

### **Division III**

In the past few years there has been little competition or drama surrounding the team titles in Division I and II. Only in Division III have we had some exciting battles, and one of the best was last year when Troy Christian and Marion Pleasant battled down to the wire. On the surface it seems difficult to understand how Pleasant didn't win. They had, for example, 12 state qualifiers to 8 for Troy Christian. They placed 9 while Troy Christian had 8. While Troy Christian had 5 finalists to 3 for Pleasant, both placed 5 in the top 3. Pleasant won 34 state bouts, including 23 in the championship round while Troy Christian won 27 with 21 in the championship round and, in fact, Pleasant scored 6 more advancement and placement points than Troy Christian. The critical difference was bonus points. This is what won the tournament for Troy Christian. They scored 29.0 bonus points (11 falls/defaults, 2 technical falls, and four majors) compared to 20.5 points for Pleasant (4 falls/defaults, 5 technical falls, and five majors). That 8.5 point differential erased the six extra advancement and placement points and created the 2.5 point margin of victory. The unheralded Cody Libengood, who finished 6<sup>th</sup>, scored 5.5 bonus points, the same number as both of Marion Pleasant's state champs combined. In a way he was the unexpected hero of this drama.

### **103 #**

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

#### **Top Contenders**

2	Hancock (Troy Christian)	16	Powers (CVCA)
3	Yeary/Harrison (Reading)	17	Fusco (Hartley)
4	Strine (Hillsdale)	18	Klinger (Cuyahoga Hts.)
5	Tschantz (Chanel)	19	Ankrom (Bloom Carroll)
6	Pierce (North Union)	20	Harrington (Sandusky St. Mary)
7	Aranjo (Delta)	21	Thompson (Brookfield)
8	Triskett (VASJ)	22	Hall (Preble Shawnee)
9	Elchert (Arcadia)	23	Hamilton (Waynedale).
10	Spreng (Loudonville)	24	Deaton (Blanchester)
11	Adams (Madison Plains)	25	Kapper (Manchester)
12	Barlow (Heath)	26	Pizzuto (Jackson Milton)
13	Glosser (Otsego)	27	Dronzek (Beachwood)
14	Ferguson (Montpelier)	28	A. Merschman (Delphos St. John)
15	Reed (Waterford)	29	Johnston (Bluffton)
		30	Arthur (Greeneview)

The biggest story in Ohio wrestling this year has been the emergence of the Monroeville Four, three freshmen and a sophomore possessing incredible talent. At the Ironman they captured three individual titles – matching the combined total of Graham, Blair, and St. Edward. At the powerful Brecksville Holiday Tournament they won four titles and only one other team won more than one. The igniter is Hunter Stieber the second of two brothers and, quite possibly, the best 103 pounder in the country. Last year his

brother, Logan, took this title with three first period falls and a 20-5 technical fall in the finals. Hunter, a two time junior high state champion and Cadet National titleholder, should have little more trouble. Undefeated, he has beaten my Division I and II selections, and he faces very few problems in Division III. Curiously, brother following brother at the same weight class in consecutive years was last done in 2002-03, also in Division III, by Jordan and Kevin Lipp at 112#. The last time it happened in Division I, if you accept the official results, was in 1978-1979 when the twins Randy and Ray Jenkins won consecutive titles also at 112#.

As mentioned, I'm struggling big time to come up with reasonable challengers for Stieber. The Owens District returns two state qualifiers, but there are questions. Aranjo, a senior, was the district runner-up last year, but has wrestled only once this year for a variety of reasons. If he shows up at sectionals healthy and bout-ready, he is a state placer, but I'm not sure that's a high probability event. Elchert had an interesting district. His three wins nailed down 4<sup>th</sup> place and a state berth, but his two losses were by a combined 30-1 margin – and both his state bouts ended in falls. This year he has been a steady placer, including a win at Arcadia. He should make it to Columbus again, but placement will be difficult. Ferguson has a 1<sup>st</sup> at Stryker and a 2<sup>nd</sup> at Richmond Hts. in the D-3 Classic. He could well be second best here if Aranjo, who notched a second period pin against him in last year's sectional, does not compete. Glosser was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Hudson defeating the excellent Kazimir in the process, and then was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Tiffin. On a hot weekend he would qualify. With so much uncertainty, people like Harrington, Stacy (Liberty Center), and Reid (Hicksville) have a real opportunity. I particularly like Harrington's chances.

The best and deepest district is at Maple Hts. There are at least eight wrestlers, who could quality out of other districts, competing here. It is a district with five returning district qualifiers and a solid influx of new talent, although no one here can challenge Stieber. Strine grabbed the last state qualifying spot last year and went 1-2 losing to Libengood and Householder. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the WIT and 1<sup>st</sup> at Black River, but does not wrestle a high-powered schedule. His past experience is no guarantee of a return trip. Graham Coghill is a great coach of low weight wrestlers (and everyone else, too) and he always has outstanding lightweights. He lost Dakota Hayes (4<sup>th</sup> last year) who went back to Ravenna, but the young Tschantz is really improving. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Solon and 5<sup>th</sup> at Mayfield (in a strong field) and should qualify. Right with this duo are two wrestlers who competed at 112# last year – both of whom, in fact, were district qualifiers. Triskett won two district bouts last year and now at 103# won at both Hawken and the D-3 Classic. Klinger was champ at Woodridge and has posted a 15-3 record. His scores have shown a sharp trend upward and he, clearly, will be a factor. This is a solid quartet, but the sophomore Spreng has the talent to sweep by most of this group. He was a district quarter-finalist last year before having to default out of the consolation round. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Gorman and should challenge everyone here. The wild card here is Powers who has some very good results and some that were less strong. On a hot weekend he could qualify. Another wrestler in that same category is Thompson who won a district bout last year. He's a goer who can score in bunches. Kapper and Hamilton, from the southern part of this district, have possibilities –

especially the first mentioned. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Northwest. Long shots might include the younger Pizzuto and Dronzek, who pinned Klinger. This district will be a dog fight from the very first round with interesting battles on every mat. It reminds me of last year when there were some incredible bouts like Strine losing to Hayes 16-15, but beating Thompson in a crucial consolation bout 23-20. Expect more of the same this year.

There is nowhere near that depth at Heath. While all sixteen district qualifiers at 103# last year were underclassmen, the top eight have all moved up. That leaves a wide-open field this time around. Most of the best 103's are from the Columbus area. I think Pierce might be the strongest of this group as confirmed by his victory at North Union, including a 6-0 win in the finals. Right with him is the junior, Adams, who won 36 bouts last year, including one at the district level. Junior high place winner Barlow has been very good – 1<sup>st</sup> at Whitehall and Licking County and 2<sup>nd</sup> at North Union (to Pierce). Fusco is also a possibility after a 30+ win season last year as is Reichle. Waterford is generally short in numbers, but they so often have a couple of strong contenders (a Kern or Schott or any number of Langs) and this year is no exception. Reed lost two close district bouts last year after a first round fall. If anyone is going to break the Columbus monopoly at this weight class it will likely be him. Knowlton (Bellaire) and Ankrom are other possibilities.

There is an air of mystery at Fairmont. Yeary, a state qualifier last year, was putting together a dominant year at 103# including a 2<sup>nd</sup> at the SWOCA, when suddenly, since the New Year, he has competed only at 112#. I am ranking him here, but also listing his capable backup, Harrison, as a possibility. Right behind him, and showing great improvement, is the sophomore Hancock. He has split a pair of bouts with Brascetta and was 6<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville – losing on a fall to Stieber and narrowly to Hayes. Like Libengood last year, he could be a critical point scorer for Troy Christian. Hall looks to be next best with a win at Franklin and several other high placements. That leaves one open spot which might fall to Arthur who had a slow start, Deaton, or Merschman.

**112 #**

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

*Top Contenders*

2	Reynolds (Pleasant)	16	Glenn (Otsego)
3	Libengood (Troy Christian)	17	Porter (Bellaire)
4	Tinch (Mt. Gilead)	18	Majoy (Edison)
5	Poling (North Union)	19	Hoskins (Greeneview)
6	Yoder (Martins Ferry)	20	Colombo (Independence)
7	Heminger (Northmor)	21	Tolson (Delta)
8	B. Merschman (Delphos St. John)	22	Anthony (Carlisle)
9	Mallos (Cuyahoga Hts.)	23	Bailes (Mogadore)
10	Riedlinger (Arcadia)	24	Jacober (Beachwood)
11	Pizzuto (Jackson Milton)	25	Adams (Hicksville)
12	Branham (West Jefferson)	26	Parker (Mohawk)
13	Lee (Elmwood)	27	Grandstaff (Coldwater)
14	Petersheim (Waynedale)	28	Breisch (Covington)
15	Cattran (Bloom Carroll)	29	Fleetwood (Margaretta)
		30	Fano (Waterloo)

The usual flow of events runs something like this. Each year there is a talented influx of newcomers at 103# who provide exceptional competition. Then the following year most move up to 112# and join some holdovers to create a very difficult weight class. It didn't happen that way this year. In 2007 the 103# class was relatively weak, and, even then, more than usual grew into higher than 112# weight classes. Not only that, most of the 112-pounders also moved up, including I believe, all eight placers. That leaves a weight class where there is real opportunity for glory.

The wrestler most likely to profit from this is the least well known of the Monroeville Four, Cam Tessari. A former junior high state champion and Cadet National place winner, Tessari is well equipped to win a state title at this weight class. Tessari was a semi-final loser at the Ironman, dropping a decision to the inimitable David Taylor. At Brecksville, unseeded, he beat former Division I state champion Steve Mitcheff rather easily in the quarter finals; then shrugged off a 4-point throw by Division I state placer Jerome Robinson to win ten of the next eleven points and win 10-5 in the semi-finals; before shutting out Division II state runner-up James Inghram. It was very impressive. He will be a strong favorite to win at this weight class.

The sternest tests for Tessari are likely to come from the Heath District. Reynolds has spent most of the year (as far as I can tell) at 119#, but I have mixed messages as to whether he will be at 112#. If so, he jumps into the immediate foreground for Tessari. Reynolds lost by a point to Householder in the district finals at 103# and ended up 5<sup>th</sup> with two narrow wins over Libengood. In his second sojourn at 112# at Brecksville he was pinned by Chanel's Kiefer in his first bout and then immediately lost in the consolation round. I chalk that up to a tough weight cut during the holidays. He has

been reasonably successful at 119#, including a North Union title over state qualifiers Shepard and Thomas. He'll need to make a decision, although 112# would seem to be the easier weight class. Tinch has also moved around, wrestling as high as 125# (1<sup>st</sup> at Northridge), but most likely ending up at 112# -- where he finished a solid 2<sup>nd</sup> at Marion Harding. He was 7<sup>th</sup> last year at 103# and could move up a few notches this time. Poling was also a state qualifier at 112#, and was a quarter-final loser to Harbart. He does not wrestle an overly tough schedule, but won a big title at North Union. A senior who won 40 bouts last year he, too, has state placement potential. The fourth state berth is wide open. The best bet is Yoder who lost a critical 7-6 bout to Poling in last year's quarterfinals. He won again at Barnesville and heads a relatively weak Eastern District group at this weight class. Right with him is Cattran, who was a bout from state qualification at 103# last year. He already has 20 wins and a title at Union Local. Other possibilities are Porter and Barker (Barnesville), but the dark horses here are a pair of freshmen. Heminger was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Marion Harding and 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Gorman, including a 25-12 win over Gould. Branham beat Cattran, 4-1, and can go with the top boys. After this district the qualifiers will be too tired to beat Tessari.

