columbus DeSales)	22	Hough (Olmsted Falls)
10	Schott (Marlington)	23	Garabrandt (Claymont)
11	Gayheart (Willard)	24	Bailey (Washington CH)
12	Boso (Akron Springfield)	25	Schaal (Buckeye Local)
13	Holt (Miami Trace)	26	Hirschy (Van Wert)
14	Baker (Oak Harbor)	27	Wells (Greenon)

This has all the earmarks of a classic two-man battle featuring two excellent juniors with contrasting styles. Cubberly, 3<sup>rd</sup> last year at 145#, is fast and rangy with an absolutely devastating tilt – perhaps, the best one in Ohio. Kusar, 3<sup>rd</sup> last year at this weight class, is brute force strong with an arsenal of solid takedowns. Cubberly beat a strong field at Brecksville, beating Division III pick Moore in the finals. He dominated Collett at the Ohio Duals and had a quick fall over Mannier. His only loss was to Moore in the dual meet where he got caught and pinned. Kusar was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman (losing to then #1 in the country Eric Medina) and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Medina, losing to Division I champ Straughn in overtime. He, too, devastated Collett, and has dominated most lesser competition. They “met” in the Top Gun finals with Kusar defaulting to 2<sup>nd</sup> place. I suspect they will meet again.

The wildcard here is Myers. Just three years ago as a freshman he was 5<sup>th</sup> at 103#. Last year, up six weight classes in two years, he was runner-up at 140#, losing to Jake Kyle in the finals. He will be a major factor at 152#, but I don’t see him challenging the top duo. Both Cubberly and Kusar wrestle a far more demanding schedule and while both of them tech falled Collett, Myers won a terrific bout against that same opponent 16-14 in overtime. Should all three top contenders win their district, then Myers would be in one-half of the draw and Cubberly and Kusar would meet in the semi-finals in the other half. It will be interesting. Myers has beaten Collett three times, but each time it’s been closer. Their district bout will be pivotal for the entire weight class.

That Steubenville District will be terrific. Myers we’ve already discussed. Collett was a state qualifier at 140# making it to the state semi-finals before losing to Myers and finishing 4<sup>th</sup>. This year he won at the WIT and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun and Medina. He is very good. Also here is state qualifier Mahley who went as a sophomore, but missed out last year by the margin of a takedown. He has missed some of the season, but is

undefeated as of this writing. Also missing much of the year is state qualifier Croasmun who surprisingly lost both state bouts. I'm guessing he'll win a bunch this year. He won the CIT, upsetting the excellent Weinkam in the finals. It could be a watershed bout for him. That's four very good wrestlers, but we're hardly through. Tharp is a former state qualifier who has lots of big match experience. Mahley beat him by three at Sheridan, but he certainly could qualify. I think Brady Bragg may even be better. He just missed state qualification last year. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Barnesville to Myers, but has won several other tourneys. Factor in Garabrandt – 7<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun and Prokopakis (Edison Local) and it's quite a weight class.

There is not nearly that much excitement at Goshen. The two best 152's, Mannier and Luster, both wrestle for Graham and whoever wins that wrestle-off will be the favorite. Both were district champs last year. State alternate Holt returns and was 4<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA and won at Beavercreek. He was handled rather roughly at the Ohio Duals, losing to Giachetti and getting pinned by Cubberly. Danny Johnson is also very good, placing at both the SWOCA and the CIT. He missed state qualification by one bout last year. That leaves Bailey, Wells, and state alternate Miller as other possible contenders, with Starnier(Circleville) also in the mix.

There are some rugged people at Firestone. Kusar leads the way as this junior has proven his excellence many times. State qualifier Erdman would seem to be next best. He was a quarter-finalist at Columbus last year and was 7<sup>th</sup> at the wonderfully difficult weight class. He was a semi-finalist at Brecksville finishing a strong 3<sup>rd</sup> as he did at North Canton, and then was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun, losing to Cubberly in the semi-finals and to Collett for 3<sup>rd</sup>. He is an extremely consistent performer at what appears to be a very difficult weight class. State qualifier Schott and Boso are a step behind this top duo, both going 1-2 at the state level. Schott was 6<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun, losing two close bouts to Erdman and one to Luster. I haven't seen much about Boso this year. He did lose a tight overtime bout to Block earlier in the year. The big X factor is Harris, who has huge upset potential. He nearly knocked off Erdman last year before losing 12-10. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at the best weight at the WIT, losing to Collett and Sonyers and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Wadsworth, losing only to Thatcher. Colman and Bell (Warrensville Hts.) are other possibilities.

