

DIVISION I

This year, seven state champions and seven state runners-up return to Division I competition - a somewhat higher than normal number. Probably five of this number are bunched at the 119# and 125# weight classes, which suggests excellent competition and, perhaps, some late weight changes. Last year only eight of the 14 champs were from the Northeast District -- percentage-wise their lowest total since 1975. The four champions from the Central District (Ratliff, Felty, Anderson and Walker) were the most ever in big school competition. 1997 also established a high water mark for my forecast with 11 of my top choices winning and the remaining three titles going to those I picked second. I don't ever expect to duplicate these results nor, in fact, do I believe such consistency would be a positive for the sport.

103#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: MASON LENHARD (ST. EDWARD)

TOP CONTENDERS

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|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Dies (Akron Springfield) | 14. Dew (Stow) |
| 3. Ott (Wayne) | 15. Cundall (Maple Hts) |
| 4. Ramirez (Fairmont) | 16. Zinkan (Moeller) |
| 5. Sabin (Eastlake) | 17. Prophet (Sandusky) |
| 6. Smith (St. Xavier) | 18. Novak (St. Ignatius) |
| 7. Di Salvo (Carroll) | 19. Freeman (Findley) |
| 8. Purcell (Coffman) | 20. Gamble (Hoover) |
| 9. Varga (Brunswick) | 21. Moore (Westland) |
| 10. McCreary (Marion Harding) | 22. Thompson (North Ridgeville) |
| 11. Spatola (Elder) | 23. Rohr (Massillon) |
| 12. Penn (Solon) | 24. Mason (Oakhill[s]) |
| 13. Hansen (Pikerington) | 25. Mendez (Lorain Southview) |

In the past, this initial weight class was generally dominated by highly skilled freshman and sophomores with large amounts of youth wrestling experience. However, the past four years has seen older boys, juniors and seniors, dominate with title-winning efforts each year-- the last two from Massillon Perry. In 1998 I expect the pendulum to move back in the other direction with younger wrestlers like Lenhard, Ott, and Smith moving into the forefront.

Lenhard, only a sophomore, has outstanding credentials. A Cadet national champion he immediately moved into the St. Edward's starting line up and compiled a 29-5 record, despite the fact that he was a somewhat undersized 103 pounder. He lost his first round state bout in heartbreaking fashion with a penalty point in overtime for excessive false starts. This year Lenhard is undefeated, but

did not compete at both the Ironman or the MIT. In contrast to last year he apparently has struggled somewhat in making weight but on the mat he has been almost flawless --losing only at 112# to Byers. His relatively light schedule should keep him fresh for the rigors of March.

Lenhard will face a field studded with solid performers from all around the state. At Massillon state alternate Dies has moved past Varga to head a relatively shallow field. Undefeated this year, he dominated a very representative Brecksville Tournament including a 16-8 win over the excellent Smith, and won handily at North Canton. State qualifier Varga nipped Dies last year in district competition, but has not seemed as sharp this year. He was hammered in the Hudson Final by Harry Lester and was upset by Dew and Prophet at Brecksville. However, he is a savvy senior who I anticipate will move it up several notches at tournament time, Dew is a solid choice for the third state berth based on consistent results during the year with Gamble and Rohr a solid step behind this top trio.

Mentor is back to sending four qualifiers to Wright State, but only two would seem to have placement potential. Lenhard, of course, leads the way with Sabin having placement potential. Last year Sabin came into the district with a sectional title and a 23-2 record. He dropped a frenzied quarter final bout to Percival, the eventual third place medalist at Wright State, 12-10 in overtime, and couldn't come back to qualify. This year he was a strong second to the ubiquitous Lester at the Ironman, but then was injured the second week of the season and has not yet returned to competition. Completely healthy he is second best here. Novak started the year in strong fashion-- including a win over Penn-- but has been on a downhill path recently. Penn nipped Cundall in overtime and along with Novak and Mendez should battle for the last two spots.

The deepest district is clearly at Fairfield. It would not be a surprise if three of their four qualifiers placed. The freshman Ott looks to be the "real deal" and cannot be overlooked by anyone. He has not, though, wrestled any of the other highly rated contenders so its difficult to know exactly how good he is. State qualifier Ramirez is back at 103# and is a rugged performer. He crushed the competition at Tiffin. Smith is probably the best in Cincinnati winning the SWOCA and St. Xavier meets and losing only to Dies at Brecksville and Rooney (in an upset) at CIT. He has defeated Spatola three times. Disalvo won the CIT and placed at the MIT and will be a force at Fairfield. Factor in Zinken, Mason, Wilkens (Fairfield) and Langdon (Harrison) and its a crowded field. With this many good wrestlers here expect some upsets.

The field at Darby is by far the weakest of the four, and with five qualifiers it will create some first round mis-matches at Wright State. The two competitors with the best hopes for placement are Purcell and McCreary both of whom have performed well. Purcell has been coming on very strongly during recent weeks,

including a big win at Perrysburg. He was a strong third at the MIT. One wrestler to watch with upset potential is Hansen, who placed well at the SWOCA and wrestled well at the MIT. Other possibilities besides those listed are Josefowicz (Holland Springfield), Rose (Perrysburg) and Simmons (Westerville North).

112#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: MARK JAYNE (ST. EDWARD)

TOP CONTENDERS

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| 2. Percival(Amherst) | 14. Dobbins (Barberton) |
| 3. Spires (Lancaster) | 15. Bamonte (Harrison) |
| 4. Byers (EasJake North) | 16. McMillen (Kilbourne) |
| 5. Saley (Akron Springfield) | 17. Burke (Wayne) |
| 6. McKinney (Sandusky) | 18. West (Fairborn) |
| 7. Heggood (Glen Este) | 19. Slaby (Maple Hts) |
| 8. Mathews (Marion Franklin) | 20. Brooks (North Royalton) |
| 9. Hickey (Mayfield) | 21. Cook (Solon) |
| 10. McGuire (Hilliard Davidson) | 22. Tagliareni I McKay (Pickerington) |
| 11. Bonner (Princeton) | 23. Smith (East Liverpool) |
| 12. Schraibman (Scioto) | 24. Ward (West Carrollton) |
| 13. Townsend (Marion Harding) | 25. Bourquin (Massillon Perry) |
| | 26. Spiccia (Cuyahoga Falls) |

I keep ten-year moving averages of my success rate C3t each weight class, and currently my two worst scores are 112# in Division I and 112# in Division II. I'm not sure it entirely coincidental that the same weight class causes problems in terms of performance forecasting. The jump from 1 03# - populated mostly by very young wrestlers -- and 112# is often viewed as an inordinately large one, and this is just one more set of figures to bolster that claim. Some wrestlers seem hardly to miss a beat (like Ratliff and Wilcox last year), while many others struggle when facing additional age, guile and muscle.

In order to circumvent this problem my choice is Mark Jayne who was fourth at this weight as a freshman, and has returned as a much improved sophomore. Despite the usual, difficult St. Edward's schedule Jayne remains undefeated and without even the whisper of challenge from any Ohio wrestler. He crushed everyone through both the Ironman and MIT, and is very much improved. Last year I noticed that in every instance where he wrestled an opponent a second time his results dramatically improved -- a tribute to both his intelligence and his coaching. Having had twins I know its generally unwise to compare brothers, but the temptation here is too great. Older brother and three-time state champion Eddie might have been a shade quicker, but this younger version is much more

physical and seems to have a larger arsenal of takedowns. Both shared the qualities of enormous intensity and singular focus.

The Mentor District is divided into two segments, four powerful, potential state placers, and a large group of solid journeymen performers. Percival has been out much of the year with a broken hand, but he was very impressive last year. He reversed his sectional loss to Lenhard in the district finals, and then finished a strong third at Wright State losing only a 2-point bout to the eventual champ McBurney. He and Jayne exit the same sectional, and they could have three finals match-ups.

Jayne's ability to improve against individual competitors will be tested here. Byers lost a 3-2 bout to Jayne for the last state qualifying spot, but then lost to him 9-3 at Ironman this year. Both his losses were, in fact, at the Ironman this year. Hickey has shown great improvement losing only to Division II Brooks by a point in the Solon Final, and crushing state qualifier Slaby in their dual. The pairings should be okay with Jayne and Percival at the same sectional as are Byers and Hickey. If they lose only to each other all four should qualify in most pairings scenarios. Somewhat below the group is the erratic Cook, Slaby, Brooks, Diaz (Lorain Southview) and Juliana (Brush), who could jump in if the two early losers from the top quartet end up meeting in the consolation semi-finals.

Saley is the second part of the great one-two punch that Akron Springfield has at the initial two weights. He was sixth last year at the state meet including a 9-0 win over Heggood. This year he won at North Canton and suffered his only loss to Division III state champ Allega in the Brecksville finals. Dobbins, who I thought would go at 103#, is a lukewarm second choice over what is a very weak field after Saley. Besides those listed other possibilities for qualification are Fedoruk (Fitch), and Spiccia (Cuyahoga Falls).

Last year Spires did not appear on my radar screen, and he came very close to being the first wrestler in a number of years to make the state finals without being mentioned in the report. A hard-fought semi-final 7-6 loss to the senior Roy pushed him into consolation bracket where he eventually placed sixth (losing in OT and then by one point again). This year he was a finalist at the MIT losing only to Jayne. At the MIT he showed tremendous defensive skills giving up only 3 points in 4 bouts before losing to Jayne. He seems the best at a crowded Darby field that also boasts state qualifiers McGuire, McKinney, McMillen, Mathews and the non-alliterative Schraibman. That's six returning qualifiers for five spots with Townsend, Harpster, Tagliarini, and Soldatek yet to be accounted for. McKinney is overpoweringly strong in this district - he was second to Spires last year, but was only fourth at Brecksville losing to Saley by six in the (semi-finals. Mathews was fourth in Division II last year wrestling close, generally low scoring bouts (0-3, 4-3, 3-2, 6-5, 1-2) and always giving himself a chance to win. As an opponent, this is not someone you want to capture the initial takedown.

Like Massillon Perry, the Fairfield District is not very strong. Heggood is a returning state qualifier, who won the SWOCA while Bonner has been his most intense rival. Bamonte is an explosive wrestler who gave Heggood two tough bouts and seems to be improving as we move through the year. I've also listed Ward, Burke and West with the latter in particular having good upset potential. Other thoughts are Doggett (Tecumseh), Leugers (Fairfield) and Marchbanks (Talawanda).