The Maple Hts. District, as it now stands, is uncharacteristically weak. Kiefer, the powerhouse 112# from Chanel, who pinned Reynolds while reaching the semi-finals at Brecksville, is out for the year. He looked to be the best at this district. As it now stands, unless some of the 119's move down (and I have seen no sign of that) this will be a district that will be challenging for lower to middle places at Columbus. Mallos is the kind of wrestler you like to watch. He is aggressive, likes to score, and maintains constant motion. He qualified for States at 103# last year, but lost twice 17-13 and 8-5. He should do better this year. Right with him is Pizzuto, 3<sup>rd</sup> at Solon and 1<sup>st</sup> at Jackson Milton, whose overtime loss to Kovach probably cost him a state berth last year. I liked what I saw of Petersheim at the D-3 Classic as he won the title allowing virtually no offensive points against him the entire tourney. At the state duals Libengood beat him by a single point, 4-3. Bailes and Colombo were both district semi-finalists who ended up wrestling each other for 5<sup>th</sup> place. Bailes was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Northwest and 1<sup>st</sup> at Manchester. State junior high placer Jacober and, maybe, Fano are possibilities.

Tessari should have very few problems at the Owens District. State alternate Glenn is a district possibility to get a state berth, as is the experienced senior Riedlinger. If the younger Lee is healthy he could well finish ahead of either of them. He beat Riedlinger earlier in the year at Arcadia. Factor in Majoy and, maybe, Fleetwood or Parker, and the competition for the last three berths sounds a little more exciting. Tolson has had some big wins and might be a factor here, as well as Adams.

Libengood would appear to dominate at Fairmont. He was 6<sup>th</sup> last year at Columbus and was a pivotal figure in Troy Christian's run to a state title. He wrestles a very difficult schedule compared to most of his opponents at this district. Last year he entered sectional wrestling with a 9-9 record and yet never had to wrestle six minutes in winning this district at 103#. It will be much the same this year with his real tests beginning at the state level. His advantage is that he'll be entering the state bracket as a district champ. Also here is state placer Merschman who finished 8<sup>th</sup> last year. A

fourth place district qualifier (badly beaten by Libengood and Yeary) he won two state consolation bouts. His 15-13 overtime win was a classic. This year he has been at 119#, but the move down should get him to Columbus. I think Hoskins might be third best based on a 7-2 win over Anthony at the GMVWA. Both these boys have district experience. Hoskins also beat Breisch in overtime and he, too, has district experience after going 2-2 last year. This quintet will be challenged by Grandstaff and, possibly, Yeary if he stays at 112#. Also look for Leuthold (Badin) to pull an upset.

### 119 #

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

##### Top Contenders

2	Householder (West Jefferson)	14	Stasa (Evergreen)
3	Hall (Tuslaw)	15	Goldberg (Miami East)
4	Harbert (Garrettsville Garfield)	16	Rayfield (Delta)
5	Kovach (Chanel)	17	Sommers (CVCA)
6	Shepard (Sparta Highland)	18	Border (Caldwell)
7	Lopez (Patrick Henry)	19	Traver (Genoa)
8	Thomas (Bloom Carroll)	20	Faykus (Bellaire)
9	Wooten (West Liberty Salem)	21	Panno (Blanchester)
10	Dennis (Lutheran West)	22	Gase (Calvert)
11	Graves (Paint Valley)	23	Brown (Manchester)
12	J. Carpenter (Madeira)	24	Duhigg (VASJ)
13	Begg (Bluffton)	25	Walter (Carey)
		26	Herron (Covington)

Should I be correct and the three Monroeville lightweights win as anticipated, it will be a most extraordinary accomplishment. No team in Division III or in Division II has ever swept the first three weight classes at a state meet. It's reasonably rare for wrestlers from the same school to win the first two weight classes. As for the first three in a row – it's happened only twice in back-to-back years, and it goes back even further than the last time my beloved Indians won a World Series. In both 1946 and 1947 Bill Buckingham, John Matteucci and either Joe DiBello (1947) or Jack Saunders (1946) swept the first three weight classes.

The heaviest favorite of this trio will be Logan Stieber, but he could have the toughest competition. Stieber, ranked first in the nation, is a two-time Cadet National Champ and a defending state champion. He is tremendous in all three positions. Often the great Ohio high school wrestlers have been takedown machines with limited mat skills. What is impressive with the Monroeville wrestlers is their great riding ability. Watching them, for example, at Brecksville you had to marvel at their great technique and tenacity on top. Stieber has lost only once in his high school career (to the remarkable Taylor) and that number will not increase this year.

The biggest question about this weight class is who will show up here at sectional time. There are three possibilities of real note, but their intentions are still not totally clear. Opfer gave Stieber a good bout at Brecksville, losing 4-2, but I never thought he had winning chances. I see him at 125#. State champion Sergent is another question mark. Supposedly committed to 119# he has wrestled at 125# since Brecksville. I again will rate him at that class. Finally, Householder has been at 119# or 125#. I see him staying at 119# knowing that, under my assumed conditions, he would be seeded away from Stieber, but with Hall.

I would like to have seen a Householder/Stieber bout last year, but Hayes dumped Householder in overtime. Interestingly when they wrestled for 3<sup>rd</sup>, Householder won 12-0. He has now been 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, and this time he should meet Stieber in the finals. He has had few problems at 125# or 119# this year (he's 21-0), but it will not be a cakewalk to the finals. I see at least three boys who could challenge him. Next best at his district are a quartet of state qualifiers and a returning state alternate. It makes this easily the toughest district. Interestingly the four other returning qualifiers went 1-8 at Columbus last year. Graves was not only the first Paint Valley wrestler to qualify for state action, he was the first one I had ever heard of. He beat Shepard twice at districts to finish 3<sup>rd</sup>, but then lost twice on Thursday at Columbus. This year he has remained at 119# and recently won easily at London. Shepard and Thomas also lost twice after finishing 4<sup>th</sup> out of their district weight classes. They both have low state placement potential, but they'll need to escape this district first. I rate Shepard a little higher because of his point scoring ability. I think Border has the best opportunity to upset this top quartet. He lost a 6-5 go-to-state bout to Tinch last year, but has rebounded with wins at Shadyside and Barnesville. Faykus, the only one of that quartet of state qualifiers to win a bout in Columbus, has struggled at 119# and will need to "step it up" to return there. It's a great district and it's possible that Reynolds – always a tough bout for Householder – may join this group.

State runner-up Hall returns at this weight class and we could have a repeat of the 103# state final from last year. Hall got a great pairing in Columbus being away from both Stieber and Householder and he took full advantage. Narrow wins over Tinch and Reynolds propelled him into the finals where Stieber defeated him. Very solid (like his brother) he has had few problems this year, winning most recently at Northwest. He'll be joined at Maple Hts. by three other state qualifiers. Harbert looked great at last year's district, beating the other three qualifiers, Marmaros, Kovach, and Dennis. A semi-finalist in Columbus, he lost in that round to Opfer and finished a solid 4<sup>th</sup>. Now a junior, he was only 6<sup>th</sup> at Wadsworth – a surprising result. Dennis, a two-time state qualifier, placed 7<sup>th</sup> two years ago, but after a great first round win over Lopez, lost twice and did not place. He has been a steady placer at 119# and 125# all year. The biggest improvement, though, has been made by Kovach. He caught Opfer in the first round of States and it was two and out. This year he won at the Mayfield Big 8 and was 4<sup>th</sup> at Solon in a strong field, and 6<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville (which featured Steiber, Opfer, Sergent, and Papesch). At the state duals he pinned all three wrestlers including Reynolds and Panno. Hall will have trouble beating him. Right with this quartet is the rapidly improving Sommers. He could beat any of this top quartet, and I think Dennis could be

vulnerable. Brown is certainly a solid possibility, if something happens to one of the top quartet while Duhigg, injured all year, should return.

At Owens, Lopez will be Stieber's chief rival. Last year he won his first 41 bouts before losing to Opfer in the semi-finals and finishing 3<sup>rd</sup>. He ended up 7<sup>th</sup> at States and was one of the more impressive freshmen there. This year he has been equally impressive winning most bouts with overpowering ease – for example, a 17-4 final win at the "A" Classic. State qualifiers Rayfield and Traver are also back, but they are a step below this top duo. However, Rayfield was 7<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA against a strong field. Who I think may have surpassed them is the senior, Matt Stasa. A district semi-finalist last year, he got pinned by two-time state champ Harrington and couldn't come back in the consolation round. He won at Sylvania Southview besting a good field. Add in Walter and Gase and it is a very representative field.

I sense a certain disarray at Fairmont. It is difficult to decide who the real frontrunners are. There are three returning state qualifiers, but by year's end the flashy freshman from Madeira might be best. Let's start with the returnees. Wooten was a district finalist last year and after a first round loss won two bouts to finish 8<sup>th</sup>. Goldberg qualified at 103# and went 1-2 at Columbus including an exciting 17-13 first round triumph. He has had some problems at 119#, but has done better lately (3<sup>rd</sup> at Clyde). Begg was also 1-2 at Columbus with a win over Dandurand. He looked good beating state placer Merschman, 15-5, to win at Allen County. The freshman is Johnny Carpenter, who was 4<sup>th</sup> at junior high states and has had an outstanding first year – winning at Madeira and finishing a solid 4<sup>th</sup> at the always tough SWOCA. That leaves Panno, state alternate Herron and Johnson (Reading) as possible outsiders.

## 125 #

### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: TROY OPFER (SANDUSKY ST. MARY)**

#### Top Contenders

- |    |                               |    |                                   |
|----|-------------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| 2  | Sergent (Troy Christian)      | 16 | Widder (Waynedale)                |
| 3  | Pope (Pleasant)               | 17 | Orrill (Chanel)                   |
| 4  | D. Carpenter (Madeira)        | 18 | Callahan (Carlisle)               |
| 5  | Clark (Reading)               | 19 | Kuzma/Dandurand (Hopewell Loudon) |
| 6  | Carnahan (Paulding)           | 20 | Donahue (Tuslaw)                  |
| 7  | Mascioli (Jackson Milton)     | 21 | Johnson (Monroeville)             |
| 8  | Morris (CVCA)                 | 22 | Cardiero (Girard)                 |
| 9  | Carrisalez (Delta)            | 23 | McSwords (Martins Ferry)          |
| 10 | Coulter (Cardington Lincoln)  | 24 | Shellhouse (Mohawk)               |
| 11 | Biddle (Liberty Center)       | 25 | Smith (Bloom Carroll)             |
| 12 | Ziegler (Mechanicsburg)       | 26 | Timmerman (Coldwater)             |
| 13 | Foster (Bellaire St. John)    | 27 | Fisher (Allen East)               |
| 14 | M. Gualtieri (West Jefferson) | 28 | Hook (Nelsonville York)           |
| 15 | Oney (South Central)          | 29 | Hernandez (Elmwood)               |
|    |                               | 30 | Burge (Norwayne)                  |

There should be a great four-way battle for this state title as a quartet of outstanding seniors converges at this weight class. This will be a remarkable shootout with complicated seeding issues. Sergent should be away from Opfer and Pope, with Carpenter (should he fail to beat Sergent at the district) also in that same half making for a very unbalanced bracket. Let's look at the contenders.