There is a dynamite quartet at Ontario. Cubberly looks to be the best. Right behind him is the defending district champion at this weight class, Thomas Schwartz. He had a terrible draw at States and didn't place. This year he won handily at Lorain Southview, but was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Clyde (to Reer) and 3<sup>rd</sup> at Coffman. Baker was a state qualifier at 160# last year and has spent much of the season getting to this weight class. He won five consolation bouts in placing at Medina and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Oak Harbor. This is a very good trio. Right behind him, though, is Seth Gayheart who has come back to wrestling with a vengeance, state alternate Drummond, and the under-rated Hough. That leaves Hirschy and Jordan (Lexington) out of luck.

**160#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: COLT SPONSELLER (WEST HOLMES)**

Top Contenders

2	Dukes (Ravenna)	15	Guthrie (Eaton)
3	Witt (Oak Harbor)	16	Alfani (Louisville)
4	Thomusseit (Graham)	17	Van Fossen (New Philadelphia)
5	Mills (University)	18	Williams (Tiffin Columbian)
6	Thurn (Clyde)	19	Hamilton (Salem)
7	Fisher (Columbus DeSales)	20	Sexton (Franklin)
8	Rhoads (Hillsboro)	21	Donley (Harrison Central)
9	McCurdy (Fairfield Union)	22	Cope (Indian Lake)
10	DeLong (Lexington)	23	Erf (Bellevue)
11	Raber (Triway)	24	King (Milton Union)
12	Kilroy (Padua)	25	King (Tri-Valley)
13	Haddox (Canal Fulton Northwest)	26	Hojnacki (CVCA)
14	Bittinger (Beaver Local)	27	Geiger (Edison)

Last year I chose Colt Sponseller to win at the 152# weight class foregoing the popular pick, the excellent senior Josh Rohler. In the 35 years I have been preparing this report never before had I received so many notes and e-mails finding fault with my selection. Words like "misguided," "incomprehensible," and "moronic" were about as positive as it got with most notes more negative. Well, vindication is sweet and Sponseller proved to be even more brilliant than I anticipated. In a bout that wasn't nearly as close as the score, Sponseller captured his second state crown and stamped himself as one of the special wrestlers in Ohio. This year he has been even better, winning that huge confrontation with two-time champ Sean Nemec at Medina, including five takedowns in the last two plus minutes. Then he defeated a very strong field at the Top Gun, beating Dukes 20-8 in the finals. He is the best 160 pounder in the country and his third title should look more like a coronation than a contest.

Sponseller exits a very good district. All three of the other qualifiers should have reasonable placement chances in Columbus. Fisher, now a senior, has had two remarkably similar adventures at the State meet. He roars through the first two rounds reaching the semi-finals. Then he gets pounded in that round, loses two consolation bouts, and finishes 6<sup>th</sup>. He has decided to change some things this year. He transferred from Morgan to Columbus DeSales and then moved up three weight classes from 140# to 160#. He was 1<sup>st</sup> at DeSales over Division III pick Steve Wilson, and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the CIT, losing to Mahon. At Brecksville he pinned his way into the semi-finals where Mills caught and pinned him and he ended up 4<sup>th</sup>. McCurdy is the defending district champion at this class and last year won two state bouts to finish 8<sup>th</sup>. He's already won at Circleville, Logan, Sheridan, and Wadsworth so he has been busy. State qualifier Donley is undefeated at this moment (before the OVAC) and has won at the State level and, yet, he'll be struggling just to qualify out of this tough district. Right behind him are Bittinger, champ at Beaver Local, with only two losses on the year, and

Van Fossen, who seems to wrestler Sponseller every other week. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> at Medina the last two years, losing to Sponseller each time. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at the WIT, losing in the semi-finals to Sponseller. Likely doomed to disappointment are King and Gilmore (Dover).

In what will be a crowded field at Ontario, two juniors from the northwest stand out. Two-time state qualifier Witt was 7<sup>th</sup> last year and is one of the three amigos that came in as super freshmen at Oak Harbor. He has wrestled little this year, with injuries and weight issues, but now looks firmly in place at 160#. This rating is based on his previous track record since we have not seen much of him in 2006-07. His only win was at Perrysburg. Thurn qualified at this class last year and is part of that brutal middleweight lineup that Clyde puts on the mat starting with Michaels and going through Andrews. He won at Coffman, Lorain Southview, and Clyde, but has not met some of the top-rated boys. I think DeLong might be next best – finishing, for example, 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Gorman and winning at Northwood. That last berth though is difficult. The freshman Kilroy is very good and should come out as sectional champ. That would leave him with Williams, Erf, and, maybe, Geiger to beat. Also don't overlook Fricke (Elida) who was a close second at Tiffin.