119#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JEFF RA TUFF (MARION HARDING)

TOP CONTENDERS

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|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2. McBurney (Massillon Perry) | 15. Ja. Wilcox (Oakhills) |
| 3. Peretti (Boardman) | 16. Sanders (Westland) |
| 4. Shears(Madison) | 17. Bloomfield (Tiffan) |
| 5. Shutty (Normandy) | 18. Mazzarella (Westlake) |
| 6. Daugherty ONayne) | 19. Mcintire (Lakota West) |
| 7. Dimitris(Brecksville) | 20. Balog (Medina) |
| 8. Jackson (Hamilton) | 21. Burich (Eastlake North) |
| 9. Guillozet Greenville) | 22. Zinkan (Moellar) |
| 10. Simon (North Canton) | 23. Egar (Coffman) |
| 11. Giesige (Celina) | 24. Lybarger (Mt. Vernon) |
| 12 .Pierson(Beavercreek) | 25. Pflug (Maple Hts) |
| 13. Barkhurst (Glen Este) | 26. Desko (Fitch) |
| 14. Amick (Groveport Madison) | 27. Cook (Solon) |

It's not often you have returning state champions at the same weight class let alone a third place finisher and a state runner-up should Bentley opt to compete here. That's the reason this is one of the last of the 42 weight class essays to be written. With modern technology they can be completed in any order so this one came last with the hopes that the Top Gun would clarify issues -- and, perhaps, to some extent that happened.

I have had last year's 112# state champ Ratliff rated first all year and his win at the Top Gun confirms two things. First, when it comes to big matches Ratliff is going to be very tough to beat, and second, the real danger for him is an indifferent performance in an early-round bout such as his overtime, quarter-final win over the excellent Daugherty. Maybe you can catch him looking ahead and less focused and a strong competitor could eliminate him. I thought that might have happened two years ago when Nettle pinned him in the state quarter-finals. One other thing, Ratliff is a brilliant wrestler but the 11-1 score just cannot be

indicative of the difference between he and McBurney. Next time my guess is that it will be a lot closer. Ratliff can be fun to watch. He isn't out there trying to protect his record, and he isn't afraid to take a well-calculated chance. Only a junior he will be a top-rated senior next year not only for his talent, but for his love of the big bout.

As I'll discuss at 125# I believe Bentley will go at 125# thus giving Ratliff a relatively straightforward path through this district. State qualifiers Giesige and Bloomfield are back, but they don't figure to challenge Ratliff here or the other big-timers at Wright State. Amick, who every year has patiently waited for Bentley to select a weight class, should do well, too. He may have a chance for a low place and greatly improve upon his current ranking. Add Rediger (Toledo Central Catholic), Ducat (Maumee), and Kresser (Sandusky) to those already listed for consideration for the last one or two state berths.

It's a great field at Massillon Perry. State Champion McBurney won at the Ironman and the MIT before his second place finish at the Top Gun. A great down-tempo, defensively oriented wrestler he is still difficult to beat. His challenge here will come from state third place medalist Peretti, who has lost only to Ratliff. Its interesting that Peretti and Ratliff have now met three times with Ratliff winning all three (14-2,5-2 and 9-4). Dimitris was a district third at 103# last year, but then copped a fifth place ribbon at Wright State including a huge first round win over Lenhard. The first and biggest issue for Dimitris is just to make his team at this weight with the excellent Scott winning about half their wrestle offs. The loser must compete at 130#. The fine sophomore Simon is right behind this trio with Balog and Desko other challengers. .

Shutty and Shears stand out at Mentor especially since state qualifier Federico (Willoughby South) will apparently miss the entire season due to a back injury. Shears was the district champ at 112# last year shutting down Jayne 7-3 in the semis and defeating Chavers in the final. Two victories at Wright Sate put him the semi-finals where Justin Wicox sent him into the consolation bracket and an eventual fifth place finish (after Jayne returned the district favor). This year Shears only loss was a 4-3 thriller to Division III state runner-up at Wadsworth. Shutty, a Padua transfer, remains undefeated at this writing with titles at Avon lake and Brecksville. A Division II state and then a 3-1 consolation bout to eventual third place winner Simmons. The rest of this district is not strong.

There is a glut of low placement type talent at Fairfield. State qualifiers Daugherty, Jackson, and Guillozet are good performers while all of those ranked are not that far behind. I've noted a multitude of close bouts in local Cincinnati tournaments indicating that, like the NFL, parity has become a reality.

125#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: ROGER MERRELL (MANSFIELD MADISON)

TOP CONTENDERS

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|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Ju. Wilcox (Oakhills) | 14. Petsanis (Willoughby South) |
| 3. Bentley (Groveport Madison) | 15. Bolyard (Akron Springfield) |
| 4. Skoch (Madison) | 16. S. Walls (Sandusky) |
| 5. Billow (Nordonia) | 17. Stamper (Miamisburg) |
| 6. Kaplan (Sycamore) | 18. Cost (Solon) |
| 7. New (Marion Franklin) | 19. M. Wahoff (Fairfield) |
| 8. Key (Butler) | 20. Grecol (St. Edward) |
| 9. Sarge (East Liverpool) | 21. Smith (Marion Harding) |
| 10. Caruso (Brecksville) | 22. Neely (Thomas Worthington) |
| 11. Sheets (Westland) | 23. Wensinger (Fremont Ross) |
| 12. Z., Kallai (Wadsworth) | 24. Zollers (Massillon Perry) |
| 13. Lyons (Moeller) | 25. Carano (Maple Hts) |
| | 26. Vargo (Normandy) |

There are a series of unusual crosscurrents at 125# this year. Defending state champion Roger Merrell switched from Mansfield to Mansfield Madison, but also has sat out the entire season because of eligibility issues. These will apparently be resolved some time during the last weekend of January, and Merrell will begin competing at 125#. He is an exceptional talent who blew through the state meet with a first period fall and a 32-7 margin over his three other opponents (13-2 in the final).

That somewhat obscures the fact that he did lose four times last year- a couple of times in inexplicable fashion. How will this lay-off impact him? I don't believe it will be a significant issue since he has had the excellent Yetzers as workout partners (along, I'm sure with his state champion brother) and has four weeks of competition still ahead. It might even be a plus with Merrell far fresher and less "nicked up" than the competition. Of course, this is all speculation since he has not yet performed at this weight class.

He will not have as easy a path at Wright State as last year. Merrell or no Merrell, I came very close to choosing the superb Wilcox here. His regular season record over the past four years is a magical 106-1 and he is a three time state placer -losing the state title by a point to Ratliff last year. With so many unknowns about Merrell this is the safe choice and in the long run it may also have been the best choice. As always Wilcox has been devastating this year crushing Bein (his only local vanquisher) at the same SWOCA and manhandling Carrizales at the GMWVA. If anybody deserves a state title it is probably Wilcox and this may well be his year.

Bentley was second to Merrell at both the district and state level last year winning several very close bouts at the district level. Certified at 119# I think he will

compete here for two reasons. He has an excellent shot at being runner-up to Merrell at Darby, and if Wilcox and Merrell are in the same half-bracket at Wright State he would again have something of a clear path to the final. At the same time he is probably a step behind the top three at 119#. Smith, a 119 pounder much of the year, moved up when Ratliff moved down. He gave Merrell a tough 14-9 tussle in the first round of districts last year. That may be a hint that to beat Merrell you may have to catch him early.

Wilcox dominates an otherwise pedestrian weight class at Fairfield. State qualifier Key returns either here or at the far more crowded 119# class. He won two state bouts last year, but Kaplan may have surpassed based on early season performance. Lyons and Stamper may be the two principal battlers for the spot.

Two-time state qualifiers Skoch heads up an otherwise very weak Mentor District. Skoch has lost only two regular season bouts in the past three years, but has not yet won at Wright State. As a freshman he gave away a sure first round win to Bloomfield surrendering a five-point move in the waning seconds, and then last year drawing Bentley and the excellent Nash back-to-back, He should be a high placer this year. Folks like Petsanis, Cost and Carano could be the other qualifiers, but there is real opportunity here. Grecol who looked so good at the end of his sophomore year, but struggled all last year might be ideally placed in 1998,"

The deepest weight class is at Massillon Perry. Two-time state qualifier Billow battled injuries all last year and won only one district bout. This year he has been at both 125# and 130# with good success. He was fourth at the Ironman at 125# and won the WRC title at 130#. State qualifier Sarge has low place potential while Bolyard and Caruso should battle for the last spot with the excellent Kallai. This is an excellent group with real possibility of upsets over Bilow and/or Sarge. Zollars, Pavkov (Barberton), Bucur (Hudson) and Crawford (Fitch) are also good and add to an already zesty mix. The big unknown is Golombiewski (Massillon Jackson) who has had lots of experience and success. He has been plagued by a series of injuries over the past two years and may not be ready to meet the trials of a three weight class jump and the level of competition we find here.

130#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: MIKE KULCZYCKI (ST. EDWARD)

TOP CONTENDERS

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|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2. Paisz (Wadsworth) | 6. Osolin (Eastlake North) |
| 3. Burch (Harrison) | 7. Branham (Westland) |
| 4. Linberg (Fairfield) | 8. Goodwin (Wapakoneta) |
| 5. Sikora (GlenOak) | 9. Artino (Nardon) |

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|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 10. Lampe (Glen Este) | 19. Cruz (North Ridgeville) |
| 11. Freeman (Marion Harding) | 20. Beckley (Hudson) |
| 12. McCoy (Elder) | 21. Maher (Pickerington) |
| 13. J. Yetzer (Mansfield Madison) | 22. Leidich (Strongsville) |
| 14. Chase (Mentor) | 23. Burd (Fitch) |
| 15. Heman (Madison) | 24. J. Doggett (Trcumseh) |
| 16. Bennett (Findlay) | 25. Scott (Brecksville) |
| 17. Distel (Colerain) | 26. Abrams (Mason) |
| 18. Scott (Scioto) | 27. Neiheisel (Oakhills) |

Despite being substantially less than 100% physically, Mike Kulczycki dominated the 125# class last year as he picked up his first state title after finishing second and sixth the two preceding year. Suffering from the lingering effects of a stress fracture that limited him to only seven regular season bouts it was touch and go as to whether he would be able to compete at all. And yet, once unleashed, he had but one of his 12 tournament trail opponents come within seven points of him.' As he closes a brilliant career he seems substantially healthier, and must be rated as one of the top 130s in the country. He is certainly a heavy favorite to repeat, with perhaps, his two principal obstacles being to remain injury-free and weight management.