This is the last year we'll be seeing an Opfer brother and what a run it has been. At the moment the four of them wrestled 15 seasons and placed at States every time. At the moment that includes eight titles, two runner-up medals, three thirds, and two fifth place results. In terms of consistency (15 of 15) it cannot be surpassed. Troy, the last brother, has finished 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 2<sup>nd</sup> the past three years and this is his last chance for a title. He has lost extremely close final round bouts each of the last two years. He has beaten Sergent three of their four meetings, but Sergent won the one that really counted. He'll be a relatively small 125#, but that shouldn't count for much.

Like Opfer, Sergent has placed each year (4<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>) and is amazingly quick. A Junior National title holder, he knows just how and when to win. He has twice lost to Pope – giving up an early big move and then unable to catch up, but beat him at the state meet two years ago. As I mentioned last year, I think he is more conservative than he should be since he is lightning quick and has an arsenal of great moves. He'll also be a relatively small 125-pounder.

Pope has been 7<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> in his career. Opfer and Sergent have each, at some time, knocked him out of the championship bracket. He was 5-1 at States last year and all five of his victories were dominating. He'll have to beat Opfer and Sergent to win it all, and that is not out of the question. He has already beaten Sergent twice.

Carpenter has been 7<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> – both times at difficult weight classes. In 2005 he lost to Opfer and Toal, while last year Hancock handled him. He will be the biggest of the quartet, but also the one needing the biggest upsets to win. He exits with Sergent so that may give him two shots at him.

I think this will end up as yet another Opfer against Sergent battle. At Brecksville Opfer got an early lead on a scramble that could have gone either way. Opfer is the better rider and he was able to use the clock to maintain the lead for a time. Down by one with under a minute to go Sergent pushed it up a couple of notches and launched a whirlwind attack. Opfer was able to hold him off only with brilliant defense. If Sergent could wrestle six full minutes that way he would win, but I don't think that will happen and Opfer finally wins the big one.

Sergent and Carpenter do not exhaust the possibilities at Fairmont. Clark has been 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> the last two years, and at many weight classes that would make you a prime candidate to win it all. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Madeira, losing to Carpenter, 13-8, and 1<sup>st</sup> at Reading at 130#. A returning district champ, his choice is Sergent and Carpenter here or Kolodzik and Hancock at 130#. State qualifier Ziegler should gain the fourth berth.

He went 1-2 at Columbus after losing by major decision to Pope in the first round. This is a very good quartet, but a second foursome could cause some issues. Timmerman was a district semi-finalist at this weight class last year before getting TF'ed by Carpenter and losing to Schweikart. Callahan is down two weight classes after being a district semi-finalist at 135# last year – then losing to state champion Thome and Eavers. He is the best choice to upset one of the top quartet. The other two in this group are Fisher (currently 19-2) and Borton (Clinton Massie).

The district at Owens is crowded, but no one here can truly challenge Opfer. At the moment I count six other state qualifiers at this class, some here, perhaps to avoid Stieber. With 130# somewhat weaker at this district do not be surprised to see some movement – perhaps one or two moving up, and now that 119# seems somewhat empty, a couple moving back down. I'm thinking maybe Karnes or Bodenbender will move up – and that is where I'll rank them. Let's talk about who is left to challenge Opfer. The top two are probably Carnahan and Carrisalez – both of whom were at this weight class last year. At that time Carnahan won their semi-final meeting, 5-4, and took the district title, while Carrisalez was 3<sup>rd</sup>. The vagaries of the bracket at Columbus had these two wrestle off to place with Carnahan winning and taking 6<sup>th</sup>. Both have been good this year with Carrisalez 2<sup>nd</sup> at Perrysburg and 4<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA, while Carnahan just keeps winning. State qualifier Oney and Johnson are also here with solid chances. Oney, only a freshman last year, was a district finalist beating, among others, state placer Karnes 8-2. However, at Columbus Oney went 1-2 while Karnes got a 6<sup>th</sup>. Johnson looks to be a small 125-pounder and has followed his teammates to the Ironman and Brecksville. He is battle-hardened. There is an interesting situation at Hopewell-Loudon. State qualifier Dandurand has been out most of the year and Kuzma has filled in brilliantly going 19-4. Somebody will have to move if Dandurand returns. State qualifier Biddle is also here and he missed a second qualification last year by losing to Pezzin twice. Add in Shellhouse, Hernandez and Cavinder (Riverdale) and this is a very crowded district.

Pope has looked great this year and many think he wins the state title no matter who is there. He could have placement company with the young Gualtieri (Marco) and Coulter. Coulter has been particularly impressive winning, for example, at the Gorman pinning Farkas in the semis and beating Division II state qualifier DeVito 9-3 in the finals. Foster is 15-1 and is probably the best out of the Eastern District with a win at St. Johns and Shadyside and a 3<sup>rd</sup> at Barnesville. Other possibilities are Smith, Hook and Boyd (Caldwell) – all of whom are needing at least one solid upset to quality.

The Maple Hts. District is by far the weakest. Certainly the wrestler with the most credentials is clearly Mascioli – already a two time state qualifier. He is a master of knowing when to win. Last year he lost his sectional final 12-0, but then pulled out a district 3<sup>rd</sup> after losing in the semis. At Columbus he won his first two bouts before losing to two-time champ Harrington and nailing down a 5<sup>th</sup>. He'll need his entire arsenal of tools to better that this year. Morris, something of an enigma, might be best here. He did not place at North Canton despite losing to Mattingly by only 6-5 in the quarters. He was 5<sup>th</sup> at the MIT and has had some excellent dual meet wins. At the top

of his game he is the best here. Widder, champ at the D-3 Classic, might be next best with the excellent freshman Orrill right behind (Widder won at their dual 9-5). Orrill was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Mayfield Big 8 and was a place winner at Junior High States last year. I also like Cardiero who won at Jackson Milton and was a district qualifier in Division II last year. I'm thinking, maybe, a Donahue is the big upset threat with Burge and Dankle (Cuyahoga Hts.) still in the picture.

### 130 #

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: DANIEL KOLODZIK (MIAMI VALLEY)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Hancock (Troy Christian)	17	DeHart (Covington)
3	V. Gualtieri (West Jefferson)	18	Essenmacher (New London)
4	Coomes (Pleasant)	19	Deady (Triad)
5	Karnes (Edgerton)	20	Holt (Martins Ferry)
6	Marmaros (Beachwood)	21	Curcio (Toledo Christian)
7	Canter (Bellaire)	22	Everhart (Mt. Gilead)
8	Clark (Union Local)	23	Foos (Otsego)
9	Miller (Brookfield)	24	Bodenbender (Tinora)
10	Powers (CVCA)	25	Freiberg (Cardinal)
11	Neer (Northmor)	26	Beekman (Margaretta)
12	Almanza (Patrick Henry)	27	Klaus (Mechanicsburg)
13	Vitallo (Waynedale)	28	Collier (Chanel)
14	Thoreson (Berkshire)	29	Smith (Delta)
15	Costello (Sandusky St. Mary)	30	Redd (Archbold)
16	Nuzum (Bluffton)	31	Paus (Clinton Massie)

At one time I thought that this weight class might serve as a relatively peaceful interlude between incredibly fierce battles at 125# and 135#. Now that Kolodzik and Gualtieri have moved down to 130# it does not look nearly as calm. Some of the 125's that were hoping for bigger meals and easier brackets may now re-think their options.

Kolodzik has been a marvel. A two-time junior high state champion (defeating Tony Jameson and Brad Squire in his two finals) and a two-time state champion (and a 4<sup>th</sup>), he has been the greatest one-man team in history. At the end of last year I thought he was the best 125-pounder in the state not named Palmer. This year he was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman, losing to Palmer and to the top ranked Johnston (in overtime) and swept through the GMVWA beating two-time champ Gambill in the finals. All this was at 135# in preparation for the state tourney. There are only a couple of wrestlers who can challenge him in Columbus, as he looks to win his third crown.

The second choice here, and a relatively easy one, is the solid junior from Troy Christian, Zac Hancock. Wrestling up a weight as a freshman, he finished 6<sup>th</sup> at 130# and then last year was runner-up to two-time champ Kolozik at 125# after also losing to him in a close district bout. This year at the Ironman he beat D-I state runner-up Sulzer

and lost a narrow 8-7 verdict to Blair's highly rated Anthony Valles. He ended up 6<sup>th</sup> after losing to state runner-up Stephens of Graham. The Brecksville was a washout with injury issues, but at the state duals he pinned Coomes and Vitallo. That was followed by a sensational 7-0 win over Stephens in a rematch. The question is which Hancock will Kolodzik see in the state finals – the one who battled him to a 6-4 decision in the district semi-finals, or the one who lost 11-0 in the state finals. If it's the former case, we could have a real battle on a not so distant Saturday night.

Kolodzik and Hancock tower over the rest of the field at Fairmont. I thought state qualifier Eavers and Callahan might be here, but they have moved to different venues. As it is Deady – a district 6<sup>th</sup> last year – and the undefeated Nuzum might be real tentative choices for the last two spots. One to watch is the freshman DeHart who was a junior high state runner-up last year. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at GMVWA and 1<sup>st</sup> at Lincolnview, and by year's end may surpass all but the top duo here. Klaus and Paus are long-shots with Siefker (Delphos Jefferson) just barely in the picture. Look for the top two to be in the finals and, perhaps, the freshman to win a state bout or two.

The biggest challenge for the top duo is likely to emerge from the Heath District. A trio of possibilities will exit that district with upset potential. Gualtieri knows all about upsets. He upended two-time state champ Gambill at 135# by a convincing 12-7 score. Last year after going 43-5 and winning his sectional Gualtieri did not compete at the district level. One who did was Coomes who raced through the district competition and then, somewhat surprisingly, reached the state semi-finals before being pinned by Kolodzik and falling to 5<sup>th</sup>. This year he won at the Midwest Classic and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at North Union to the onrushing Collins. He struggled at Brecksville (as did Hancock), but was pinned by Hancock at the State Duals. He'll need a late season surge to better that 5<sup>th</sup> place finish. Also here is two-time state placer Clark who has been 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> the past two years. His big hang-up has been winning that first round bout, which he has yet to do. He has won again this year at Barnesville, Shadyside, and Union Local. State alternate Canter also returns looking, this time, to squeeze into one of the top four slots. He missed by one point last year. Clark defeated him 3-1 in his finals win at Shadyside. Also back is the senior Holt who qualified as a freshman and has been prone to injury during the intervening time. As I write this he has won the only three bouts he has wrestled this year. Can he be ready by February? Everhart and, particularly Neer, will be tough to beat. Neer was a district finalist last year, but has missed some time this year. Everhart defeated Neer and has good upset potential. Some good people are going to be left the way it's structured right now. Look for movement either up or down for several of these boys. One of them might be Morgan (Trimble)

While Karnes has been at 125# I wouldn't be surprised to see him (and others) move to this more congenial weight class. Karnes was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the 119# district and then wrestled brilliantly in making the state semi-finals and losing to Hall 12-7. He finished up 6<sup>th</sup>. He'll have to do the same thing to repeat that placement at either 125# or 130#. Almanza and state qualifier Essenmacher met in the "A" Classic finals with the former taking his fourth tournament title. Both boys have solid district placement chances. There are a number of other possible contenders. Curcio and Foos have both been

good with steady placement at tournaments big and small. A dark horse candidate is Beekman (Margaretta), who lost to Almanza, 5-4, and wrestles a tough schedule. I almost forgot Costello who could get to the States on a hot weekend. Other possibilities are Smith, Redd, and Correll (Calvert).