It will be senior versus sophomore at Firestone. Dukes is extremely powerful and a superior athlete who was 5<sup>th</sup> last year as a junior, losing close matches to Michaels and Tank. I thought he looked impatient at Brecksville, trying to force the issue and after losing in the semis wrestled poorly to finish 6<sup>th</sup>. It was a different story at the Top Gun where Dukes was 2<sup>nd</sup>, beating Pankewicz and Mills. Mills is that sophomore and he has made enormous progress. He missed state qualification by one point last year. This year he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at North Canton to Shalash, 2<sup>nd</sup> at Brecksville, and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun. He's had some big wins over Alfani, Shalash (revenge), Thomusseit, Fisher, and Pankewicz. Alfani was a state semi-finalist last year, but has been shaky in 2007. He was 6<sup>th</sup> at North Canton, losing 8-1 to Mills and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Wadsworth, losing to Scavuzzo and 7<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun were Mills pinned him. I wonder if he has been hurt. At any rate, he may struggle to qualify. State qualifier Raber was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the WIT and North Canton and will be a factor. Should this top quartet falter, Haddox might be going to Columbus. He was 7<sup>th</sup> at Medina, losing a 3-point bout to two-time champ Nemec and getting nipped by Coleman. He lost to Rohler and Mills at last year's district. Hamilton and Hojnacki are other possibilities here.

Thomusseit, a state semi-finalist just two years ago at 103#, is now the top 160 pounder at Goshen. He was a semi-finalist at the Ironman, was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the GMVWA, and 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun, losing a 7-2 decision to Sponseller in the semi-finals. I'm penciling him in at heavyweight for next year. Rhoads has a decision to make. He has been at 171# most of the year, winning at Bellbrook and Lebanon, and finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> to Mauro at the GMVWA. He was also 2<sup>nd</sup> at the SWOCA at 160#, so he can go either way. My guess is here, where he has a size advantage and is the defending district champ. He was 5<sup>th</sup> last year and could better that now. State qualifier Guthrie returns, but I don't see him beating the top duo. After that it is wide open, with Sexton having the best shot over Cope and King.

**#171**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: CODY MAGRUM (OAK HARBOR)**

Top Contenders

2	Foster (Eastwood)	15	Roddy (Watkins Memorial)
3	Thompson (Graham)	16	Roeder (Circleville)
4	Gorman (Marlington)	17	Shipp (Wapakoneta)
5	Hughes (New Philadelphia)	18	Lochtefeld (Lexington)
6	Griffin (Canal Fulton Northwest)	19	Westwood (Valley View)
7	Stewart (New Albany)	20	Teague (Cambridge)
8	Robinson (New Lexington)	21	Lamberg (Ravenna Southeast)
9	Sinchok (CVCA)	22	Foster (Kenton Ridge)
10	Lisowski (Fairview Park)	23	Rice (Conneaut)
11	Stewart (Edison Local)	24	Ritchie (Franklin)
12	Dencer (Clyde)	25	Conley (Miami Trace)
13	Stygler (Columbus DeSales)	26	Franklin (Big Walnut)
14	Cheatham (Walsh)	27	Rosen (University)

It should be a three-man battle at this weight class with defending champ Cody Magrum, perhaps, a half step ahead of the other two possibilities. This is the same trio that held the first three places in my ratings last year. Magrum was part of that terrific trio of freshmen (with Tank and Witt) who emerged at Oak Harbor two seasons past. A low placer as a freshman, he had a terrific second half his sophomore year culminating in a title at this weight class. His four state bouts were beautifully wrestled as he outscored his opponents 52-12. His semi-final win over the excellent Van Buskirk was particularly outstanding. This year he was brilliant in defeating Division I runner-up Brian Roddy, 12-5 in the Ironman quarter-finals before suffering a concussion and defaulting in the semis. The win over Roddy was a bravura performance after having lost to him last year. The hoped for rematch at Medina did not take place because Magrum was still not 100%, but he should be fine well before tourney time. If so, he will be the favorite.