Osolin who was sixth last year at 119t#, is next best at the Mentor District. He is currently 15-3 losing twice by narrow scores (once in overtime) at the Ironman. After that its wide open for the last two spots with Hernan a district semi-finalist, and Chase,an OT semi-final loser to Lampe at Brecksville, the top contenders. However, Cruz, Leidich, Stetka (North Royalton) and Fogliano (Maple Hts.) all have upset potential.

The battle for the three berths at Massillon Perry may be the most difficult to forecast at any district. Sikora surprised many people (including me) by capturing the third and last state berth last year, and then won four state bouts last year (including one over Paisz) to take fourth. I think he may again be third best at his district, but he obviously has the ability to surprise. Still, district champ Paisz returns this year and is currently undefeated. Fifth last year, he has finalist potential provided he is again bracketed away from Kulczycki. Artino has come a long way from his first weekend at the Ironman where he went 1-2. He won the WRC at 135# and gave state runner-up Burns a battle at the MIT. It probably doesn't hurt having the lacaboni twins and Billow for workout partners. The wild card here is what happen with the Brecksville line-up since both Dimitris and Scott are exceptional, but the loser of their 119# wrestle off competes at 130#. When it was Dimitris (fifth at 103# last year) he won the Brecksville dumping Lampe handily in the finals; when it was Scott he was third at St. Xavier. Either of them has strong upset potential here. Beckley won the giant GMWIA and Burd is 17-1, but they are underdogs here. The somewhat easier 135# class may capture their attention. Murty (Brunswick) and Everhart (Massillon Perry) are

also strong with Miller (Cuyahoga Falls) and Clark (Uniontown Lake) also in the running. It will be a strong competition.

State qualifier Branham lost a first-round overtime bout to Paisz last year and that was the difference between placing and not placing. He was third this year at the GMWIA (after inexplicably not being seeded), losing in the first round to Clem then winning seven straight consolation bouts (including one over Clem). The quartet of Goodwin, Freeman, Bennett and J. Yetzer are all better -than-average performers, but do not stand out. Certainly able to go with that top group are Ma. Neely (Thomas Washington), Bauman (Bowsher) rated No.1 in his area, and Rolf (Defiance) about as good. In fact the 16-man bracket at this district is really very lightly differentiated. People like Ahman (Holland Springfield), Zychowitz (Perrysburg) and Strouth (Coffman), who I have down on my list, have nearly the same performance level as those at the top. It promises great district competition, but little in the way of eventual state places.

A real wild card emerges in the Southwest District. Eddie Burch, fourth at 135# last year, has been injured all season but will begin competition soon. Despite wrestling up a weight last year (because of state champ Wandsnider), he went 29-5 including four state wins. Many in the southwest believe he has the talent to upset Kulcycki and win it all. Like Kulczycki was last year, he'll be fresh and ready to turn it on big time, but I'm not convinced that that will be enough to unseat Kulczycki.

Also in the Southwest, state qualifier Linberg has spent the entire year at 135# before certifying at 130#. Last year at Wright State he defeated the highly regarded Rob Lentz in the first round, then lost a tense overtime struggle to eventual state runner-up Zimmerman. An 8-7 consolation also added to the "what might have been" thoughts for him. This year he was fourth at the SWOCA and third at Kenston losing early both times at 135#. However, I believe he'll be a real force at this class. Lampe won the SWOCA and S1. Xavier, but was handled by Dimitris in the Brecksville final. He is a very consistent performer. There is a boatload of contenders after this duo with those listed above and Gnau (Xenia). Mallue (Centerville) and Wiley (Carroll) as fop contenders.

135# PROJECTED CHAMPION: RYAN BERTIN (ST. EDWARD)

TOP CONTENDERS

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|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2. G. Lacaboni (Nordia) | 7. Smith (North Royalton) |
| 3. Wirtzberger (Madison) | 8. Jenny (Glen Ester) |
| 4. Scruggs (Sycamore) | 9. Davis (Moeller) |
| 5. Conway (Sandusky) | 10. Smigel (Beavercreek) |
| 6. McAdams (Brecksville) | 11. Crilley (Northland) |

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|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 12. Holzheimer (St. Ignatius) | 19. Moos (Amherst) |
| 13. Mirisciotti (Butler) | 20. Lambers (Elder) |
| 14. Partee (Hilliard Davidson) | 21. N. Yetzer (Mansfield Madison) |
| 15. McCabe (St. Xavier) | 22. C. Kallai (Wadsworth) |
| 16. Yurchisen (Garfield Hts.) | 23. J. Smith (Findlay) |
| 17. Trimble (Hayes) | 24. Jakuszewski (Green) |
| 18. Williamson (Massillon Perry) | 25. Hawald (Solon) |

This will be a tremendously entertaining weight class with lots of outstanding individuals sporting a wide variety of styles. At the moment I count at least 13 returning state qualifiers, including three who placed. Not only will the state meet be exciting, but every district looks relatively deep and powerful.

Picking a champion here as essentially between the senior, Gino Iacaboni and the sophomore Ryan Bertin. Bertin has won their two meetings this year but is certainly not upset proof. Last year Iacaboni, at this weight class, won sectional and district titles and then won three state bouts before falling to Felty in the finals 6-5. Looks like pretty bluechip credentials from here. Bertin was a state qualifier at 119#, but he is rapidly moving up the performance curve -- and two victories over Iacaboni cannot be disregarded. One danger is that neither can afford to look ahead with the wealth of other talent at this weight class.

The Mentor District is loaded. Besides Bertin, three other qualifiers will compete. Wirtzberger debuted just last week after battling the injury bug, and he is very good. Last year he was a state semi-finalist at 135# , losing 11-7 to Felty and then falling to sixth. State qualifier Holzheimer, like the little girl with the curl, can either be very good or something less than that while Smith, another state qualifier, is a battle-hardened veteran. Yurchisen, the promising Moos, Hawald and Sawyer (Strongsville) are a second quartet one of whom, I'm guessing, will upset a state qualifier. Both Bosley (Mayfield) and Sabatino (Brush) must be given long-shot status here as well.

It's more of a two-man battle at Massillon Perry. Last year McAdams qualified at 130# and advanced to the state semi-finals before losing and falling to fifth place. This year he beat both Conway (in overtime) and Jenny (13-9) on his way to the Brecksville title, but was tripped up by Holzheimer at St. Xavier and finished third. He should match up well with Iacaboni leaving only the third spot open - wide open. Williamson and Jakuszewski are a clear step behind the top duo, but may be marginally better than everyone else. An interesting candidate could be Chris Kallai - who has moved up from 125# when Zak Kallai decided to go at that class. He will certainly test that second twosome.

Conway would seem to somewhat better than anyone else competing at Darby. A state qualifier last year he lost a one-point first round bout and was eliminated. Wrestling as high as 160# he has lost only to the aforementioned McAdams, and

his combination of power and speed will test anyone in the state at this weight class. State qualifier Crilley will find it tough going at the state level much as did last year when he drew eventual state champ Wandsnider and State fourth Bukky in his first two bouts. The remainder of this group is somewhat below what I see at other districts, and the qualifiers other than Conway will struggle win even once at Wright State.

There are five returning state qualifiers at Fairfield and several others with virtually equivalent credentials. The standout, so far has been Scruggs who is currently 19-0 with three tourney titles. Last year at Wright State he lost to Iacaboni by one and to Wahoff in the consolation round in overtime. He was particularly impressive at the SWOCA this year -- defeating Smigel, Jenny and Maher all by 6 points. I've rated state qualifier Jenny second best here with runner-up finishes at SWOCA, Brecksville and St. Xavier. State qualifier Davis is excellent and should easily qualify, while Smigel has bounced from weight to weight making it hard to value his performances. Mirisciotti along with McGabe and Lambers will need something very good to happen to qualify, while Guess (Mason) and Smith (Tecumseh) look to be out of luck.

140#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: KEATON ANDERSON (PICKERINGTON)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2. Tolar (ST. Edward) | 14. Schoolcraft (Beavercreek) |
| 3. D. Walls (Sandusky) | 15. Eden (Mentor) |
| 4. B. Wahoff (Fairfield) | 16. McIntyre (Rogers) |
| 5. Drake (Barberton) | 17. Clemens (Carroll) |
| 6. Lattavo (GlenOak) | 18. Salzman (Celina) |
| 7. Miglets (Fitch) | 19. Snyder (Tecumseh) |
| 8. DiSalvo (North Olmsted) | 20. Strunk (Harrison) |
| 9. Olinger (Fairmont) | 21. Nader (St. Ignatius) |
| 10. Hancock (Solon) | 22. Spreng (Mt. Vernon) |
| 11. Waggoner (Perrysburg) | 23. McCool (Coffman) |
| 12. Feldman (Mueller) | 24. Graham (New Philadelphia) |
| 13. Fitch (Massillon Perry) | 25. Neely (Thomas Worthington) |
| | 26. Siegler (Strongsville) |

In the 60 years of state wrestling competition, there have been 32 three- or four-time state champs of whom 12 won all of their titles in the large school division. Interestingly, no Central District wrestler has ever won as many as three big school titles and, in fact, until last year only two of the 78 large school two-time champs came from the Central District (high marks for those who immediately identified Joe East and Rex Holman). This is a strange quirk

considering the many Division II and III wrestlers from the Columbus area who have won multiple titles, and the powerful teams in those divisions who have been strong for a quarter century.

This year that will all change as the exceptional, two-time champ Keaton Anderson will be a heavy favorite to take home his third title. He has been brilliant this year cutting through a difficult schedule with titles at the Ironman (defeating the Russian champ from Blair), the SWOCA (never going more than five minutes), and the MIT (with a dominating win over Ty Morgan). He has added new dimensions to his attack, particularly on this feet where he is vastly improved over last year. Even as a two-time champ he was not satisfied to polish already present skills, but continued to seek improvement in new areas. Most impressively, he remains committed to going out and challenging tough competition rather than simply wrestling not to lose -- as some defending champs occasionally do. He should dominate a solid field on contenders.