The most intriguing district is at Maple Hts. Thoreson, a state qualifier two years ago, defeated Mascioli twice last year – once by fall and once 12-0 in the sectional finals. Yet, Mascioli was 5<sup>th</sup> in the state while Thoreson failed even to qualify. This year Thoreson was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Solon and 4<sup>th</sup> at Kenston, both times losing critically close semi-final bouts. He beat D'Alessandro in the dual (leading 5-3 at default), but did not look good at the Top Gun. Until he learns to win the close ones he will handcuff his talent. Others have probably passed him. Marmaros is one who knows exactly how to win. Not the greatest athlete in the world he has still been 6<sup>th</sup> the last two years, confounding “experts” like me. Tall and rather gangly he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Solon, defeating Thoreson in the semis. He has wrestled at least once at 125# but this would seem to be the best place to be. There are three state alternates at this weight class – Thoreson, Miller, and Freilberg – and they will be a hungry group at Maple Hts. The one I like the best right now is Miller who was at this class last year, and who has wrestled a succession of strong bouts. Also, keep an eye on Vitallo. He was very good at the D-3 Classic, winning at this weight class. He was 2-2 at this district weight class last year. Also check out the freshman Collier, one of the solid freshmen on the Chanel team. Finally, Powers, 5<sup>th</sup> at North Canton is the wildcard. If he wrestles at full potential he will qualify.

### 135 #

#### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: RYAN GAMBILL (MIAMI EAST)**

##### Top Contenders

2	Thome (Troy Christian)	16	Rayl (Bluffton)
3	Smith (Tuslaw)	17	Noernberg (Cuyahoga Hts.)
4	Malave (Lutheran West)	18	Schweikart (Williamsburg)
5	Eavers (Greeneview)	19	Chapman (Hopewell Loudon)
6	Foster (Bellaire St. John)	20	Fullenkamp (Versailles)
7	Reindel (Stritch)	21	Beckley (Indian Valley)
8	Block (Johnstown Monroe)	22	Kunk (Coldwater)
9	Cooperider (Pleasant)	23	Bemmes (Reading)
10	Weatherholt (Garaway)	24	Rayfield (Delta)
11	Neuenschwander (Dalton)	25	Trusnik (Chanel)
12	Johnson (Otsego)	26	O'Bradovich (Sandy Valley)
13	Smith (Carlisle)	27	Coblentz (Waynedale)
14	Sonnenberg (VanBuren)	28	Espinoza (Millbury Lake)
15	Curcio (Toledo Christian)	29	Rinehart (Plymouth)

This will be the 33<sup>rd</sup> year of Division III competition at the state meet and for much of that time the Southwestern District was seen as the weakest area. Wrestlers from other

areas would hope to draw a southwestern wrestler in the first round. Yes, there were exceptions. For a period of time West Liberty Salem (featuring the Dernlan brothers) was well respected, but most of the time the perception of the weakness prevailed. Contrast that with the events of this year. Troy Christian defending their team title with a squadron of superior wrestlers, two other wrestlers searching for their third state title, and highly respected wrestlers at virtually every weight class.

One of the wrestlers going for his third title is Ryan Gambill, and, yes, his biggest challenge is likely to come from his own district. Gambill has been a real phenomenon. He wrestled brilliantly as a freshman to win at 112# and then was 7<sup>th</sup> at that absolutely brutal 119# weight class as a sophomore (Kolodzik was 4<sup>th</sup>). Last year he was one level above everyone while winning at 130# -- beating Schumaker by 10, D'Allesandro by 14, and Demas by 5. He lost to Kolodzik this year 5-3 at the GMVWA finals and was upset by Gualtieri, but he always seems to lose one or two until state time. He'll go down as one of the greatest D-3 wrestlers ever to have competed in the Southwestern District.

That state title is not assured. The junior, Thome, is very good. He was 6<sup>th</sup> at the 119# class as a freshman and was 4<sup>th</sup> last year after losing an 11-9 overtime heartbreaker to Demas. Many expected that he and Gambill would reprise their sectional and district finals bout in the state finals – bouts Gambill had won 13-6 and 14-8. This year Thome was 8<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Brecksville – beating Mencini and pinning state runner-up Wukie before losing to Skonieczny. He'll get three shots at Gambill, but the third one will be the one that counts.

This duo towers over the Fairmont District. However Eavers, 8<sup>th</sup> at 135# last year, should qualify and will have state placement opportunities. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Elyria Catholic, 5<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA, and a dominating 1<sup>st</sup> at Bellbrook. Also returning are state qualifiers Schweikart and Smith who are definitely “on the bubble” here. I wouldn't be surprised to see one or both move to 130# (Alpha weights approving). Both are solid performers with good credentials, but the margin for error at this weight is very small. There are at least three other contenders. Fullenkamp, the recent winner at Plymouth and 7<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA, is an outstanding freshman who was 5<sup>th</sup> at the junior high states. Rayl won two district bouts last year and has been a terror in the Lima area, losing only once this year. Bemmes won at Madeira and Reading and was a semi-finalist at the SWOCA. He beat Monesmith (Preble Shawnee) another contender, 14-3 at Reading. Also in the mix is the young Kunk who may have to wait until next year to qualify. There will be incredible competition underneath the Gambill-Thome confrontation at this district.

None of the other districts are nearly this strong. At Heath the major question is the eventual landing spot for Zolman and that appears to be 140#. With his departure and Falk's season ending injury, the anticipated depth has evaporated.

There still is a quartet of solid contenders for the four state berths. As a freshman last year Shane Foster was a district semi-finalist losing there to Coomes 4-2, and

eventually falling to 5<sup>th</sup> – a state alternate. He went 30-6 overall. This year he is undefeated – the OVAC is tomorrow – and has won a pair of tournaments. Block now seems clearly best in the Central District. He went 2-2 at last year's district (eliminated in a 10-9 bout) and has won at Licking Hts. and Licking County. Weatherholt wrestles a difficult schedule to follow. He won at Beallsville and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Aurora this year. Last year, at 130#, he was a district semi-finalist and after a loss to Clark he beat Canter to qualify. He went 1-2 at States after a tough first-round match-up. Cooperider is a new starter for Pleasant, but he has stepped right in. He won at the Midwest Classic and North Union and went 3-2 at Brecksville, losing to Skonieczny and Mencini. That is a solid quartet, but there is much behind it. The two best are Beckley and O'Bradovich and they still have qualification chances.

I am not overly impressed with the strength or depth at this weight class at Owens. As mentioned I would not be surprised to see movement in the middle weights at this location. At the moment the frontrunner has to be the defending district champion Josh Reindel. He plowed through last year's relatively weak district (the four qualifiers went 1-8 at States) without much trouble and won his first round bout in Columbus. He most recently won at Oak Harbor. Still only a junior, he wrestles with poise. Johnson, who was a district 3<sup>rd</sup>, also returns and was undefeated at the Suburban League Duals. Otsego has really rejuvenated its wrestling program and has four or five state candidates. Also here are Curcio and Chapman, two solid wrestlers with steady placement results. Curcio was a state alternate last year and was a takedown away from Columbus. Chapman has been winning steadily at 140# and will be a factor. Watch out for Sonnenberg. He was 7<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the last two junior high state tournaments. He has been as low as 130#, but I think this "A" Classic champ will opt for this weight. He could well qualify. That leaves Rayfield, Espinoza and Rinehart with a big hill to climb.

There are some real opportunities at Maple Hts. for those able to grab them. Returning state qualifier Smith is already at this class and should get to Columbus again. He was 2nd at Northwest to Price and has senior experience. The wrestler he beat in his go-to-state bout, Josh Malave, is back and may have gone past him. Malave won at Black River and Elyria Catholic, including a win over state placer Eavers. He is currently 21-1 and was a district semi-finalist last year. I'm guessing state qualifier Josh Neuenschwander will also examine the advantages here and move down from 140#. He was 3rd at this weight in last year's district and went 1-2 at the state level – beating Cawley, but getting pinned twice in less than a minute. The sophomore Noernberg was 2-2 at districts last year as a freshman and should do better this year. He has wrestled a tougher schedule than many here. He won at Woodridge and was 2nd at Cuyahoga Hts. losing 4-2 to state Division I placer Dinda. Two other possibilities are Trusnik (2-2 at last year's district) and Coblentz (champion at the D-3 Classic).

**140 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: KEVIN CLORAN (MADEIRA)**

Top Contenders

2	Schumaker (Arcadia)	16	Pike (Greeneview)
3	Chilson (Bellaire)	17	Alexander (Elmwood)
4	Zolman (Northmor)	18	French (Middletown Madison)
5	Reisz (Beallsville)	19	Neuberger (Edison)
6	Pfister (Black River)	20	McGillvray (Miami East)
7	McDaniel (Pleasant)	21	Jones (Waterford)
8	Burns (Troy Christian)	22	Woody (Chippewa)
9	Clum (Spencerville)	23	Chatterton (Dixie)
10	McCreary (Fairbanks)	24	Kwiat (Calvert)
11	Ash (Wayndale)	25	Martin (West Jefferson)
12	Schafer (Chanel)	26	Snyder (Port Clinton)
13	Pajestka (Cuyahoga Hts.)	27	Patton (Madison Plains)
14	Gombash (Delta)	28	Bill (Clearview)
15	Young (Norwayne)	29	Shonkwiler (Westfall)

While many weight classes in Division III have one or two substantial favorites that is not the case here. It looks to be a wide open affair with two state runners-up and a number of state placers and qualifiers, all thrown together. This could be even more complicated if Nelson were to drop to 140# (assuming an accommodating alpha weight) or one of the other top-notch 145's moves down.

Cloran is the obvious choice here, but somehow I'm worried. It's probably a tough cut for him and the bracket is so deep there is no respite. Chilson and Zolman are very good, and Pfister, on a good day, can beat anyone. Still, Cloran has the talent, experience and incentive to win it all. The unknown factor is Schumaker who has the talent to beat anyone here. Give him a good draw, a little luck, and he could be on the top step of the podium.

The Heath District is very crowded now that Zolman has elected to participate at this weight class. Should Nelson spring a sectional surprise and compete, the bracket sheet would be frenetic. As it is I have eight viable state contenders. Chilson was a huge surprise last year. He raced through the 135# district bracket giving up only one point in three of those wins and eking out a 5-4 win over Zolman. He then had absolutely no trouble zipping through the first three state rounds before Casey Thome majored him 21-11 in the final. This year Reisz beat him at Shadyside, but other than that blip he has been great. Zolman was 4<sup>th</sup> last year, losing to Thome in the quarterfinals. I've wondered (probably not all that often) had Zolman beaten Chilson at districts whether he would have been the finalist. He missed much of this year with injuries, but is reported healthy now. Reisz has been beating everyone. A state placer as a freshman, he went back last year, but lightning didn't strike that time. McDaniel was also something of a surprise qualifier last year, making the finals before losing to Chilson.

He went 1-2 and for a time it looked like those two advancements might be the difference. This year he's taken titles at North Union and the Midwest Classic. He did not place at Brecksville, but had a telling 12-10 win over Schafer. I've always been impressed with state qualifier McCreary who went 1-2 in Columbus last year. I keep expecting a huge breakout year. Patton is under the radar, but he has chances here while Shonkwiler is a long-shot. Two to keep an eye on are Jones and Martin. Jones, in particular has been on the periphery of success. Last year he won his first two district bouts, but then lost in overtime to McDaniel and by one point to Merryman and failed to qualify.