Foster, also a junior, placed 4<sup>th</sup> as a freshman and was actually my choice last year (I had Magrum 2<sup>nd</sup>). It was based on a mid-season splurge that saw him beat Popham and pin Kilgore at the Top Gun, and whip Thompson by six in the dual. Some late season distractions seemed to impact his performance as he finished 2<sup>nd</sup> to Magrum in the district finals, though the 7-5 score was by far Magrum's closest bout throughout the tournament process. This year he won easily over a relatively weak Brecksville field and will be a most dangerous opponent.

Thompson is already a three-time state placer (6-4-4) all at 171#. This has obviously been a very productive career, but I still feel a state title has to come into play, and this could be the year. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman, losing to Roddy by a point in the consolation finals, and then was injured the next week at the Elite Eight, and has not wrestled since that time. His problem at Columbus has been the quarter final round

where he has lost each of the past three years, including a 7-6 heartbreaker to Neptune last year. Not quite the athlete as Magrum and Foster, he'll have to win on experience and mat management.

With a Magrum and Foster there, it looks like only two other 171's have a chance of qualifying out of Ontario. The obvious third choice is Dencer, who qualified at this class last year, and won a state bout after taking Van Buskirk into overtime and losing in the first round. However, he worries me. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Clyde, 2<sup>nd</sup> at Coffman (but to Kilgore), and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Lorain Southview where he lost to Lisowski. This gives Lisowski, Lochtefeld and Shipp real hope and, perhaps, two of this trio will qualify. Maybe, Hamons can have a good district like he did last year.

Thompson, if healthy, and I am assured he will be, will dominate at Goshen and hit the State bracket as a district champ – a real advantage. After him chaos reigns supreme. Roeder was a district semi-finalist last year, but has already lost four times this year. Westwood and Foster are possibilities as is Ritchie, winner at Franklin. Add in Conley and, maybe, a couple of this group will qualify.

The really crowded district is at Steubenville. Hughes was a state alternate last year at this weight class and has been better this year. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the WIT (after being upset by Lamberg) and then was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina, losing only to Wolff and beating Robinson and Sinchok twice. The mystery man is Jayce Stewart. He was 4<sup>th</sup> two years ago and then did not wrestle last year. Now back, he did not place at Medina, but still showed flashes of his past talent. He'll need to be in good form to escape this district. Stygler was 4<sup>th</sup> at the CIT, but did not place at Brecksville. Roddy was 7<sup>th</sup> at Medina, beating Jayce Stewart 5-2 in the consolation rounds and won at Licking Hts. Robinson was a state alternate at 152# last year and was 5<sup>th</sup> at Medina. Jonathan Stewart has been excellent for Edison, going 29-2 at this writing. He beat Dencer 7-2 in their match-up. Add in Teague and Franklin, 6<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun and that makes eight candidates, requiring a 50% attrition rate at this district. I'm thinking Hughes, Stygler, one of the Stewarts, and Robinson will make it.

There are a lot of question marks at Firestone. There are two returning state qualifiers – Gorman and Griffen – but neither won a bout at the state level. Sinchok wrestles with abandon and can score points in bunches, while Cheatham and Lamberg are question marks. Sinchok and Gorman were 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> respectively at the Top Gun (it was 7-6) both losing to Kilgore. Sinchok was 4<sup>th</sup> at Medina, losing twice to Hughes and beating Griffen, Roddy, and Inks. At North Canton Sinchok was 2<sup>nd</sup>, while Gorman was 5<sup>th</sup>. Cheatham missed part of this year, but was 5<sup>th</sup> at the CIT, losing to Gaier and Sanders. Lamberg wrestles some wild, high-scoring bouts and is the upset maker. A dark horse candidate might be Tyler Rice, who after winning his first district bout last year ended up defaulting out.