The presence of Anderson will probably chase away a number of seniors who are committed to maximizing their chances for a state title. For example, I anticipate the Lou lacaboni will compete at 145# while several others have made the tough cut to 135#. However this does provide opportunities for high state placement in possibly very favorable circumstances.

Anderson's district at Darby is relatively weak. Walls, a state qualifier at 125# last year, is explosive and placement should be within his grasp. He lost a tough 9-8 bout in his only state appearance last year. He was undefeated at the Springfield duals, but has been injured recently and will struggle to be ready by tourney time. The remainder of this district has few standouts with perhaps, Perrysburg and Hudson runner -up. Waggoner, having the best shot at a low place.

Tolar, only a junior, leads a relatively weak Mentor District. Last year as a sophomore Tolar was a district finalist, but then suffered a first round state disappointment and failed to get pulled back into the consolation round. This year he has undertaken has a brutal schedule finishing fifth at the Iron man and third at Medina. His only Ohio losses have been to L. lacaboni, who I have rated at 145# and Anderson (10-0). DiSalvo and Hancock look to be next best with state alternate Eden in line for the fourth slot, assuming he does not compete at 135#.

At Massillon Perry there look to be four quality contenders for three state berths. State qualifier Drake has won at Norton while finishing second to Division I powerhouse Murphy at Wadsworth. He spent most of the year at 145#. Lattavo won two district matchers at this class last year, and has come on strong this year with wins at Canal Fulton and Brecksville - the latter via wins over both Eden and Disalvo. Miglets is scheduled to go at 145# (although certified at 140#). but if Lou lacaboni opts for that weight, I believe Miglets has a better chance of state qualification here. Miglets had two district wins last year a sophomore. but

also dropped a pair of 6-5 heart breakers. This year he is 14-2 (one loss by default) also having lost to Murphy at Wadsworth, and by the same score to Drake, 8-5. Fitch is the fourth possibility here. He had two district wins last year and easily won the Perry Tourney several weeks ago. Just now getting into top-notch shape he'll challenge the top three. Graham is the long-shot in this group.

The Southwest District is in disarray. With so many highly credentialed wrestlers currently at 135# we might anticipate some slippage in this direction. State qualifier Wahoff looks to be the best of those presently at 140# with state alternate Olinger and, perhaps, Feldman next in line. Of course, Davis and Feldman may switch weights at tourney time. Olinger was at 145# last year losing to Griffith for the last qualifying spot. This year he won at Tiffin. In truth, after Wahoff and Olinger everything else is pretty much up for grabs.

145#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: LOU IACABONI (NORDONIA)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Kapustka (Centerville) | 14. Malone (Shaw) |
| 3. Mauro (Carroll) | 15. Nemeth (St. Edward) |
| 4. M. Smith (Lorain Southview) | 16. B. Dusina (Kilbourne) |
| 5. R. Smith (Miamisburg) | 17. Magistrelli (Maple Hts.) |
| 6. Watters (Wadsworth) | 18. Smith (Massillon Perry) |
| 7. Padgett (Fairfiel) | 19. Edwards (Westerville South) |
| 8. Gerbino (Brecksville) | 20. Butler (Sycamore) |
| 9. Cannon (Clay) | 21. Escola (Massillon Jackson) |
| 10. Pace (Talawanda) | 22. Tammerine (Perrysburg) |
| 11. Luneke (Wayne) | 23. Jarrett (North Ridgeville) |
| 12. J. Smith (Chillicothe) | 24. Tang (Defiance) |
| 13. Cameron (Pickerington) | 25. Orrill (Bedford) |

Yoshi Nakamura's victory last March extended an amazing streak at this weight class. The last 11 State champions at 145# have all represented the Northeast District as have, in fact, 17 of the last 18. Only Monty Dagley's 8-3 win over Joe Gucciardo of St. Edward in 1986 interrupts an almost two decade-long skein.

This year, however, the 145# class is probably the weakest one in Division I with the exception of heavyweight. Given that vacuum, one could anticipate substantial movement in this direction as a number of the 140s may move up to avoid Keaton Anderson, while some normal 152s may certify at 145# - avoiding

the logjam at the top of that class and, perhaps, finding a more congenial environment here.

Utilizing that logic flow, I've chosen Lou Iacaboni to outmaneuver a wide variety of opponents in a succession of close matches and take home the title. It will be a gamble for Iacaboni to make this move since he is probably a relatively sure second or third at his certified weight of 140#. However, he has' already won a third place medal at 130# last year, and his best opportunity to win it all is probably here. It will be a challenge since he is not one of the all-time strongest 140s, but he has a boatload of experience back to the age of 7, and nice technique. He was fourth at 140# at the MIT, losing a controversial semi-final to Ty Morgan by a point and then losing to Tolar for third. At 145# he won the WRC title over state qualifier Drake by a comfortable 10-3 margin.

Six of my top 11 wrestlers exit the Fairfield District which means at least two of them will not compete at Wright State. It's a varied lot, all with reasonably good credentials. Kapustka was a state qualifier last year at 152# as a freshmen losing twice - including a one point defeat by Gerbino. This year he was second at the GMWJA to my Division III choice Schuler and won at Fairfield over a tough field. Should he wrestle comfortably at 145#, he will be a real handful. If Carroll High School had had one less boy in the top three grades, they would have remained in Division II, but as it is they will compete in the large school division this year. Fortunately, they have a terrific squad led by Mauro -- who was sixth last year at 140#. A state semi-finalist, he was TF'ed by the redoubtable Marchette and couldn't come back in the consolation rounds. This year Mauro was second in the MIT and first at the CIT and Carroll tourneys. Not spectacular, he is a hard-nosed competitor who can grind down his opposition. I'm not sure where to rate the sophomore Padgett. He has won absolutely everything including the SWOCA, Kenston and Fairfield, but has not faced a lot of tough competition. He won two district bouts at 152# as a freshmen last year and may well do better than his current rating. Take a look at him, he'll be one of the stars during the next two years and maybe this year as well. Both Smith and Pace are returning state qualifiers while Luneke is a steady veteran. They certainly are capable of challenging any at this district. My feeling is that all four of the qualifiers will win bouts at the state level and, frankly, a number of those left behind could do the same.

The Massillon Perry District has three very strong performers. I've already mentioned Iacaboni, but Gerbino could easily be a high placer. A state qualifier at 152# last year he won two state bouts, but lost the other two by a total of just 3 points. This year he has been a consistent placer, but did not reach the finals at the Ironman, Brecksville or St. Xavier. However, he closed with a rush last year and we can probably expect the same this year. Watters may have moved past Gerbino with a win at Wadsworth and North Canton. Last year after a brilliant season, though, he did not get out of his sectional. Escola or Smith will have to

pull an upset to qualify and that will not be easy. They are probably 6-8 points behind the top trio. Fleshaur (Green) and Eaton (Brunswick) are other candidates here.

I anticipate close competition at Darby, much like what we'll see at the crowded Fairfield District -- but this will be at a somewhat lower level. I think the trio of Cannon, J. Smith and, maybe, Cameron may be a little ahead of the rest of the pack. Cannon, consistently rated number one in the Toledo area at this class, was a state alternate last year - making the semi-finals then losing three Saturday bouts. In 1997-98 he already has won titles at Perrysburg, St. Johns and Northwood with impressive ease, including a big win over Luneke. Josh Smith is back at 145# and he was very impressive at the Massillon Perry District. He won four bouts against tough competition, but lost twice to Zmith to end up in fourth place. He wrestles a schedule that is nearly invisible to me, but what results I have seen are impressive. He may quickly surpass this ranking. Cameron, who has had good success at 152#, should do at least as well at this weight, while Dusina and Edward will be competitive. Factor in Tammerine and Tang along with Sauder (Coffman), Wilt (Scioto) and May (Maumee) and it should be very interesting.

There is a certain aura of uncertainty at Mentor. The exceptional sophomore Mike Smith returns at this weight after a strong season last year. Already this year he was a strong second at the tough Midwest Classic and an easy first at Southview. He would easily seem to be best here with good state placement potential. However, state qualifier Tony Miller, who has missed the entire season, appears to have certified at this class as well. If so, Southview probably has the two best 145s in this district. One of them will have to move up to 152# or even 160#, and I've chosen Miller to be that person. The remaining three qualifiers will come from a somewhat diluted talent pool. Malone is very tough, but has not seen the kind of competition likely to hone his skills. Two other interesting possibilities are Nemeth and Magistrelli. The former has received little attention wrestling among the star-studded cast at St. Edward, but ever so gradually his results continue to improve. Given the tough schedule, the variety of workout partners and the quality of coaching, Nemeth may catch some opponent unawares. He won five bouts at the MIT for a sixth and went 4-0 on their Pennsylvania tour against rugged competition. Magistrelli, only a freshman, has the look of a future champ. He was third in the toughest weight class at Franklin Hts. and was fourth at Brecksville - losing to Gerbino in overtime. Watch out for him. Other possibilities, besides those listed are Gizzi (St. Ignatius) and Waight (Brush).

152#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: GRAY MAYNARD (ST. EDWARD)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2. Mahone (Solon) | 15. Ward (Shaker Hts.) |
| 3. Lange (Nordonia) | 16. Griffith (Centerville) |
| 4. .Sellet- (Harrison) | 17. Gamble (Hoover) |
| 5. Shanklin (Fairfield) | 18. Lampe (Glen Este) |
| 6. Zmith (Fitch) | 19. Ward (Mansfield Madison) |
| 7. Mc Intire (Holy Name) | 20. Spear (Stow) |
| 8. Auker (Mt. Vernon) | 21. McDaniel (VWayne) |
| 9. DeWald (Tiffin) | 22. Abrams (Lebanon) |
| 10. Miller (Lorain Southview) | 23. T. Januszewski (Strongsville) |
| 11. Carraher (St. Xavier) | 24. Mantilla (Thomas Worthington) |
| 12. J. Dusina (Kilbourne) | 25. Brennemall (Green) |
| 13. Gerwe (Milford) | 26. Krieger (Coffman) |
| 14. Carroll (Elder) | 27. Davis (Wadsworth) |

This should be one of the most interesting and compelling- stories of the entire state tournament. If every weight was as strong and diversified as this one Jacobs Field would not be large enough for the state finals. There are four principal players likely to dominate this drama, but at least, three other have the ability to play a significant role in its resolution. Lets take a brief look at each of the top quartet.