The Maple Hts. District is also loaded. There are six wrestlers with state placement ability currently scheduled to be at this class. I think the ferocious Pfister might be the best of this group. He was a district finalist last year (losing to Jenkins in the final), and then crushed his first two state foes to reach the semi-finals. He has made a major jump forward over the summer and has been unbeaten at 140# and 145#. Ash has been at 145# much of the year winning, for example, the D-3 Classic at that weight class – and doing so in commanding fashion. A state qualifier last year, he drew Toal in the first round and failed to place. Pajestka is already a three-time state qualifier, but has not yet placed going 1-6 in his last three efforts. He has not been overly lucky getting Falk for example, in the first round last year. Recently he won at both Cuyahoga Hts. and Woodridge – tech falling the excellent Fraley in the latter final. His only losses were at Brecksville where he finished 7<sup>th</sup>. Schafer is also a three-time state qualifier, placing his freshman year. He has wrestled the best schedule – winning at the Mayfield Big 8 and Solon, but failing to place at Brecksville. That's four excellent contenders. However, state qualifier (twice) Young is also here and, if healthy, cannot be overlooked. He again won the WIT, beating Woody 6-5, but was hurt at the Dies. Woody lost an overtime battle to go to state last year and he has been a solid performer (and Ash rival) for years. That's six quality wrestlers and we can't forget about Bill (Clearview) who has been on the periphery of this group.

Schumaker is a three time state placer (6-5-3) who is overdue to wrestle on Saturday night. Since the beginning of his sophomore year he has lost only twice outside the state meet. A state semi-finalist last year he was dumped 14-4 by two-time state champ Ryan Gambill. This year his only loss was to Betts wrestling up at 145#. Gombash qualified at this weight class last year and went 1-2 at Columbus. This year he was 1<sup>st</sup> at Perrysburg and 2<sup>nd</sup> at the GMVWA in what has been a great year. He'll be Schumaker's only rival at this district. The last two spots will be wide open. State qualifier Alexander is up three weight classes after a short visit to Columbus last spring. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Arcadia (to Sonnenberg), and had some struggles at this higher weight. Look for him to be a real factor by districts. Neuberger was 2-2 at the Division II District last year and should do well this year. He won at Edison and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Bellevue and Plymouth losing to Schumaker at the latter event. After that it might be a Snyder (Port Clinton) or Kwiat (Calvert) or ....

It's another very crowded field at Fairmont. State runner-up Cloran is down a weight class in what was a real surprise. At last year's district he beat Burns in the quarter

finals after 8 ½ minutes of wrestling 3-2 otu and then beat Fose 3-2 in the finals – a critical win in my mind. At the States he used that #1 seed to good advantage trouncing Lonsinger and state runner-up Skaggs in the first two rounds. An upset one-point win put him in the finals where he lost a heartbreaker in overtime. This year he was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the SWOCA (losing in overtime to Leland) and a dominating 1<sup>st</sup> at Madeira. Burns has dropped down with him and will again be a factor. He ended up 7<sup>th</sup> last year after a narrow first round loss to Howe. At the State Duals he beat Ash, but lost to McDaniel. He placed at the Ironman, but was not sharp at Brecksville where he finished behind Pajestka. State qualifier Clum and Pike are both back, but are certainly not assured of a return trip to Columbus. Clum won at Allen County, Lincolnview, and Marion Harding, but had only token opposition at the first two events. Pike won at Bellbrook (over Chatterton) and Elyria Catholic and was 4<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA. Neither boy placed at Columbus, although Clum was a quarter-finalist. He also beat Pike 7-6 for 3<sup>rd</sup> at the district. State alternate McGillvray defeated Chatterton for 5<sup>th</sup> last year, and both boys are back. McGillvray was impressive winning at Clyde and was 7<sup>th</sup> at GMVWA. Chatterton beat Woody to win at the D-3 Classic and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Bellbrook. French was also a state alternate last year and may have moved ahead of some of those listed above. He was 1<sup>st</sup> at Deer Park, Blanchester, and Norwood – all in impressive fashion. He'll have to decide between 135# or 140# at sectionals. It won't be an easy decision.

### 145 #

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

##### Top Contenders

2	Nelson (Madison Plains)	16	Dye (Patrick Henry)
3	Stiltner (Waynedale)	17	Washington (Carlisle)
4	Kosky (Bellaire St. John)	18	Rufenacht (Archbold)
5	Skaggs (Jackson Milton)	19	Hoerig (Mohawk)
6	Levy (West Liberty Salem)	20	Hunter (Manchester)
7	McCoy (Pleasant)	21	J. Schafer (Chanel)
8	Petrella (Hartley)	22	Oliver (Versailles)
9	Porter (Bellaire)	23	Redden (West Jefferson)
10	Howe (Blanchester)	24	Goebel (Edgerton)
11	Schalk (Hopewell Loudon)	25	Hayes (Madeira)
12	Rado (Woodridge)	26	Hickin (CVCA)
13	Betts (Elmwood)	27	Noernberg (Cuyahoga Hts.)
14	Border (Caldwell)	28	Collinsworth (Huron)
15	Cawley (Norwalk St. Paul)	29	Pokorny (VASJ)
		30	Espinoza (Genoa)

This is the best weight class in Division III. It features three state champions, a state runner-up, and returning state qualifiers seemingly without number. Also in the mix is a Junior High State champion from last year and several wrestlers returning after absences with injury. It is an embarrassment of riches. Let's look at the contenders.

Toal, only a junior, was 3<sup>rd</sup> at 112# as freshmen, and then jumped up five weight classes to win at 140#. He defeated state champ Josh Falk at both the district and state level. This year he was 5<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman – losing to his nemesis Ben Jordan, 2-1, and the number one ranked Mario Mason, 3-2. At Brecksville he cruised to the finals where he beat three-time Division I state champion Tony Jameson, 11-9. It was Jameson's second defeat in three years. I mark him as the favorite. By the way, what a middle of the lineup for Troy Christian – Sergent, Hancock, Thome, Burns, and Toal. Superb.

Stiltner won at this weight class last year in a surprise – at least to me. He was by far the lowest ranked wrestler in the 42 weight classes to triumph (I had him 10<sup>th</sup>) and he did it with some clutch wrestling. He avenged an earlier defeat in the semis over Hill and then won an overtime battle with Cloran. I always feel that nerves impact the slick technique wrestlers far more than those who depend primarily on power. He won the D-3 Classic at 152#, but has since moved into the cauldron at 145#.

Nelson won two years ago and, coincidentally, was the lowest ranked wrestler to win that year. Last year he ran roughshod over his district and easily won his first two state bouts. However, Falk beat him 7-4 in the semi-finals and he ended up defaulting to 4<sup>th</sup> place. This year he has again been brilliant.

As I see it Toal and Stiltner will be seeded in opposite halves with Nelson drawing into one of them for a semi-final confrontation. I like Toal to win, but Nelson, should he draw into Stiltner, might be the somewhat unexpected finalist. That's of course, if the other legitimate contenders don't upset one (or more) of this top trio.

Despite the presence of a state champ and a state runner-up the Maple Hts. District may be the least strong. Stiltner has been discussed. Skaggs was a runner-up at 135# two years ago losing to Joe Skoff in the finals, and that was from a 4<sup>th</sup> place district finish. Last year he was a district 3<sup>rd</sup> and after a first round fall lost to Cloran (who he had beaten the previous year in the same round) and failed to place. This year he should again qualify and he cannot be overlooked by anyone following wins at Solon, Jackson Milton, and Elyria Catholic. It gets a little shaky after this duo, but Rado is a strong third contender here. He won at Wadsworth and Woodridge and had two district wins last year. I think what might happen is that some of the 140's in that very crowded weight class at this district might opt to move up. Maybe, a Hunter or Woody might see it as a better qualification possibility. Absent that, look for Hickin, Pokorny, or Noernberg to get that fourth spot. One other possibility is Schafer who was a strong 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Mayfield Big 8.

There are five good contenders for the three spots behind Toal at Fairmont. Levy is already a two time state qualifier and was 8<sup>th</sup> last year at this weight class. Howe was also a state qualifier nabbing a district 3<sup>rd</sup> at 135#. He got an 8<sup>th</sup> place medal beating Johnson and Reindel in the consolations. He was 1<sup>st</sup> at Reading and Blanchester, and lost only to Andrew Schafer at the Ohio Duals. Also back is Washington – a district runner-up at 140# -- and who had tough sledding at Columbus. He has struggled a bit at this high weight class, but he came on strong at the end of last year and may do so

again. I know he has competed at 140#, but I suspect, based on the talent at that weight class in this district that he will end up here. Should any of this group falter Oliver and Hayes, both very good are waiting in the wings.

The most crowded district is at Heath. Nelson, of course, would be the prime mover, but there is high quality talent just beneath him. Kosky won three state bouts before defaulting to 6<sup>th</sup> and is a savvy, experienced wrestler. He has competed at 145# and 152# and will choose, perhaps based on his OVAC results at the higher weight, in which direction to go. Mark him up as a factor at either weight class. Porter also was a state qualifier and went 1-2 at Columbus. He beat a tough field at Shadyside that included Kosky, Border, and Jefferis. His 20-1 record suggests strong placement chances. McCoy can be erratic, but he can be a big match wrestler. He won two district bouts and has built on that. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Midwest Classic to Messerall and won handsomely at North Union. At Brecksville he was pinned by the excellent McGookey in the first round and then won six consecutive consolation bouts including wins over state qualifier Lee, Herrick, and Schreiner. He ended up 6<sup>th</sup>, losing again to McGookey – this time in overtime. At the Ohio Duals Toal beat him in a closely fought bout 3-2. He could be a state placer or a district victim. Petrella is much more consistent, but does not wrestle as tough a schedule. He won two district bouts, but lost to Porter. Border, a state qualifier two years ago, had a nightmarish district last season and failed to win a bout. He has put that behind him, beating Kosky to finish 2<sup>nd</sup> at Shadyside. His only losses have been to high-powered opponents. That is six excellent competitors (assuming Kosky is at 145#), but Redden, a Washington Court House move-in, and Robinson are possibilities. Missing here is Michael Falk (Grandview Hts.) who had an excellent freshman season and almost assuredly would have been a major factor at one of the middle weights. Injuries have eliminated his sophomore season.

There are some question marks at Owens. Can state placer Lucas Schalk come back after a year and a half layoff from injuries and be effective? Will state junior high champ Xavier Dye stay at 145# or drop at this lower weight class? I wish I knew the answers. Cawley is the other returning state qualifier and he is something of a wild man. He likes to score and his bouts are often wild frantic episodes. He won two critical overtime bouts to qualify last year (10-8 and 8-6), but struggled at the state level. He won at the Gorman, but was 5<sup>th</sup> at the D-3 Classic. He is dangerous. Betts and Hoerig are both consistent placers and solid threats to qualify. Betts beat Schumaker earlier in the year and has wrestled a tough schedule. Dye is terrific and a likely state champion in the future. He may be ready for a sampling of state competition this year. Goebel has to decide the optimal weight class and then commit to it. He lost to Dye 7-6 in overtime. Espinoza and Collinsworth are other thoughts.