**189#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: JOHN WEAKLEY (CVCA)**

Top Contenders

2	Fisher (Perkins)	15	Place (Chaminade)
3	Knapp (Morgan)	16	Hudak (Lexington)
4	Hershberger (Marlington)	17	Fyffe (Bellbrook)
5	Reeder (Beaver Local)	18	Ayers (Canal Fulton Northwest)
6	Gilgenbach (Napoleon)	19	Fenner (Miami Trace)
7	Brankamp (Columbus DeSales)	20	Weininger (Dover)
8	Akam (West Holmes)	21	Busick (Steubenville)
9	Bailey (Walsh)	22	Kiss-Benke (Holy Name)
10	Hersman (Perry)	23	Kearney (Triway)
11	Lipstraw (Oak Harbor)	24	Oliver (Jackson)
12	Stoll (Milan Edison)	25	Abbuhl (Claymont)
13	Wetherell (Cambridge)	26	White (Graham)
14	Marshall (Indian Lakes)	27	Angelotta (West Geauga)

John Weakley crafted a fabulous junior season winning his first state crown while going 38-1. He was a convincing winner at the Ironman and his only loss was an overtime thriller to Chris Honeycutt. He dominated throughout the state tourney process beating Srock in the finals five takedowns to none (there were no reversals or back points) but, through, some would say, bizarre officiating, only winning 10-9. This year, after a great football season, he jumped into the Ironman only to be ambushed by Honeycutt 9-1. Two things need to be remembered, after that loss he came back to get 3<sup>rd</sup>, including a win over Division III state champ Nick Purdue, and he subsequently was diagnosed with a blood disorder that has kept him on the sidelines for nearly a month now. Never fear, the always smiling and friendly John Weakley is again the class of this weight.

There are two principal challengers standing in the way of a state title. One of these is the junior Matt Fisher from the Northwest District. Last year he was the district champ and then finishing 4<sup>th</sup> at the Schott, losing in the semi-finals to Srock. He and Weakley never met. His two losses this year were both to Division I stalwarts, lammarino and Samson, and both were close. He is very big and strong and awesomely difficult to score against. On the other hand, his offense needs augmentation so that he can get the crucial takedown when required. I think there are five principal contenders for the other three State berths. At the top of that list are Stoll, a State 7<sup>th</sup> at 171# and who has been ill), and Gilgenbach, who was the state alternate, at this weight class. Stoll surprised me last year and with a little luck could have placed higher than he did. This year he won at Edison, but was only 3<sup>rd</sup> at Kenston, losing to Porter. We'll see how he handles this weight jump. Gilgenbach was 1<sup>st</sup> at Perrysburg and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Sylvania Southview to Purdue. Behind this twosome are Lipstraw, who is coming back from injury and Hudak. The latter was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Gorman, while the former won the Oak Harbor and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Perrysburg. Lipstraw lost two close bouts to lammarino (3-2) and

Schilling (4-2) at Medina. He seems to be getting better. From the east Kiss-Benke, 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CIT, could disrupt the western monopoly.

The other principal contender is Knapp. He was an easy district champ last year, but twice lost overtime heartbreakers to Knopick to finish 6<sup>th</sup>. He has been at 215# much of the year, but dropped to 189# at Marion Harding, losing by a point to Alexander in the finals. He exits a most difficult district. State qualifier Akam returns, but was injured at Medina and has not wrestled recently. He won at the WIT early in the year. Wetherell also went to States and is 23-3 this year after winning at Sheridan and Barnesville. Reeder has missed much of the early going, but has returned at this class. Weininger, Busick, and Abbuhl also have possibilities, but the one to watch is Brankamp. He lost one of those 30-second tie-breakers in his go-to-state bout last year, but I think he could be a critical factor now. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Brecksville pinning Wetherell in the process. However, he was a disappointing 4<sup>th</sup> at the CIT, losing to Bailey and Kiss-Benke.

Weakley's major threat at Firestone is the powerful and experienced Milt Hershberger. After a fine season last year, though, he did not get out of his sectional. Amazing. This year he was again 2<sup>nd</sup> at North Canton (as he was last year), finished ahead of Fisher and Weininger, and losing only to lammarino, 3-2. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun, losing to Weakley, 8-5. Bailey is a bit of an unknown. Sometimes he is very good, winning the CIT, and sometimes not quite as solid. If he has a hot weekend he could be a finalist. Remember he went 12-8 with Honeycutt in a losing cause. Hersman, 1<sup>st</sup> at Perry and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Riverside and Kenston, should be the fourth qualifier. He was a district semi-finalist last year before losing to Weakley and Knopick. Ayers and Kearney are other possibilities.

There is very little at Goshen. The only returning state qualifier is Hamilton who has been solid all year. He was 7<sup>th</sup> at Medina losing only to Honeycutt and lammarino. After him, I've got Fyffe and Marshall next with Place just behind them. Fenner has district experience, but I know nothing about Oliver except his gaudy 25-0 record. Watch out for Logan White as the Graham brain trust push him hard to qualify.