Gray Maynard is a crushingly strong 152-pounder who is excellent on his feet. Nevada State Champion as a sophomore he transferred to St. Edwards last year and after a bit of a slow start came on like a whirlwind at tourney time. He crushed all opposition at 140# until the finals when he lost for the second time to Keaton Anderson. Interestingly enough he took Anderson down six times in their two bouts. This year he has again dominated every opponent with the singular exception of Lange who he beat 9-8 in the MIT finals. Again, as with Anderson, his problem with Lange was staying off his back.

Myron Mahone also was state runner-up last year (at 152#) but had a different path to the finals than Maynard. He won his district final in overtime and then won his first three state bouts by a total of 5 points. An ankle injury incurred in the semi-finals made him an easy target for Walker in the finals. Back at 152# in 1998, his only two losses were last second defeats in Pennsylvania and he, too has consistently dominated his opponents. Whereas Maynard has a tendency to go back, Mahone may be vulnerable to leg attacks, but only by the very best of takedown wrestlers. Conditioning, too, could also be a factor.

Lange, a state qualifier at 140# last year, is another one of these great youth wrestlers from the Cleveland/Akron corridor. The only junior in my top group, he has lost only to Maynard by a point and during the first week of the season to Gerbino in overtime. Not as strong as either Maynard or Mahone he is

excellent defensively and the most opportunistic of the top quartet. He will need to combat the strength and athleticism in this field with solid defense and superb conditioning.

Sellet won the Southwest District at 152# last year and met eventual champ Walker in the first round. Ahead by one point he took an ill-advised shot with 10 seconds to go and lost by a point. He started a trifle sluggishly this season at 160#, but now appears to be warming to the task at hand. He, too, is very strong, but he must maintain intensity and focus if he is to compete with this top group. Undefeated this year he may not have faced the caliber of competition of the other three.

Maynard and Mahone both compete at Mentor with the fast improving McIntire. Factor in 135# state qualifier Tony Miller and all four qualifiers could have last names beginning with the letter "M". Miller is a wonderful athlete who found that he disliked early retirement and rejoined Southview's squad last week. Certified at 145#, he'll probably be here and allow Michael Smith to remain at 145#. Certainly, he may also be tempted by the much weaker district at 160#. But make no mistake, Miller is very good - his first week back he won at Waite. Winner at Solon and Southview (at 160#), McIntire is 16-1 with his only defeat to Fenos at the higher weight class. As a sectional champ he could, with luck, be away from the top two at Mentor and be a finalist. The fourth spot, depending on Miller, is wide open. I've listed Ward and Januszewski (certified at 145#, but who I believe may compete here), but it will likely depend on how the consolation bracket unwinds.

At Massillon Perry, Lange will not have an easy time with the rugged Zmith. A state qualifier at 145# last year he won two bouts at Wright State. He has strong state placement potential this year again the third and final spot is wide open with Gamble, Spear, Brenneman and Davis the top contenders. Gamble, who certified at 145#, may calculate that his state qualification chances are better here.

While the Darby district has three returning state qualifiers at this weight I just don't see them matching up well with the top contenders. DeWald was fifth last year, but was third at Tiffin and second at Avon Lake. Dusina won two state bouts last year, but could well opt for the far easier 145# class-- pushing his brother to this class. Auker was first at the Gorman and the Wazie, but both times faced weak field.

The deepest reservoir of talent is undoubtedly at Fairfield. While I've put Mahone, Maynard, Sellet and Lange in my top quartet, McIntire, Zmith and Shanklin are a formidable trio. At many weight classes this second group would be vying for a state crown rather than low places. Shanklin has been a great performer since his freshman year. A two-time state qualifier he stands at 14-2 with one of the losses to the

exceptional Santiago at Kenston. He and Sellet compete at the same sectional so should be apart at the district and state level. State qualifiers Carroll, Griffith and Carraher all return with Carroll, perhaps, having the weakest performance record to this point. Mix in the excellent Gerwe, consistent Lampe, Abrams and McDaniel and it should be a real battle just to get to Wright State. With 160# far easier at Fairfield, some of this group may select that weight class.

160#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JOEL WALKER (UPPER ARLINGTON)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Fair (St. Edward) | 15. Watts (Oakhills) |
| 3. Dysart (Coffman) | 16. Havlin (Mt. Healthy) |
| 4. Maher (Pickerington) | 17. Cromly (Toledo St. Francis) |
| 5. Wright (East Liverpool) | 18. Dolezal (Carroll) |
| 6. McWilliams (Grahanna Lincoln) | 19. Hertl (Westlake) |
| 7. Fenos (North Royalton) | 20. Stark (Massillon Jackson) |
| 8. Osting (Piqua) | 21. Fimple (Massillon Perry) |
| 9. Lance (Wadsworth) | 22. Niehaus (Harrison) |
| 10. Aguilar (Thomas Worthington) | 23. Thorpe (Sidney) |
| 11. Bonati (Lakota West) | 24. Blanton (Shaker Hts.) |
| 12. Nealy (Sylvania Northview) | 25. Carter (Mt. Vernon) |
| 13. Whaley (Madison) | 26. Overman (Maple Hts.) |
| 14. Miocic (Eastlake North) | 27. Segur (Whitmer) |

While it is clear that this weight class is not nearly as strong as 152#, there is still substantial up-top strength. So while we may see a flow of wrestlers from 152# they will not move into a class without substantial power. It is also true that this class (along with 112# in Division III) is the one where I've gone longest without a correct prediction. My last winner was in 1993 with Juggy Franklin and I've missed the last the last four years.

My choice this year, and it's a very close call, is defending state champ Joel Walker. Last year I came within a hairs breadth of choosing him, but ended up putting him second. In district action he lost twice to take a fourth, but then at Wright State squeaked out a first round win, gained momentum by avenging his district loss to Shuler, and then took the title over Mahone. This year he has been outstanding winning everything big except a finals loss to Dysart at Upper Arlington. He'll be a relatively small 160 pounder, but his takedown work should negate that.

The Darby District is loaded. Walker, who is not even ranked #1 in his own area, will have incredible competition. Dysart, as mentioned, upset Walker 10-6, but

then lost to Fair at Medina after having an early lead. A transfer from Pickerington, he missed most of last year due to injury. He also nipped Maher on criteria at the MIT and has had a very consistent season. Maher will be a big 160 pounder who won this district at this weight last year. He did win two-state bouts but failed to place. He has a decision to make insofar as he could very easily move to 171# - encountering a much easier district environment but having little or no chance to win the state title. While this district is very tough Maher still has a significant probability of being state champ. I look for him at 160#. Rather unbelievably that means McWilliams, who was sixth at 152# at Wright State last year, may only be fourth best in this district. He won at Davidson (when Lange had to forfeit) and Worthington, and was a district champion last year as well. I may be underrating him. Behind this quartet lurks a number of solid performers any of whom could qualify out of Massillon Perry. However it is likely that Healy, Aguilar, Segur and Carter will be battling for just one state berth.

A wrestler that will challenge all of this Columbus group will be the excellent Fair. A surprise state qualifier at 152# last year - he ended the season with a dozen losses - he has made enormous strides in 1997-98. He won at both the Ironman and MIT defeating people like Dysart and Biel in the process. Still not real strong on his feet, but a tremendous mat wrestler, his only loss has been to my Division II pick Becks. Fenos is probably second best at Mentor with a 16-1 record losing a one-point match to Smith in the Wadsworth finals. The rest of the field is substantially behind the top duo with those rated above and Barnes (Berea), Dominick (Euclid), Hoover (Willoughby South) and Balog (Southview) battling for the last two state berths.

At Massillon Perry state qualifiers Wright and Lance face very minimal competition. Both grabbed district 3rds last year, but failed to win a bout at Wright State. This year Wright defeated the highly regarded Hieber at the Gorman winning the Outstanding Wrestler Award, but lost one point bouts to Dysart (3-2) and Lensman (3-2) at the MIT. Lance is probably a half-step behind Wright and has spent most of the year at 171#. He, like Fair, was a surprise state qualifier last year - ending the season with a 20-16 record. After this duo there is a real void. Mike Chandler (Massillon Perry) would have probably been rated #1 at this district but he has missed the season due to injury, while Chapman (Massillon) apparently will not compete.

The Southwest District also seems quite weak. Osting has had a great season with titles at Piqua, St. Xavier and the Wazie. However, he has not wrestled real tough competition for the most part. Bonati has shown upward potential. while Watts has lost some close bouts against tough competition. Add in Havlin, Doze/a/ and Thorpe along with Doerflein (Greenville), Pennington (Colerain) and Clement (Fairmont) and you should have a strongly competitive district. However, any of the qualifiers will have real difficulty placing at the state level.

171#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: RICHIE ROOT (LAKOTA EAST)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2. Gay (Trotwood Madison) | 14. Barr (New Philadelphia) |
| 3. Dobies (Garfield Hts.) | 15. Holmes (Solon) |
| 4. Kinley (St. Edward) | 16. Cochran (Westerville North) |
| 5. Grover (Whitmer) | 17. Schnitzler (Moeller) |
| 6. Kapustka (Centerville) | 18. Sorace (Hudson) |
| 7. McGregor (Mansfield Madison) | 19. Hasenohrl (Maple Hts.) |
| 8. Stepanovich (Berea) | 20. Leonard (Cloverleaf) |
| 9. Miller (Wapakoneta) | 21. Rugh (Hilliard Darby) |
| 10. Heard (Princeton) | 22. Estes (Cincinnati Northwest) |
| 11. Schwaberow (Akron Springfield) | 23. Irwin (Scioto) |
| 12. Terbay (Carroll) | 24. Perkins(Harrison) |
| 13.Salmon (Kilbourne) | 25. Foster (Stow) |
| | 26. Donley (Clay) |

Since 1979 there has been only three (out of 249) finals in Division I that have featured two wrestlers from the Southwestern District. At this weight class there is a reasonable probability that it could happen for the fourth time.