**152 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: JEDD MOORE (PLEASANT)**

Top Contenders

2	Kusar (CVCA)	16	Bracken (Johnstown Monroe)
3	Foley (Worthington Christian)	17	McMillion (Covington)
4	Short (Archbold)	18	Jackson (Grand Valley)
5	Merryman (Shadyside)	19	Moyer (Sandy Valley)
6	True (Arcadia)	20	Reidenbach (Loudonville)
7	Kayatin (Lima Central Catholic)	21	Angevine (Reading)
8	Wagner (Genoa)	22	Schaffer (Seneca East)
9	Bender (Brookfield)	23	Kobilarczyk (Tuslaw)
10	Randolph (Belpre)	24	Gilmore (Indian Valley)
11	Groudle (VASJ)	25	Howard (Edison)
12	Walters (Chanel)	26	Krill (Edgerton)
13	Runyon (Blanchester)	27	Boreing (Deer Park)
14	Keller (Woodridge)	28	Mark (Northwestern)
15	K. Burns (Troy Christian)	29	Pajestka (Cuyahoga Hts.)
		30	Means (Plymouth)

There will be no suspense at this weight class. Defending state champ Jedd Moore is one of the best in the country. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> as a sophomore in Division I, losing only to 4-time champ Lance Palmer in the finals. Last year he had absolutely no problems winning the title with three technical falls and an 11-4 decision over Robel Campbell. He has lost only once in the past two years (He split a pair of bouts with Cubberly last year), and won the NHSCA Juniors title. He is absolutely superb on his feet taking down the opposition at will and never giving him respite.

The one opponent with at least a chance of victory is Jared Kusar. Already a three-time state qualifier he was 3<sup>rd</sup> two years ago in Division II, losing only to Colt Sponseller. Last year I figured he was Cubberly's biggest obstacle, but a major 10-9 upset by Garbrandt took him out in the quarter-finals. This year he was 5<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman defeating Gobin and majoring Heflin. He was knocked out of the championship bracket by the #1 ranked Alex Meade, 5-0. He won at North Canton defeating Division I state place winner Brett Ewing 17-5. At Medina he faced my Division I choice Jesse Dong in the finals and hit a late 4-point move to win 5-4. So he has real upset potential. The question remains can he nullify Moore's fabulous takedown skills. The tentative answer is "highly unlikely".

The Heath District should do very well at this weight class in Columbus. There are three other returning state qualifiers in addition to Moore at this site. Foley grabbed a district 4<sup>th</sup> at this weight including a big win over Packard. He was 1-2 at states losing two reasonable close bouts to placers. This year he was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the D-3 Classic to state champion Stiltner, and beat Porter to win at St. Xavier. Merryman is up three weight classes, but it has not slowed him down as his 24-1 record attests. He lost two one-

point bouts at States the first night. This year he has titles at Union Local, Barnesville, and Shadyside. His only loss was to an out-of-state wrestler at St. Clairsville. Randolph qualified two years ago, but injuries held him back at last year's district. He's back up to 152# this year and that is a good omen. None of this trio has guaranteed qualification. Bracken was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Licking County and has district credentials, while Gilmore was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Coshocton, losing only to Mellor. A recovered Moyer would also be a possibility.

Kusar should have relatively little trouble at Maple Hts. Next best is likely Bender who was district finalist at this weight class last year – his likely fate again this year. He went 1-2 at Columbus losing to True in the consolation rounds. He won at Elyria Catholic at 160#, but will compete at this weight class. After this duo chaos reigns. I have a list of about eight names with district placement possibilities. Walters, only a freshman, was 4<sup>th</sup> at the Mayfield Big Eight and 3-0 at the Ohio Duals. A junior high place winner last year (4<sup>th</sup>) he has defeated state qualifier Runyon. He should have the steepest learning curve of this group. Dropping to 52# is state alternate Groudle who immediately becomes a factor at this class. Last year he lost to Stiltner, 4-2, in the semi-finals and then missed qualification by one point. Factor in Keller (6<sup>th</sup> at Wadsworth), Reidenbach (3<sup>rd</sup> at Gorman), and Jackson (4<sup>th</sup> at D-3 Classic) and, perhaps, one of those will qualify. Other thoughts include Pajestka, mark, and Kobilarczyk.

Last year I ranked Mason True 8<sup>th</sup> in the state so it was a little surprising to discover on the last Sunday in February that he had not qualified out of the Owens District. A quarter-final loss to Lee and a one-point defeat at the hands of Kwiat had apparently eliminated him. Then with Lee unable to compete True stepped in and had a solid tournament finishing 7<sup>th</sup>. He has been exceptionally good this season and I was very impressed with his 17-5 win over Hendon at Northwood. The rest of this year he has been equally strong, but, perhaps, this is the time to qualify in the normal manner. I like Short and Wagner for two more of the state berths. Short had two district wins last year and has been dynamite at 160# for most of the year. I'm expecting big things. Wagner won at Sylvania Southview, but drew Tankin the first round of medina and didn't make it through the tortuous consolation process. He'll have to be in top form to qualify. After that it's unclear. Keill has been hurt while Schaffer who won two district bouts and lost a 3-1 decision to True, was only 5<sup>th</sup> at Plymouth. Howard or Means might just sneak in to a qualifying spot.

Fairmont will be the weakest of the four districts at this weight class. Moving into the foreground is Scott Kayatin who was a district semi-finalist at this weight class last year and then lost three straight close bouts. This year he won at 160# at Allen County in dominating fashion, then crushed the opposition at the "A" Classic at 152#. I think he might be the best here. Runyon, now only a junior, qualified at 140# last year in a bit of a surprise. He did not wrestle well at Columbus (nerves?) and was outscored 24-0 in his two bouts. McMillion, 7<sup>th</sup> at GMVWA, factors into possible district placement with Angevine, Boreing, and, maybe Rackley looking to score. The under-the-radar candidate might be Kyle Burns who is progressing rapidly.

**160 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: STEVE WILSON (PLEASANT)**

Top Contenders

2	Raber (Triway)	15	Mehling (Grandview Hts.)
3	Skoff (Bridgeport)	16	Panno (Blanchester)
4	Heasley (Worthington Christian)	17	Marthey (Tuslaw)
5	Kwiat (Calvert)	18	Stacey (Liberty Center)
6	Lee (Elmwood)	19	Hathaway (Woodridge)
7	Beam (Waynedale)	20	Uhlenhake (Coldwater)
8	Utley (CVCA)	21	Wagner (Greeneview)
9	Ortocani (Sandusky St. Mary)	22	Patti (Margaretta)
10	Packard (Belpre)	23	Meade (Cuyahoga Hts.)
11	Jones/Keplinger (Troy Christian)	24	Kleman (Lakota)
12	Norway (Nelsonville York)	25	Ramoe (Wellington)
13	Meyer (Reading)	26	Hrabek (Fostoria St. Wedelion)
14	Lewis (West Liberty Salem)		

Steve Wilson will be a heavy favorite to defend his title at 160#. Last year he went 48-1 and placed for the third time at the state level. He had three falls and a major decision at the districts last year, and pretty much cruised to the state finals before winning a hard fought decision over Tice in the finals. This year his only loss was in the finals at Brecksville to Cubberly during which he was injured and eventually had to default. Provided he is healthy there is no one here who can successfully challenge him.

While Wilson may dominate the Heath District, the other three qualifiers will all have placement potential. Skoff was a state semi-finalist last year at 152# before losing to Campbell and ending up 4<sup>th</sup>. This year he is undefeated as I write this, undoubtedly gearing up for his titanic struggle with Bittenger at the OVAC. His 25 wins have won four tournaments and he should be away from Wilson at the state meet. Heasley, like Skoff, was also a district runner-up losing to Wilson 15-4 last year. Losing only to Tice and Yant at the states, he finished a strong 5<sup>th</sup>. I saw him win the D-3 Classic and he seems to have finalist potential. The win at St. Xavier was very impressive. That would leave but one state berth available with two exciting southeast wrestlers the main contenders. The obvious choice is state alternate Packard who won 44 times last year and was one bout from states. He was 5<sup>th</sup> at Medina losing narrowly to Kline and then being upset by Utley. Only a junior, he continues to improve partly because of the middleweights that surround him in the Belpre line-up. However, Norway, also a junior, is intriguing. He has already won four tournaments, pinning almost everyone and defeating a defending state champion from West Virginia. He was only 1-2 at the district level last year losing a pair of major decisions. Has he improved that much in a year? We shall see. Mehling is a long shot possibility along with Mickle (west Jefferson).

Those Columbus qualifiers look very strong, but there will be challengers – particularly from the Northwest. Two state qualifiers return to Owens, each with possibilities. Kwiat was 6<sup>th</sup> at 152# losing to Moore and Skoff. He has wrestled an active schedule this year, winning at Lincolnview and finishing a strong 2<sup>nd</sup> at the GMVWA, at the BG Duals he beat Haxton and Ortolani, losing only to Kilroy. He should place again. Lee actually finished ahead of Kwiat at districts, but then couldn't compete. The 5<sup>th</sup> place district finisher then stepped in and finished 7<sup>th</sup>. This year he has been solid, but not yet spectacular. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at Medina, losing to Kline and then the freshman Utley. Ortocani, in my mind, was a lock to qualify at 145# last year. He was 52-6 with a sectional title and wrestled well against tough competition. Yet a bad afternoon, including an overtime loss put him out. He gets a second chance this year, after another good campaign. I see Stacey, down from 189#, Patti, Kleman, or Hrabek as the best shot for the fourth berth. Shattuck (Stritch) is a long shot.

Raber on a hot weekend could be a state finalist. Last year in Division II he captured a district 4<sup>th</sup> and a ticket to Columbus. After a first round loss to Sponseller he beat both Kilroy and Thurn before losing to Phil Dukes in overtime. A first period pin of Bittinger nailed down 7<sup>th</sup> place. This year he ripped through the WIT and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at North Canton to Schott after beating Utley. He can be very good. There is a drop-off to the next trio of Utley, Beam, and Marthey. Marthey was a district 6<sup>th</sup> at the weight class this year missing state qualification by two points. At Medina he failed to place, losing to Allen and Lewis. The sophomore Beam is still a work in progress, but he will be very good. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the D-3 Classic, losing to Heasley in the semis and then beating Mehling. He was 3-0 at the Ohio Duals and will be a major factor at the district level. The one to really watch, though, is Utley. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the junior high states last year, and is showing tremendous improvement as a freshman. Of course, it helps having Kusar as a workout partner. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at Medina beating Lee and Packard, and 7<sup>th</sup> at the Ironman, losing only to the eventual champ, 8-3, and to Mannier, 4-2. He is nearly ready for prime time. Hathaway, Ramage, and, maybe, Meade have a chance if any of the top four should stumble.

I think the qualifiers from the Southwest District will struggle. Both Lewis and Panno were state qualifiers last year, but both failed to win a bout at states. Lewis was 7<sup>th</sup> at Medina, but finished behind three Division II wrestlers. I think Meyer might have passed both after winning at Reading and Madeira and finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at the SWOCA. Keplinger has wrestled much of the year at Troy Christian, but the one to watch is Brad Jones. He could be a critical extra state qualifier. Other possibilities are Wagner and Uhlenake.