**215#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: JAMIE SROCK (AKRON ST. VINCENT)**

Top Contenders

2	Clum (Galion)	15	Twarek (Aurora)
3	Kampfer (Carrollton)	16	Rowan (Harvey)
4	Houska (Medina Highland)	17	Williams (New Richmond)
5	Pummill (Valley View)	18	Akin (Triway)
6	Snyder (Hillsboro)	19	Gidcumb (John Glenn)
7	Oddo (CVCA)	20	Gray (Claymont)
8	McCluggage (West Holmes)	21	Ford (Circleville)
9	Weisenberger (Urbana)	22	Klein (Licking Valley)
10	Scherf (Oak Harbor)	23	Pickererel (Toledo Central Catholic)
11	Schecter (Olmsted Falls)	24	Bickham (Hebron Lakewood)
12	Foster (Hamilton Ross)	25	Weidle (Goshen)
13	Miller (Springfield Shawnee)	26	Whitehead (Columbus DeSales)
14	Sanchez (Napoleon)		

It looks more and more like this will be a two man competition. There is not a lot of depth at this class and little previous state experience. In fact I can find only one 215-pounder who has won a state bout in the championship rounds and that is who I'm going to pick. Srock was 5<sup>th</sup> in Division I at 189# as a sophomore after losing in the semi-finals and then was 2<sup>nd</sup> to John Weakley last year at that same class. Weakley, if memory serves, inflicted three of Srock's six losses. This year Srock was a semi-finalist at the Ironman before being pinned by Platt (who got Division I pick Powell the next week) and then tore through a weak Brecksville field with four falls.

His big challenge will be the enigmatic Clum, who, when he is in top form, can be sensational. Last year Clum had a district 4<sup>th</sup> and a state 6<sup>th</sup> in what was a senior-dominated weight class. So far this year he has been exceptional. At North Canton he beat Division I place winner (and, an exceptional talent) Tyler Rasho 11-4, and then crushed the field at the Gorman. I think Srock's strength, consistency and big match experience gives him the edge here, but it's a narrow one. If Clum has a hot weekend those first two places may well be switched.

Srock shouldn't have much trouble at Firestone. Oddo was the state alternate last year, losing by a point in his go-to-state bout. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun and North Canton, losing to Powell, Clum, and McCluggage, but did not place at Medina as he caught two future stars (Rasho and Houska) in an unlucky draw. Rowan and Twarek have district experience and have cobbled together successful seasons. Akin has beaten McCluggage to win at the WIT, but then failed to place at North Canton.

Clum has a stiffer test at Ontario. Houska is a star in the making. He was one bout from qualification as a freshman at 189# last year, and continues to improve. He won at Mansfield, Madison, and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina, losing to Schecter, then finishing above

him. He was also 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Gorman, losing a one-pointer to Hershey. He may not win it this year, but the next two should be within his reach. Schecter also missed qualification by one bout, but he has seemed a little inconsistent to me. Expect him to peak at tourney time. I like Scherf for the fourth spot. He was undefeated at the Ohio Duals, beating McCluggage and defeating a tough Metzger to win at Perrysburg to go along with Oak Harbor. Sanchez cannot be forgotten. He decisioned Schecter earlier in the year and has great upset potential. Pickerel is the other possibility, winning at Rogers and placing 5<sup>th</sup> at the CIT.

McCluggage is the only returning state qualifier out of Stebenville, but Kampfer has gone by him. They ended up 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Top Gun with Kampfer decisively winning their individual match-up. McCluggage has wrestled a busy schedule highlighted by a runner-up finish at the WIT. I haven't seen much about Gidcumb this year, but he was one point from States as a sophomore. Klein, Bickham, and Whitehead seem to be the best in the Columbus area, but only won a single district bout between them.

There is some solid competition at Goshen. Pummill was a state alternate last year, but has really been good to this point. He beat Snyder to win at Lebanon, Bellbrook and the GMVWA – the last one in overtime. They must be getting tired of seeing each other. Snyder was a state qualifier last year and missed placement when he lost one of those 30-second overtimes. They're the two best with Weisenberger, a state qualifier at 189#, right behind them. That fourth spot should be interesting. I have Foster as a slight favorite with Miller, Weidle, Williams, and Ford right there, too.