The Root family seems overdue in gaining a state title. Older brother Ryan was twice runner up in Illinois and then ran into a buzz saw, otherwise known as Joey O'Neill, in his senior year in Ohio. Richie was fifth as a sophomore, but last year he suffered through an injury plagued season -- never quite getting totally healthy. He defaulted his district final to Gay, and then lost 9-7 to Hrovat in the semi-finals and defaulting for fourth place. This year he has been devastating compiling an undefeated record, including prestigious titles at both the SWOCA and Brecksville where he pinned seven of his eight opponents in the first period. If healthy, I rate him best at this class.

However, the junior Vincent Gay will certainly dispute that view. He was the district champion at 160# last year, which turned out to an enormous advantage as Chandler, Hrovat, and Root were all in the other half bracket. At any rate Gay crushed his first three state foes before succumbing to Hrovat's takedown expertise 15-6 in the finals. A tremendous all-around athlete, Gay has deadly quickness and strength. He pinned state qualifier Kapustka in the GMVWA finals, and will be more than a handful for anybody.

Their principal competition will come from a pair of Mentor competitors. Dobies was fifth last year at the weight losing only to James and Martin. This year he won at Wadsworth and Edison with his only- defeat at the hands of Kinley 4-3 -

after Dobies had built up a 3-0 lead. I still think he has slightly higher placement potential than Kinley, hence the current rating. Kinley has been champ at the Ironman (twice) and the MIT, and his narrow dual win over Dobies leaves him at 19-0. He is the antithesis of flashiness, grinding out victories based on strength, defense, and freedom from error. He did not compete in the state tournament process last year. Matt Osotin would seem third best out of Mentor with a third at the Ironman and a well-earned title at Kenston. Stepanovich - whose father and uncle were exceptional heavyweights in the 1970s should capture the fourth qualifying spot from a number of other contenders. These top four each exit form a different sectional, so winning sectional titles would create the optimum pairings.

Root and Gay will have plenty of competition at Fairfield. State qualifier Kapustka returns at this weight and he won a state bout last year. Heard has missed much of the year, but has solid credentials while four or five competitors will fight for the last berth.

With Maher likely to be at 160#, the Darby District is substantially weakened at this class. Grover was sixth at 171# last year, including a big win over Kapustka and a loss by fall to Dobies. The rest of this district has a number of above average contestants who, however, are unlikely to challenge for state placement. The young Salmon, however, is one to watch as he continues to show rapid improvement. His brother was, of course, a state champion, and his father is now apparently taking an even more active role in the bouts. - -

The Massillon Perry District is even weaker. None of this group won more than two district bouts last year, and none have been champions at major tournaments this season. "ve listed five wrestlers, but it is likely that one or, perhaps, two relative unknowns could make a significant impact. Schwaberon was second at North Canton and Firestone while placing third at Brecksville. Barr won at Smithville and was fifth at Wadsworth losing twice to Division 11 competition.

189#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: ANDY HROVAT (ST. EDWARD)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2. McCaffrey (Glen Este) | 9. Kuhner (Scioto) |
| 3. Duncan (West Carrollton) | 10. Good (Kent Roosevelt) |
| 4. Urdzik (Brecksville) | 11. Keller (Beavercreek) |
| 5. Hudson (Sycamore) | 12. Cramer (Reynoldsburg) |
| 6. Lammers (Wayne) | 13. Hodgson (Massillon) |
| 7. Salsberry (East Liverpool) | 14. Bias (Rodgers) |
| 8. Miller Garfield Hts.) | 15. Delguy (Mayfield) |

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 16. Jarvis (Cloverleaf) | 22. Witt (Sidney) |
| 17. Bessen (Hillard Davidson) | 23. Virost (Perrysburg) |
| 18. Wepler (Marietta) | 24. Wilson (Parma) |
| 19. Edger (Coffman) | 25. Barnes (Berea) |
| 20. DeVitis (Green) | 26. Moore (Mt. Vernon) |
| 21. Westfall (Massillon Jackson) | 27. Kasnik (Mi) |

The last five 189# pound championships have been won by wrestlers from the Northeast District, and defending state champion Andy Hrovat will certainly be the favorite to extend that string to 6 - but it won't be easy. Two years ago Hrovat was state runner up at 145# and then wrestled brilliantly in winning the title last year at 160#. Clearly, Andy Hrovat has either grown substantially during the past two years or he may be a somewhat undersized 189 pounder. My view is that the latter is true and as weight allowance is piled on weight allowance his small size will become a factor. Hrovat is one of those wrestlers you love to watch, scoring points by the bushel but giving up some too. His four state bouts were a combined 58-30 with a 12-10 win over Young and a 9-7 victory over Root being critical. However, at 189# he may have to modify that style slightly - after being caught in a cradle and pinned in Pennsylvania and losing 7-6 to Novakovich. After all, much of his top competition will come from wrestlers who have been at 189# for two or three years but do not have Hrovat's skills or agility. However, style changes at this point are also dangerous, so Hrovat will need to walk a thin line on his way toward a second title.

Hrovat will not be pressed at Mentor. This field is relatively weak and he should walk through it as he did last year with three falls and a major decision. The one unknown is the very powerful Miller who dominated at Edison and then missed everything else due to injury. Behind the formidable trio of Dobies, Vanni and Stachowitz last year. It's difficult to judge how well he will do with little experience and coming off a long-term injury. His ranking is even more approximate than most. Delguyd is probably third best with Kasnik, Barnes, Wilson and Benko (Strongsville) also in the hunt.

Most of the challenges for Hrovat will come from the Southwest District. It returns its top two performers at this weight from last year in McCaffrey and Duncan, along with four or five other strong contenders. McCaffrey is very good. He cruised through this district last year and won two state bouts, but lost a crucial one-pointer to Scislo. This year he stands at 18-1 losing only to Division III state champ Engels in the finals at the SWOCA. Duncan, on the other hand, was only third at North Canton in a not too difficult field, but has performed much better in his own Dayton area. I believe he will be challenged by the rapidly improving Hudson -- all of whose losses, I believe, are to McCaffrey, and by the sophomore Lammers who will be a force in the state the next two years at the upper weights. Add in Keller, Witt, McLaughlin (Lebanon) and perhaps Hermosillo (Fairmont) and it should be a great competition.

The Darby District appears to be very weak with no returning state qualifiers. Defending district champ Ware returns for Wapakoneta but was apparently injured at Marion Harding while wrestling at 215# . Where or even if he will compete is unknown, but I've ranked him at the higher weight class. Kuhner defeated the well regarded Cramer 8-5 recently and may be best at this district. I've listed another half-dozen or so contenders, but they will be unlikely to challenge even for low state places.

Perhaps, the most intriguing district is at Massillon Perry where there are , several interesting unknowns. Foremost among these is the performance level we'll see from Urdzik. A three-year starter, Urdzik opened the year with an impressive title at the Ironman at 215#. Then, felled by injury, he remained inactive until just recently reappearing at 189#. He will be challenged by the rugged junior Salsberry - a state qualifier at this class last year - who was fifth at Hudson in a very tough weight class. Hodgson defeated Urdzik last year, and was second at Canal Fulton (on a disqualification) while not competing at Wadsworth. It's difficult to judge where he might be now, and the same can be said for Conor Jarvis who has missed the entire year to this point. Last year he had to default his go-to-state third place bout at this district after three previous wins. Add in DeVitis, GMVWA runner-up Seli (Hudson), Hereda (Wadsworth), Westfall (Massillon Jackson), Tipka (New Philadelphia) and it should be real donnybrook at this district.

215#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: BRAD HENSLEY (ANDERSON)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2. Ciesinski (Sylvania Northview) | 14. Tanner (Nordonia) |
| 3. Stachowitz (Garfield Hts.) | 15. Bradesca (St. Edward) |
| 4. Radcliff (Hoover) | 16. Fraley (Upper Arlington) |
| 5. Lehman (Oak Hills) | 17. Craddock (Medina) |
| 6. Root (Fremont Ross) | 18. Holfinger (Piqua) |
| 7. Cronin (Moeller) | 19. Baughman (Massillon Perry) |
| 8. Lenix (Toledo Central Catholic) | 20. Cole (Coffman) |
| 9. Krajnak (Solon) | 21. Morris (Harrison) |
| 10. Bowers (Westerville South) | 22. Shoemaker (Glen Oak) |
| 11. Ware (Wapakoneta) | 23. Ortiz (Defiance) |
| 12. Bond (Wayne) | 24. Piccirillo (Mayfield) |
| 13. Cooper (Strongsville) | 25. Hudson (Westland) |
| | 26. Fogle (West Carrollton) |

It was, perhaps, a preview of this year's state final when the 215 pound semi-final at Wright State went into overtime last year. On one side was the Northwest District champion Nick Ciesinski with a 37-1 record versus the Southwest District title holder in the person of Brad Hensley at 33-3. It ended with a Ciesinski takedown and eventually a state runner-up finish, while Hensley dropped down to sixth. It could well come down to that again as both boys are currently undefeated in their own areas. This time, however, I believe that Hensley will win the battle based primarily on a far more testing schedule. He has won at the SWOCA and the GMWJA, wrestling in an area that has a number of excellent 215's. That, in my mind, could be the little extra impetus that wins him the title. On the other, there are so many closely grouped 215 pounders that it would not be a huge surprise if neither of them were finalist.

As I said, Hensley has already been severely tested in the Cincinnati-Dayton and that will continue unabated at the sectional and district level. State qualifiers Lehman and Cronin are at the same sectional at Hensley creating some interesting match-ups there and possibly at the district, too. Cronin has beaten Lehman and lost to Hensley and Lenix, while Lehman is 16-2 with losses to Cronin and Hensley. At the district level this trio will be joined by Bond, Holfinger, Morris and Fogle with only four to qualify. This district could place as many as three.

The Darby District is also deep and strong. Clearly Ciesinski is the nominal leader, but remember he only beat the powerful Root 10-7 in their district final last year. Root dominated at Tiffin never going more than two periods and pinning Holtinger in the finals. He also cruised to titles at the Mackey and Wapakoneta as well. How far he has closed the gap with Ciesinski is difficult to judge, but there may be very little to choose between the two. Right on their heels are state qualifiers Bowers and Ware with the rapidly improving Lenix very close as well. Again any of this quintet could place based on this year's performances. Probably most at risk in terms of state qualification is Ware whose defeat of Bowers was thoroughly avenged 16-5. Fraley is very good and Cole, Ortiz and Dee (Ashland) are easily capable of the big upset. With the many varying styles a key at this district (as it is so often) will be the pairings.