**171 #**

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

Top Contenders

2	Yant (Delta)	16	Walker (Belpre)
3	Adams (Pleasant)	17	Kleman (Lakota)
4	Jenkins (Woodridge)	18	Akins (Troy Christian)
5	Schaefer (Northwestern)	19	Worthington (Crestview)
6	Panzano (Columbus Academy)	20	Hall (Covington)
7	Kunk (Coldwater)	21	Stewart (River)
8	Smyers (Northwayne)	22	Shafrath (Chippewa)
9	Schwab (Clinton Massie)	23	Irwin (Worthington Christian)
10	Zody (Triway)	24	Miller (Oberlin)
11	Jump (Grandview Hts.)	25	Leonard (Springfield NE)
12	Boyce (Collins Western Reserve)	26	Seislove (Calvert)
13	Tucker (Martins Ferry)	27	Melvin (Brooklyn)
14	Herr (Bluffton)	28	Hutchinson (Allen East)
15	Ackley (Elmwood)	29	Bowden (South Range)

I've been watching (and analyzing) wrestling for fifty years and I've never seen anything like it – nothing that even compares with it. A 15-year old freshman wrestling for Monroeville, of all places, comes out and beats everyone put before him. Everything he does works. It's like Roy Hobbs in The Natural – whatever he wants to do he does. I saw Chris Phillips in his first varsity experience defeat, in a single day, three of the best 171's in the country from Blair, Graham, and St Edward. He did it while battling the flu and he did it his way, ten takedowns for Phillips and none for the three opponents. That was followed up by a dominating win at Brecksville that included a 23-10 win over the Georgia state runner-up. Amazing. I mean there were certainly clues that this might happen eventually – three junior high state titles and a Cadet National title, but as a freshman at 171#.

His only real rival will also be at the Owens District. Yant was the district champion at 160# and finished 4<sup>th</sup> at states after losing to eventual state champion Wilson in the semi-finals. His only loss this year was in the finals at the GMVWA to Thomusseit, 3-1, in overtime. Very powerful, he does not have the moves and techniques of Phillips and can only win if he somehow catches and pins him.

This leaves only two spots open for the rest of the Owens District. Three boys who wrestled at 160# last year would seem to have the inside track. State alternate Boyce missed state qualification in the 30 second sudden death period after making the district semi-finals. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Clyde (to Michaels), 1<sup>st</sup> at Edison and 3<sup>rd</sup> at Tiffin. Ackley had a district 6<sup>th</sup> after also being a semi-finalist and losing, 15-0, to Yant. Worthington can be up and down – was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Gorman and lost in overtime to Ackley last year. Kleman or Seislove are the other possibilities. Kleman has been tantalizingly good for some time – maybe, this is the year he qualifies.

Two-time state qualifier Adams leads the Heath District. He won his district title last year 12-1 and was a state semi-finalist before losing a 11-0 barnburner to Kennedy and finishing 6<sup>th</sup>. This year he won the Midwest Classic and at North Union, and was 4<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville losing to Mills and Roth. He should move up a couple of places at Columbus this year. State qualifier Panzano also returns and was 8<sup>th</sup> at Wadsworth after winning several smaller tourneys. Yant beat him by technical fall last year. Jump was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Hamilton Twp. Losing to Michaels, but I've liked him since last year. He did not, however, wrestle at the D-3 Classic so it is difficult to judge his progress. He won two district bouts last year and I think only Adams and Panzano surpassed him here. Other possibilities include Chase Tucker, hopefully fully healthy once more, district qualifier Walker, and, perhaps, Stewart. Don't overlook Irwin – 4<sup>th</sup> at the D-3 Classic – for a possible upset.

Two wrestlers stand out at Fairmont. Kunk was a district finalist last year and wrestled two of the more amazing bouts at the Schott. He lost to Cartwright 20-12 in the first round and then came a couple of hours later and won 20-17. I'm guessing he is the first wrestler to have bouts where 20 points were scored back-to-back. Down from 189#, he has to be a co-favorite at this district. The other contender would be state placer Levi Schwab who finished 8<sup>th</sup> last year. Another rugged Clinton Massie product, he was 1<sup>st</sup> at Blanchester and 3<sup>rd</sup> at Fairfield. Akins and Hall had a tremendous district battle with the former winning 7-6 in overtime and vaulting him to a 6<sup>th</sup> place finish. I don't see either of them challenging the top duo. Leonard or Hutchinson are other thoughts.

The district with the greatest depth is at Maple Hts. There are four potential placers including three emerging from one sectional. One can only hope that pairings do not automatically knock out one of the quartet. What is odd is that the top four were all at different weight classes last year. Jenkins was the state alternate at 189# last year losing only to Neff and Porter at that level. This year he won at Woodridge and Wadsworth, knocking off Faiella in the process. A bit of an unknown, he has good placement prospects. Schaefer was also a state alternate (at 160#) after qualifying two years ago as a sophomore and winning a state bout. This year he won at Black River and Gorman in impressive fashion. He looks very good. Smyers qualified two years ago and was at 152# last year and failed to make district action. This year he won the WIT and beat Zody in the process. The latter boy was a Division II contender last year at 171#. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the WIT and placed at two other events. Should the pairings gods (of demons?) be unkind contenders like Schafrath, Miller, and Melvin would have greatly increased opportunities. Bowden is another candidate with possibilities here.

**189 #**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: NATHAN JONES (TROY CHRISTIAN)**

Top Contenders

2	Neff (Waynedale)	16	Bayly (Toledo Christian)
3	Miller (Delphos Jefferson)	17	Kocevar (Trinity)
4	Kirhan (Mohawk)	18	Mann (Barnesville)
5	Bowers (Pleasant)	19	Cheesman (Crestview)
6	Oliver (Versailles)	20	Shreve (Martins Ferry)
7	Dues (Allen East)	21	Fabry (West Jefferson)
8	K. Schaefer (Northwestern)	22	Chmura (Oberlin)
9	McClory (Liberty Center)	23	Rosolowski (Cuyahoga Hts.)
10	Maloy (Ridgewood)	24	Straus (Kirtland)
11	Godsey (Delta)	25	Kahl (Shadyside)
12	Meyers (Johnstown Monroe)	26	Welfle (Norwalk St. Paul)
13	White (Calvert)	27	Spiker (Rootstown)
14	Starr (River)	28	Reville (Wayne Trace)
15	Fay (Woodridge)	29	Gobrogge (Patrick Henry)

I'm looking forward to this weight class because it may well be one of the most exciting in Division III. There are five outstanding wrestlers vying for the top step of the podium and none of them can be considered a heavy favorite. As we saw all too often last year the vagaries of chance and ill fortune can derail the best of wrestlers.

My choice is Nathan Jones, a two-time Division I state qualifier who transferred from Sidney to Troy Christian. He was 8<sup>th</sup> as a sophomore, but went two and out last year after facing a tough draw. This year he was 8<sup>th</sup> at the incredibly tough Ironman with wins over Bailey and Thomusseit and 5<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville, including a big win over Bowers to clinch the team title. One thing that should help him is the team competition and the momentum Troy Christian is likely to build in defending their team title. It won't be easy, but his experience should be a critical factor in navigating what will be a perilous bracket sheet.

The powerful Neff will have revenge in mind at Columbus after White beat him 8-4 in the Ohio Duals. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at this weight class last year, defeating Kirian in a great first round match-up, and then splitting two bouts with Miller (losing by fall early and winning in overtime for 3<sup>rd</sup>). He raced through the D-3 Classic and should have little trouble in winning his district.

Miller is a stick of dynamite with explosive force. A great pinner, he was 4<sup>th</sup> last year including a win over Kirian and the aforementioned split with Neff. Nobody has really challenged him this year – and that's not good – but he and Jones exit the same district and should be apart in the state bracket. He was 52-3 last year, losing only once before the state meet.

Kirin comes from a great wrestling family. He was 4<sup>th</sup> as a sophomore, but had injury problems almost all of last year and finished 6<sup>th</sup>. He won at Tiffin and has to be considered as a potential finalist. With Miller and Jones at the same sectional you'll have to beat both to win it all.

Bowers was a bit of a magician last year. Wrestling up at least one weight class at 215# he won three close bouts to make the district finals and won a bout at state scoring two unexpected team points. This year he won the Midwest Classic and North Union and was 6<sup>th</sup> at Brecksville. Winning his district and getting a favorable draw could make him a state semi-finalist and then, who knows, maybe he has one last rabbit to pull out of a hat.

With Jones and Miller both at Fairmont that district will be very difficult. Still, Oliver is a returning state qualifier with a win at that level. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> to Miller at Plymouth and 4<sup>th</sup> at the GMVWA ahead of Godsey and White. He'll be away from Jones at the District level (same sectional), and if Miller is also in the other half (a one in three chance) he could be a district finalist. State alternate Dues has twice lost to Miller by fall in a tournament final, but he should be the fourth qualifier with reasonable decent pairings. Welling, Reuille --- who beat White, and Running (Clinton Massie) would seem to have little chance of escaping this district.

Neff faces a much easier task at Maple Hts. I am guessing that junior high state champion Kurtis Schaefer will be here and he has been very good, winning at Black River and finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Gorman after a one-point loss to state qualifier Gallik. After that everything is a little hazy with Kocevar or Fay probably third best, and then a wild scramble thereafter. I'm thinking that Chmura, Spiker, and Rosolowski (who I believe will end up at 189#) are next in what could be a long line of hopefuls. The wrestler who might be the biggest surprise is Straus. He could easily grab a state ticket.

There are up to seven contenders for the last three spots behind Bowers. State qualifier Maloy has to be one of the favorites to capture one of those trips to Columbus. He wrestles in a media black hole, but anyone who won 45 bouts last year and finished 4<sup>th</sup> in the district cannot be overlooked. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at North Union behind Bowers and 4<sup>th</sup> at Coshocton. Lane missed state qualification by a point last year, while Meyers was 6<sup>th</sup> at the district level. It now appears that Lane (Grandview Hts.) will not compete giving Meyers, perhaps, a somewhat larger margin of error. Fabry and Shook are also strong, with the former moving down from 215# where he had a 1-2 district record. Former state qualifier Starr is the best out of the East with Kahl and Mann somewhat behind him. He won at Union Local, but may have to really hustle to beat out the Columbus boys for another trip to states. The loss of Lane, however, does open up the competition.

As at Owens and Maple Hts., one wrestler – Kirian in this case – would seem to stand above the rest. However, his advantage is smaller than those two enjoy and, perhaps, more tenuous. State qualifiers McClory and White return with Godsey, Bayly, and

Cheesman clearly in that same picture. McClory is the mystery. A state qualifier at 215# last year, he has dropped to 189# with great success. He was 1<sup>st</sup> at Marion Harding, placing ahead of Alexander. White, also a returning state qualifier, has placed at Lincolnview and the GMVWA, but lost to Godsey among others. Last year he beat Cheesman and split with Bayly at district before losing on a technical fall to Kirian. Godsey has been solid and appears to have passed White. Cheesman was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Gorman while state alternate Bayly has just moved down from 215#. I think McClory, Godsey and White (by a whisker) will qualify with Kirian, while Bayly just misses again. Long shots are Welfle – who always seems to get a place – and Gobrogge from a resurgent Patrick Henry team.

## 215 #

### **PROJECTED CHAMPION: TRAVIS PORTER (BERKSHIRE)**

#### Top Contenders

2	Randall (Greeneview)	16	McKnight (Carlisle)
3	Akin (Triway)	17	Aurand (Elmwood)
4	Hesson (Caldwell)	18	Magyar (Northwayne)
5	Ewing (Northwestern)	19	Kibler (Elgin)
6	Waderker (Belpre)	20	Moore (Deer Park)
7	Hummel (Millbury Lake)	21	McHugh (Lutheran West)
8	Artrip (Loudonville)	22	Bondy (Monroe Central)
9	Uhlenhake (Coldwater)	23	Castillo (Ayersville)
10	Zang (Hartley)	24	Costlow (Steubenville CC)
11	Beam (Waynedale)	25	Skleres (Pymatuning Valley)
12	Skelton (Northmor)	26	Sousa (Crestview)
13	Running (Clinton Massie)	27	Barnes (Spencerville)
14	Ault (Woodmore)	28	Litman (Sandy Valley)
15	Stover (Calvert)	29	Petratis (VASJ)

This should be one of the more interesting weight classes in Division III. It features a number of closely matched competitors from every corner of the state. In recent years most Division III state champs are from the very top of my rankings. Last year for example, nine of the champs were ranked first in this report, three were ranked second, and one was ranked third. However, there is always at least one outlier. Last year it was Stiltner (ranked 10<sup>th</sup>) and before that Nelson (ranked 17<sup>th</sup>). This weight class could produce such a champion this year.