### 285#

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: NATHAN SHARP (WEST BRANCH)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Hiles (Columbus DeSales)	15	Duraine (Ashtabula Edgewood)
3	Walker (Alliance)	16	Ison (Batavia)
4	Walls (Graham)	17	Giltz (Goshen)
5	Nicolozakes (Cambridge)	18	Hawkins (West Holmes)
6	Diagosta (East Liverpool)	19	Hammons (Clyde)
7	Ishmael (Oak Harbor)	20	Meyer (Jefferson)
8	VanVoorhis (Elida)	21	Burwell (BigWalnut)
9	Taylor (Indian Lake)	22	Cameron (Watkins Memorial)
10	Wolf (Greenon)	23	Britt (Clear Fork)
11	Sims (Holy Name)	24	Willeford (Meigs)
12	Betz (Marlington)	25	Burt (Vinton County)
13	Fralely (Lexington)	26	Slapnicker (West Geauga)
14	Robiskie (Chagrin Falls)	27	Stallworth (Finneytown)

You would think that by his senior year a heavyweight who was a state runner-up as a sophomore and a state champion the next year would be an overwhelming favorite.

That is especially true when you remember that Nathan Sharp took the title by avenging his 2005 loss to Matt Guhn with a 5-4 win over that same nationally ranked wrestler. And yet, ironically, Sharp could again enter the tournaments as an underdog. I think there are three reasons for this. First, there is a solid trio of challengers any of whom could win. Second, while Sharp beat Guhn in the finals. He was hardly a dominant force in the first three rounds. Two of those bouts went to the 30-second tie-breaker where Sharp narrowly prevailed each time. Finally, questions persist that Sharp will be as sharp (no pun intended) and prepared now that Lamancusa, also a champion, is no longer there to motivate. Still, Sharp has put together an undefeated season that includes a narrow win over Walker and a fall over Walls.

Three of the principal threats will emerge from the Steubenville District. Hiles, still only a junior, was 3<sup>rd</sup> last year and won the NHSCA in April. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Brecksville, losing in overtime to Hartshorn, but defeating Nicolozakes, also in extra time. He will be the dominant heavyweight in Ohio next year, but he'll have to be healthy and efficient this time around. Nicolozakes beat Hiles at the district level last year, but ended up 5<sup>th</sup> at the state meet. A powerful "grinder" he took Sharp into the 30-second tie-breaker in last year's state semi-finals. The winner at the Steubenville District in their rubber match is likely to be away from Sharp, a significant advantage. Also at that district is the undefeated Diagosta, who has already won four tournaments. Last year he lost to Hiles by three in the district semi-finals and then dropped his go-to-state bout in the 30 second overtime as eventual state placer Ralph Petrella rode him out. The last qualifying spot is wide-open with MIT placer Cameron, WIT champ Hawkins, and Burwell possible contenders.

It's not clear-cut for Sharp even at Firestone. Walker was a state semi-finalist at 215# as a sophomore two years ago, finishing 5<sup>th</sup>, but last year caught eventual champ Rodriguez in the first round and failed to place. Walker is not a small heavyweight, probably like Hiles in the 250 pound range, but will give up 30+ pounds to Sharp, Nicolozakes, and Diagosta. He'll need to be in better shape, show more speed and athleticism, and use good mat management to win it all. He lost to Sharp by just 3-2 so it could happen. Except Sharp, the Firestone District was very weak last year. It will be stronger this year. Backing up Sharp and Walker will be Duraine – one bout from state last year, and Betz, who won two district bouts. Duraine has just returned to the mats, while Betz was 3<sup>rd</sup> at North Canton. A long shot here might be Robiskie who has made some solid strides in the last twelve months.

After a bevy of great heavyweights the last few years, the Ontario District is not as strong. The person to watch is Ishmael, son of the former state champion. A transfer from North Baltimore, he has been outstanding winning at Oak Harbor and finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at Perrysburg and Medina. His bouts don't last long – it's either pin or be pinned – and he has to lead the state in first period falls. At Medina he lifted the giant Jeremiah completely off the ground, but then failed to complete the move and eventually lost. His upper body stuff is great. I don't know what to think about state qualifier Van Voorhis. I've seen him ranked in various local papers, but I haven't seen a single score. I've rated him on last year's efforts where a semi-final loss in overtime kept him from

Columbus. Sims and Fraley both have past district experience, but have yet to make that final leap to the top of the podium. Sims was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Wadsworth, but failed to place at the CIT while Fraley was 5<sup>th</sup> at the Gorman. I've had glowing reports on Hammons, but his record does not quite equal that praise to this point. Other possibilities, then, are Britt and Brooks.