The Mentor District may not be quite as deep as these first two, but the four likely qualifiers will all be very good. Heading the list is Stachowitz who lost a consolation overtime battle to finish fourth at Wright State last year. He defeated Radcliff by 2 and defending state champ Lynch by 1, but was caught and pinned by Ciesinski. This year he remains undefeated with titles at Edison, Hudson, and Wadsworth where he again defeated Radcliff and Dee. If Hensley and Ciesinski fall into the other half bracket (a 1 in 3 chance) is probability of making the finals would be magnified. The Solon junior, Krajniak, has really looked good in recent weeks. He won two district bouts last year, and started the year slowly with a fourth at Solon. Since then he won the Powerade Classic in Pennsylvania and

beat Tanner handily to win the WRC title. Bradesca also has enjoyed a banner year wrestling the tough St. Edward's schedule. He was second at the Ironman and fifth at the MIT losing narrowly to Chappell and Tanner. In the dual, Stachowitz defeated him by a narrow 5-3 margin. Cooper, a first round district upset victim last year, is 18-1 losing only to Courtad at Brecksville. After this quartet, Piccirillo, Noe (Willoughby South) and Foley (St. Ignatius) are a giant step behind.

I believe Radcliff will dominate at Massillon Perry. A state qualifier last year, he has lost only to Stachowitz this year and pretty much crushed any opposition in the Akron-Canton area. Tanner, also a state qualifier, looks to be a small 215, but his experience should garner the second qualifying spot. 'Craddock, Baughman, and Shoemaker are all good enough to wrestle at Wright State, but is likely only one will get there.

HVY.

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JIM SWETTER (BRUNSWICK)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Bilins (Scioto) | 13. McMickle (Shaker Hts) |
| 3. Abusway (Sycamore) | 14. Strassel (Harrison) |
| 4. Halstead (Wadsworth) | 15. Rayburn (Hilliard Davidson) |
| 5. Kennedy (Cincinnati Northwest) | 16. Braswell (Brookhaven) |
| 6. Liming (Grove City) | 17. Leskovan (Riverside) |
| 7. Davie. (Perrysburg) | 18. Orlando (Upper Arlington) |
| 8. Thomas (Cleveland Hts.) | 19. Walling (Piqua) |
| 9. Dunmeade (Toledo Woodward) | 20. A. Stepanovich (Berea) |
| 10. Boehm (St. Xavier) | 21. Yunker (Mansfield Madson) |
| 11. Cox (Toledo Libbey) | 22. Williams (Mt. Healthy) |
| 12. Householder (Ashland) | 23. Smith (Xenia) |
| 24. Dutton (Uniontown Lake) | |
| 25. Wolf (North Ridgeville) | |
| 26. Sanderfer (Barberton) | |
| 27. Mansfield (Kent Roosevelt) | |

As I Look through my heavyweight data sheets, I'm trying (apparently in vain) to recall a weaker class of heavyweights in Division I. Only four of last years 16 state qualifiers were underclassmen - and one of those, Hawk, is now in Division II and another, Liming, certified at 215# (although my guess is he'll compete here). In addition, none of this foursome won even a single bout in last year's state competition. Ironically, all four were from the same Northwest District finishing second through fifth there. This year, no Division

I heavyweight placed at the MIT while the same held true at the Ironman. Truly, it can be said that this is not the year of the heavyweight.

My choice is the pinning machine. from Brunswick, the powerful Jim Swetter. Last year he missed a ticket to Wright State by the margin of a takedown, but this year he has taken no chances. He registered four consecutive falls at Brecksville and did exactly the same at Hudson. While many of his victims have been relatively unknown, he includes rated wrestler like Davie, Thomas, Boehm and Mansfield among his victims. The only other heavyweight of any note at the Massillon Perry District is the undefeated Halstead. Impressive. winner at North Canton and Wadsworth, he will be Swetter's only district challenger. They are both about the same size and they could in the sectional and district finals.

The last time no Mentor District Heavy weight placed at the state level was 1971 (when the district was actually at CCC Metro), but it could happen this year. The 275-pound Thomas is probably the best hope coming off runner-up finishes at Solon, the MWC and Brecksville. Whether he has the mobility to compete with the very best here is problematical, but the big junior has the potential to be an awesome force next year. McMickle and Leskovan are journeyman performers who could do responsibly well in a down year. The freshman Stepanovich could possibly qualify giving him vital experience the next three years. Wolf or Westerfield (Euclid) have qualification hopes, while the unknown Griffith (Admiral King) could surprise. Also showing some improvement is the young Orsky (St. Edwards) who might utilize their enormous team momentum to grab a district place.

All five of last yea(s Southwest District qualifies are gone, but some experienced district wrestlers remain. However, it is a wrestler who is in his first full-time varsity season who has been best to this point. Abusway won at both the SWOCA and St. Xavier and has compiled an impressive 16-2 record. He has numbered Strassel and the excellent Division III heavy weight Clepper among his victims, but his two losses do indicate at least some vulnerability. The powerful Kennedy may eventually turn out to be the best here, while state alternative Boehm is probably too light to match up against the best and give up 50 pounds as well. Strassel has the best opportunity for the fourth qualifying berth with Walling, Williams and Smith very close behind. I'm not real familiar with the unseeded Smith who was runner-up at the GMVVVA, but came out of a weak bracket.

The real depth, such as it is, resides at the Darby District. State qualifier Bilins won at Kenston and clearly has finalist potential. Liming is very light, but he has used his mobility very effectively in the heavyweight division. I think he'll envision more opportunity here than at 215#, but it is always touch and go when you're giving up 60 pounds. I've always liked Davie, except for a tendency to go to his back -- not always a winning trait at heavyweight. He was second at Hudson

(pinned by Swetter), third at Wadsworth (a 3-2 loser to Halstead) and second at Perrysburg (a 9-2 loser to Division III Taylor). Dunmeade is a powerful 240 pounder and Woodward has done very well getting their stars into the finals at Wright State. The Mansfield area heavyweights like Yunker, Householder, and Pagnard (Tiffin) are all competitive, while the mammoth Cox will, I predict, pull at least one upset. State qualifier Rayburn may not have enough to get a return ticket to Wright State, but 270 pounders like Braswell and King (Mt. Vernon) might. A very competitive district, indeed. .

TEAMS

1. St. Edward - Of his many accomplishments, one that Howard Ferguson was extremely proud of was the team point record held by the 1984 squad. The 192 points were not only the highest in Division I, but also the highest for any school classification. That record was smashed by the 1995 Walsh Jesuit team that had five champs and three runners-up and whose 203 points broke the supposedly impregnable 200-point barrier. That mark could be regained for St. Edward High School by the brilliant 1998 squad which returns eight state qualifiers including two champions and two placers. Many believe that the oldest record on the books held by the 1951 Cleveland West team - six individual champions - is in jeopardy, but that would be a real stretch. That great 1951 West team also had four consecutive individual champions never matched before or after - though four teams, 1969 Maple Hts., 1978 Cardinal, 1984 St. Edward and 1995 Walsh Jesuit, had three successive champs followed by a state runner-up.
2. Nordonia - The Lacaboni twins and Lange all look to be in the top four, while Billow, Artino and Tanner can also score. It would be ironic that on the 20th anniversary of St. Edward's first team title that Nordonia - who was runner-up that year -- would again place second. The key elements for Nordonia are finding the correct weight class for Lou lacaboni and having Billow hitting on all cylinders.
3. Madison - Now that Wrtzberger is healthy this is a team that could place three wrestlers in the top four of their weight class. They need people like Hernan, Whaley or Sample or help out.
4. Fairfield - A team with a very legitimate shot at the runner-up trophy. Shanklin, B. Wahoff and Linberg are all highly experienced state wrestlers - while the young guys like Padgett and B. Wahoff have lots of potential.
5. Wadsworth - The reshuffling at the front end of the line up that puts Paisz between the two Kallais is problematical, but Paisz will do well anywhere. Watters needs to get real consistent and Halstead to do well at the weak heavyweight class for good things to happen: Lance could be a real bright

- spot at 160#, while Hereda, Davis and Klaus could add real value with good performances.
6. Pickerington -- A fine dual meet team with a great individual star in Anderson, it's difficult to see where more state scoring is going to come from. Maher is the only other legitimate placement threat, while Cameron, the young Maher and a slew of light weights could help.
 7. Brecksville - A team with six excellent wrestlers - three of whom unfortunately are all about the same size. Dimitris and McAdams placed last year, but the former may not beat out Scott to go at 119#. Urdzik has had lots of injuries, but could do well in March. A key contributor could be Gerbino at the weak 145# class.
 8. Eastlake North - A team that has had enough injuries to last a decade. Sabin and Byers are an excellent 1-2 punch at the initial weights, while both Osolins can score at the state level. Burich, if healthy, and Miocic are long-shot possibilities, while it's a shame that their heavyweight Deaton will miss the year when that class is so weak.
 9. Marion Harding -- Their superstar is Jeff Ratliff with other lightweights like McCreary, Townsend and Smith as potential scorers. The only other helper could be Freeman at 130#.
 10. Garfield Hts. -- Dobies and Stachowitz should be high placers in the upper weight classes while a healthy Miller might help there as well. After that it is all conjecture with, perhaps, a Yurchisen or a Tepley having a hot weekend.