Undaunted – my choice is the undefeated Berkshire senior Travis Porter. He has placed 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> the last two years in Columbus at 189#. This year he won at Solon and Kenston, but his biggest win was over my heavyweight choice Don Stocum in a dual. It proved to me he could handle the bigger 215's he'll face on the tourney trail. Strong and experienced, he'll need both attributes in a process where he'll face a wide variety of good wrestlers.

Porter must escape from the best and deepest district at this weight class. Artrip was a state alternate last year and finished runner-up at the Wadsworth tourney. Akin was 6<sup>th</sup> at the D-2 district last year and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the WIT, including a fall over Magyar. Ewing was 2-2 at last year's district and was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Gorman, losing only to Houska and pinning Artrip. However, Porter beat him 12-0 last year. Beam and Magyar are both possibilities here. Magyar won two district bouts last year and lost a narrow 10-8 decision to McElligott. He was 4<sup>th</sup> at the WIT. Beam tech-falled Litman to win the D-3 Classic and didn't go six minutes in any of his bouts. This is a formidable district. The trio of McHugh, Skleres, and Petraitis is another step further back.

The Owens District still has an air of uncertainty. State qualifier Zach White is ranked at 189#, but could conceivably end up competing here. If so, it raises the bar for everyone else at this class and could scramble the eventual outcome. As it is the trio of Hummel, Ault, and Aurand look to be the best at this time. Hummel won the "A" Classic over Ault 5-1, and has won at Hopewell-Loudon and Northwood. Ault, in addition to 2<sup>nd</sup> at the "A" Classic, won at Bellevue, and was 6<sup>th</sup> at last year's district. Aurand won at Arcadia and was the state alternate at this weight class last year. In the Suburban League Duals he beat both Hummel (9-8) and Ault (3-2) by a single point. The fourth spot – assuming White, McClory and Bayly are safely ensconced at 189# - is wide open. Stover and Castillo are probably next in line, but the sophomore Sousa is building momentum. With great workout partners he could be a factor.

Hesson is one of the two state placers returning at this weight class – he was 7<sup>th</sup> – and he has high placement potential. He crushed the field at Shadyside and beat the redoubtable Busick to win at Barnesville. His only loss, 3-2, was to Waderker in a dual. These two could well be district finalists. Waderker was 2-2 at last year's district, but may be hindered by a schedule insufficiently challenging. Skelton and Zang are the best in the Columbus area, but may not match up well with the top two here. Skelton won at Tiffin and was 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Gorman, but lost to Waderker and Hesson at last year's district. Behind this top quartet are the undefeated Costlow, Bondy, and Litman, all with past district experience. Watch for Kibler (Elgin) who lost 12-10 in the Northridge finals and took the Riverside title 10-9.

There is likely to be a powerful quartet emerging from Fairmont. Randall was 5<sup>th</sup> last year at states after making the semi-finals. He was 3<sup>rd</sup> at GMVWA and Bellbrook – both times finishing behind D-2 stars Pummill and Snyder. He has finalist potential. State alternate Uhlenhake is undefeated this year leading a strong Coldwater squad. He had 40 victories last year, but lost 15-0 to Randall in the district quarter-finals. Running was the state alternate at 189# last year, losing to state placer Miller in the semi-finals. I have him at 23-1 this year and he may have surpassed Uhlenhake. He had a most impressive tournament winning at Fairfield. State qualifier McKnight is the fourth in this group, and should qualify, but not easily. The one to watch is Moore who has won at Deer Park, Madeira, and Reading, but has not, to my knowledge, wrestled any of the top quartet. Barnes is another possibility after a 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish at Allen County.

**285#**

**PROJECTED CHAMPION: DON STOCUM (KIRTLAND)**

Top Contenders

2	Southwick (Otsego)	16	Widman (Fremont St. Joseph)
3	Edington (Pleasant)	17	Reynolds (Greeneview)
4	McElligott (Chanel)	18	Budde (Fisher Catholic)
5	Addis (Hartley)	19	Krugh (Springfield NE)
6	Murray (Norwayne)	20	Schenkel (Caldwell)
7	Doughty (Norwalk St. Paul)	21	Obringer/Binkley (Spencerville)
8	Bose (Reading)	22	Lesh (Dixie)
9	Smith (Blanchester)	23	Reinhardt (Plymouth)
10	Stone (Cardington Lincoln)	24	West (Bridgeport)
11	Schwochow (Brecksville)	25	Donley (Waynedale)
12	Hamilton (South Central)	26	Clawson (Jackson Mil)
13	Woodford (Martins Ferry)	27	Ruckman (Beallsville)
14	Bergman (Stritch)	28	Snyder (Brooklyn)
15	Treon (Versailles)	29	Flegal (Hicksville)
		30	Calvan (Fostoria St. Wedelion)

The era of Cameron Wade, Jesse Campbell, and all of the other fine Division III heavyweights ended last March. Unfortunately, it ended rather sadly in a bout that was neither well wrestled nor well refereed. Amazingly, 14 of the 16 wrestlers in the state bracket have graduated with only one of that returning duo having even one state victory. It should make for a wide-open slam-bang affair with lots of new names, lots of upsets, and, perhaps, a surprise champion.

In my mind two contenders stand above the others. One, of course, is Jacob Southwick who was 4<sup>th</sup> last year while winning three state bouts. Undefeated this year, he has two big wins – beating Sanchez by six, and division II placer Donna by four. The other is the powerful Don Stocum, who last year failed to emerge from the extremely rugged Maple Hts. District – no disgrace since the qualifying four all finished in the top six at Columbus. This year he won at the D-3 Classic, North Coast, and Southview and did so in a generally dominating manner.

Stocum heads a solid trio of performers at Maple Hts. McElligott lost an overtime bout last year in his go-to-state bout at 215# after a strong season for Chanel. This year he has performed well at heavyweight losing a one-point match to the excellent McCarthy in Solon in the Solon finals, and was 2<sup>nd</sup> again at the Mayfield Big 8. At Brecksville he was pinned by Division II choice Hiles and had to default out. I think Stocum may be too strong for him. Murray had some district success last year and followed it up with a runner-up finish at the WIT this year. He should qualify this time around. The fourth state berth is up “for grabs”. I’m probably missing some solid contenders, but, maybe, a Snyder, Donley, or Clawson is that fourth qualifier.

It's far more crowded at Owens. Ten of last year's district qualifiers return with Southwick well ahead of the other nine. District semi-finalist Doughty is a big junior with good experience. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Gorman and at the D-3 Classic. Note, however, that Stocum beat him 16-5. Hamilton had 39 wins at 215# last year and was a district quarter-finalist. He won at Plymouth and gave Ironman runner-up Meder a strong battle at Black River, losing 12-8. He beat Treon at Plymouth and also finished ahead of Reinhardt and Torrence. I think Bergman and Widman might end up battling for that last berth, but the paring could be critical. Widman, who was 2<sup>nd</sup> at Northwood, lost to Bergman last year. Flegal and Calvin, the "A" Classic finalists are also in the hunt here.

The top two heavyweights at Heath both come from the Columbus area, and both should have good placement chances. Edington came out of nowhere to make the district finals and qualify for state action. This year he won the Midwest Classic and North Union, and was 3-0 at the Ohio Duals. A tough first round match-up hurt him at Brecksville (where he was the #2 seed) and he failed to place. Addis lost one of those 2-1 in several overtimes in his go-to-state bout last year. That won't happen again. He won the Ash Invitational and has been solid at every event. He could be a district finalist. Budde and Stone are two other Columbus area wrestlers with district credentials. Both went 2-2 at that level and that could foretell a Central District sweep. However, Schenkel has only lost once this year and along with Woodford, West, and Ruckman from the OVAR could provide some upsets. However, none of this group has ever reached the district level.

There are a boatload of possibilities at Fairmont and the problem is sorting them all out. At least on the surface two names stand out – state qualifier (at 215#) Smith and state alternate Treon. However, Bose beat Smith to win at Reading and also took the title at Madeira, and both Schwochow and Reynolds finished ahead of Treon at the GMVWA. Schwochow had a particularly strong run at the powerful tournament reaching the semi-finals. Add in Lesh (3<sup>rd</sup> at the D-3 Classic and 1<sup>st</sup> at Bellbrook) and Krugh and that is a solid group of contenders. But, wait, both Binkley and Obringer will come from that one Northwestern sectional, and both have done well. Binkley won at Allen County and Lincolnview. I look for Bose, Smith, and Schwochow to qualify with the fourth spot more a question of bracket placement and style issues than anything else.

## TEAMS

1. Marion Pleasant- It will again be a tremendous two team struggle for the Division III state title. Last year I chose Pleasant, but a combination of exceptional wrestling by Troy Christian and their ability to pick up bonus points won the day. The 150+ points scored by Pleasant was the highest of any runner-up team in any classification in Ohio wrestling history. This year I, again, think Pleasant's superior numbers and outstanding wrestlers will be enough to win the title, but that is dependent on getting eleven wrestlers (or so) through this district and then wrestling well in Columbus. Moore and Wilson should win again and all the rest should get some kind of place--with Pope and Edington leading the way. The key might be getting Reynolds to exactly the right weight class.
2. Troy Christian- The superstars from 125# to 145# should score somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 points while Jones should add at least 20 more. That wouldn't have been enough last year and it may not win it this year either. So, the young Hancock, Libengood or one of the upperweights has to help. They emerge from an easier district so taking district titles gets them easier first round opponents and they have very smartly capitalized on it by generating those extra bonus points. They won last year, and may well do so again.
3. Monroeville- The four superstars should score about 100 points--which would win in some years, but will only get them 3rd place this time around. The huge numbers advantage generated by Pleasant and Troy Christian are way too much to overcome. Still four state champions, if it happens, ought to be reason enough for a great celebration.
4. Waynedale- This is a team that should have lots of opportunities to score at the state level, but the question is, will they. State champion Stiltner and Neff are proven winners, but Ash, Vitallo, Petersheim, Coblentz, and the Beams need to demonstrate their prowess. You have to believe that at least a couple of this group will do so.
5. Delta- This will require that a lot goes right for Delta on the state tournament weekend. Yant must be a finalist and Gombash and Carrisalez have to place well, while Aranjó must be healthy and fit at 103#. Add in some good work by Rayfield and Godsey and this won't seem like such a big stretch.

6. Chanel- Schafer, Kovach, McElligott, and Tschantz are all potential scorers, but they are really going to miss Kiefer at 112#. They need some of the younger teammates like Orrill, J. Schafer, Walters, Collier, and Trusnik to qualify and then score.
7. CVCA- The mystery team who could be 4th or 40th. Kusar is the one proven superstar, but needs to draw away from Moore. Morris and Utley look like potential scorers, but what Powers, Sommers, Hickin, etc. I do is still up in the air.
8. Northmor- Mike Skelton has coached for 30 years and seems ready to retire. A Top Ten finish would be a nice going away gift. Zolman is solid while Skelton and Neer should do some scoring. If young Hemingewr is as good as I think that will help even more.