When I first saw Walls last year I thought to myself that this boy would not be a factor until he was a junior at the earliest. He completely fooled me. He lost in the first round of districts, but then won four consolation bouts and qualified for Columbus with 18 losses. He lost to defending champ Guhn and then won three consolation bouts to get 6<sup>th</sup>. His 21 losses were the most by any placer, but should be a badge of honor for perseverance. This year he was a semi-finalist at the Ironman before being pinned by Kuhar and finishing 4<sup>th</sup>. He beat Kuhar the next week in a dual and won the GMVWA, beating Taylor 9-5. He was a strong 4<sup>th</sup> at the Top Gun, and he may well better his placement of last year. He has been truly amazing. State qualifier Taylor returns and should place this time around. State alternate Davis (Circleville) won the first week at Circleville, but I have not seen results for him since then. He may be through for the season. Walls beat him 2-1 in their go-to-state bout. Giltz is also a strong contender after missing some early season contests he has gone 12-1. The one to watch though is Wolf. He was 5<sup>th</sup> at Medina and I found him very impressive. I think he is even with Davis for third-best here if Davis, indeed, was wrestling.

## TEAMS

1. Graham This will be their seventh consecutive title and ninth overall pushing them past Walsh Jesuit and putting them third on the all-time list behind St. Edward and Maple Hts. This may be their best team yet with seven possible finalists and a host of other superior performers. The Division II team scoring record, which they hold, is 193.5 points by the 2003 squad. I judge them capable of beating that mark and surpassing 200 points—becoming the third school to surmount that barrier. In a stretch scenario they might even flirt with the 210-point record set by St. Edward last year. What's scary is that they graduate only three starters and should be better next year.
2. Oak Harbor The junior trio of Magrum, Tank and Witt need to score big if they are to win a team trophy—their first since 1981. All three could be finalists. Now that they are at the right weight classes and getting healthy they need to cash in on the fact that they have more scoring possibilities than the other four teams looking to capture second place. That means Scherf, Baker, Sigurdson, and Stone need to step up. The real key might be Ishmael who not only wins, but gets falls for extra scoring.
3. Eastwood It's a tough thing to say about a team that won the runner-up trophy and scored over 100 points, but Eastwood did not wrestle up to their potential at last year's state meet. This year they'll be in a five-way dogfight for 2<sup>nd</sup> place and will need to show more efficiency that they demonstrated last year. Cubberly, Foster, and Ulinski could all be finalists, but they need Flores and Taylor, both experienced state wrestlers, to chip in.
4. Columbus DeSales I make this ranking with some trepidation. They need to bounce back from a very unfortunate tournament result last year. Victims of a first-round meltdown, this team that has been in the Top Five since Bob Dieli was a boy failed to make the Top Ten. Look for them to bounce back with a vengeance. Hiles and McGovern could be finalists and there is a whole array of possible placers—Fisher, Croasmun, Vaughn, Canty, and Brankamp. This time their superior depth needs to come into the foreground.

5. Ravenna A team built around a quintet of state-ready wrestlers. Reedy and Phil Dukes are powerful point scorers and the younger Dukes is suddenly becoming a force to reckon with. Add in Meyer and Kramer and a Top Five or better result could come true.
6. CVCA It all happens after 140# for this squad. Defending state champion Weakley and Kusar are finalist material again this year with Oddo and Sinchok as possible helpers. The key is for Windom to get on a roll after a somewhat pedestrian regular season, and have Hojnacki or Sommers help out.
7. University The youngsters—Mills, Inghram and Mills—along with old hand, Erdman should get close to the 60 point level. That puts you comfortably into the Top Ten and may give you a Top Five shot. The problem is that there are no other sources of state points available.
8. West Holmes The crown jewel of this team is, of course Sponseller, but Collett and Hoover can score at this level as well. They need state qualifiers Akam and McCluggage to provide personal bests that could propel them to Top Five finish.
9. Akron St. Vincent This looks to be a two-man team with all its scoring coming from Srock and Dean. Still they could put up 45+ points on the board, just enough to be a Top Ten team
10. Walsh Jesuit A mystery team with new wrestlers popping up every week. Skonieczny is easily the best of this crew, but Knotek could be a huge surprise. Bailey and Cheathem are inconsistent, but on a hot weekend could do real damage while Spence, Sciortino and Montoney might create a miracle. The real key