DIVISION II

103#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: BRANDON HAYES (RAVENNA)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Rooney (Walsh Jesuit) | 15. Blackcloud (Dover) |
| 3. Laughlin (Canton South) | 16. Triscaro (Kenston) |
| 4. West (Clyde) | 17. Wimmers (Marysville) |
| 5. Carey (Columbus DeSales) | 18. Severt (Cambridge) |
| 6. Wooten (Graham) | 19. Manning (Valley View) |
| 7. White (West Holmes) | 20. Gilbert (Teays Valley) |
| 8. Young (Ashtabula Harbor) | 21. Sell (Louisville) |
| 9. Kostko (Bryan) | 22. Marin (Benedictine) |
| 10. Kohlemain (Jefferson) | 23. Smith (Wilmington) |
| 11. Cook (Lake Catholic) | 24. Williams (Claymont) |
| 12. Blankenship (Bucyrus) | 25. Kasler (Circleville) |
| 13. Finn (Perkins) | 26. Cronkleton (Benjamin Logan) |
| 14. Ashworth (Bellbrook) | 27. Bowersock (Beaver Local) |

Hayes was fifth at this weight class last year losing in the semi-finals to two-time state champ Shawn Adkins. He was the only state competitor that made Adkins go the full six minutes. This year he has won at Solon, Medina and the WRC and looks to be a cut above the rest of this weight class. He is a large 103 pounder with excellent skills and good quickness, and the ability to pin -- a solid favorite here.

The Firestone District is by far the strongest in the state. Rooney has been making enormous strides including an overtime loss for second at the CIT. He also should be away from Hayes at the state level. The feisty Laughlin is also right there and can score from any position on the mat. A small 103 pounder last year, he has grown into this weight class and has upset potential versus anyone here. Since he and Hayes exit from the same sectional he could be in the other half bracket at both district and states. Young, a senior, lost an overtime battle for a ticket to Wright State last year at this district. He prefers a down-tempo bout -- keeping the score close and squeaking out narrow victories. In his three district wins last year, he scored a total of 10 points. Two other seniors, Cook and Kohlemain will be the top contenders for the last spot, but Triscaro and Sell will also be in the hunt. Watch out for Marin who could have upset potential here.

The other relatively strong district is at Galion. West has had a tremendous year winning over Wooten at Clyde and defeating Kohlemain to win at Southview. His only loss was a first week Edison final loss to Pressler. Carey lost 13 bouts last year, but was a state qualifier and won a consolation bout at that level. He defaulted to sixth at the CIT, but nipped Laughlin 13-12 to win the Top Gun. Kostko is probably third best here, but he

has not seen the level of competition much of the rest of this field has endured. Blankenship is solid, but somebody to be wary of is Finn. He has taken some "hard lumps" this year, but he continues to improve. Wimmers, Gilbert and Rowland (Bellevue) are other possibilities with Long (Paulding) and Sharples (Oak Harbor) yet another half-step behind.

State qualifier White should dominate at Miami Trace. He was second at the Gorman and won handily at Madison and Smithville. It should be real battle for the last two spots with those listed augmented by Barker (Maysville) and Wheatley (Cambridge) as the top contenders. Except for White, it's difficult to see the other two qualifiers, whoever they are, having placement chances at Wright State.

Much of the same pattern holds at Wilmington, too - one clear front runner and a plethora of possible candidates. Tops here is the excellent freshman Wooten. He easily won at Graham and was second at Clyde and third at the Top Gun, and only two tough losses kept him from placing at the MIT. He should cruise through this district and get a good draw at the state level. He is definite place material. There is a huge drop off after Wooten with absolutely no one exhibiting exceptional skill. Any of a dozen competitors could grab a state berth.

112#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: RYAN SIMMONS (LAKE CATHOLIC)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2. Hodermarsky (Olmsted Falls) | 14. Moore (Wauseon) |
| 3. Pusateri (Columbus DeSales) | 15. Clemens (Paulding) |
| 4. Quick (Perkins) | 16. Betzko (Miami Trace) |
| 5. Romano (Walsh Jesuit) | 17. Trostel (Graham) |
| 6. Brooks (Twinsburg) | 18. Rogers (Purcell) |
| 7. Brock (Taylor) | 19. Taylor (Carrollton) |
| 8. Morris (Carlisle) | 20. Sheffield (Loveland) |
| 9. Machnics (Kenston) | 21. Hall (Indian Creek) |
| 10. Smith (Cambridge) | 22. Durham (Swanton) |
| 11. Townsley (Clyde) | 23. Deleon (Maysville) |
| 12. Kemble (Ravenna Southeast) | 24. Thompson (Teays Valley) |
| 13. Spellman (Canfield) | 25. McClintock (Galion) |

Generally 112# is a very strong weight class with a heavy infusion of excellent 1 03s from the previous year, and some solid returning juniors and seniors. That is not true this year and it provides a great opportunity for any of a half dozen competitors to have a hot weekend and win it all. However, a clear choice as favorite has to be the senior Ryan Simmons who has been third the last two years. Injured virtually the entire year,

he came back to win the CIT and has lost only to Division I choice Jayne. My only concern is his ability to score should he fall behind. In four of his five state wins last year he scored three or fewer points and his only loss was 2-1. He has more firepower than that.

Again, most of the real depth is at Firestone. Simmons will be joined by the excellent Hodermarsky - just down from 119#. He has wrestled a rugged schedule and should do well here. The excellent freshman Romano was second at the CIT losing only to Simmons, and that by only two points, 4-2. He has really progressed and definitely has state placement potential. Brooks looked sensational in winning at Solon and Hudson, but has not done as well in recent weeks. He may be struggling to meet 112# on a weekly basis and so his respite at 119#, while not as successful in terms of wins, may be beneficial in the long run. Machnics and Kemble are solid, while Spellman, upset winner over Division I placer Saley at the Dies, may be a wild card here. Other depth will be provided by Krakowski (Padua), Hussein (Orange) and Kibler (Highland).

Quick had been undefeated until he was drubbed by the freshman Drew Opfer at the SBC Duals. He should rebound from that setback and heads up a very representative district. His big wins at Tiffin, Galion and S1. John testify to potential state placement. Pusateri is the big unknown. He had certified at 112# and if he can wrestle effectively here it will be a big boost for DeSales team chances - not only because it will give him a major opportunity to do well here, but it puts Barnett and Pilkington at optimal classes. Already a state qualifier, Pusateri was third at the CIT at 119#, but did not place at the brutal Top Gun. Townsley, Moore and state qualifier Clemens are the leaders for the last three spots.

I'm not seeing a whole lot at Miami Trace. State qualifier Smith returns up one weight class, but was only third at the OVAC, but did win at Barnesville. Former state qualifiers Taylor and Betzko should have the inside track for the other two state berths, but people like Hall or DeLeon will challenge. Other possibilities are Sustik (Buckeye Local), Saunders (Steubenville), Ramsey (Edison Local) and Ratliff (New Lexington).

State qualifier Brock heads the Wilmington district. He as a strong second at the SWOCA to Heggood and that is his only loss this year. He has an energetic style and that should propel him to potential state placement. Last year he lost a 9-8 first round state bout to Smith, but I believe he has moved ahead of him. Brock defeated Morris in the sectional last year, but both qualified for Wright State and Morris made it to the quarter-finals with a first round win. That same ordering should hold true with Morris also having low place potential. It should be a real dogfight for that last berth - Trostel, Rogers and Sheffield all in the hunt. Houghton (Dayton Northridge) also must be accorded some chances here.

119#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: NATE DAUGHERTY (WALSH JESUIT)

TOP CONTENDERS

2. Jennings (Clyde)
3. Ray (Hamilton Ross)
4. Toukonen (Claymont)
5. Creech (Milton Union)
6. Ball (Watkins Memorial)
7. Barnett (Columbus DeSales)
8. Leng (Medina Highland)
9. Hickman (Alter)
10. Smith (Copley)
11. Michalek (Twinsburg)
12. Wright (Tri-Valley)
13. Vaill (Norton)
14. Carder (Maysville)
15. Robbins (Olentangy)
16. Kramer (Crestwood)
17. Waddington (Bellevue)
18. Kirven (Triway)
19. Estrada (Wauseon)
20. Metcalf (Padua)
21. Hiles (Licking Valley)
22. Dillon (St. Clairsville)
23. Pfaff (Olmsted Falls)
24. Black (Miami Trace)
25. Leggett (Clermont NE)

Each year after I write this report (and it is being printed), I assign a probability of winning to each of my 42 individual selections. Most of the time it is over 50% (I'm very confident before sectionals), but occasionally it can fall as low as 20% or 25%. My guess, as I write this, that it's more likely to be at about an all-time low of 10-15%. That's because there just doesn't seem to be any reasonable way to differentiate between 11 or 12 wrestlers, any of whom have roughly equal chances of winning. Clearly, the pairings will have an enormous influence and assuredly one or two of this large group will have a hot hand the second weekend in March. The problem at hand is identifying who that competitor will be. With two returning state runners-up at this class it would seem to be somewhat easy, but it doesn't work out that way.

Let's look at Firestone. Daugherty, second at 112#, seems to follow a pattern of starting slow and finishing very strong. He was second in his sectional and fourth in his district before wrestling brilliantly at Wright State. His monumental upset of Holmes in the semi-finals had to be one of Bill Barger's most enduring memories of the 1997 tournament despite having five other champions. Daugherty was second at the CIT to Boyd (who Creech has defeated) and second at the Top Gun at 125# to Maehl. Leng is a very short, very powerful 119# who has strong upset potential against anyone. He was second at the MIT at 125#. Smith, Michalek and Vaill all have major tournament wins and on a very hot weekend winning or placing very high at Wright State. Kramer upset state runner-up Toukonen at the Top Gun and finished sixth at a very tough weight class. Metcalf and Pfaff have a wealth of experience, but may not have the firepower to match up with the top boys. Linich (University School), Moody (Buckeye), Dunfee (Ravenna Southeast) and Miller (Lake Catholic) are other possibilities at this crowded district.

The lightning quick Jennings heads a stellar field at Galion. A state ~ quarter-finalist last year, he was injured against eventual champ Tompkins and had to default his last two bouts. He missed much of the year, but won handily at Clyde and seems positioned as

a possible finalist. Ball, too, was a quarter-finalist who ended one consolation bout from placing. He was fifth at the Top Gun -losing only to McBurney and Peretti. He is great in the top position and very tough when given a lead. Barnett is the unknown at this weight class. A superb young freshman, he has been at 125# all year and performed extremely well. At the Top Gun he defeated state placers Haimerl and Abbuhl to finish third, and defaulted to fourth place at the CIT. At this lower weight he could be very, very tough. State qualifier Robbins, Waddington and Estrada are next best here, but they don't match up well with the top trio.

It's strictly a three-man show at Wilmington, all of whom have sparkling credentials. Ray was fourth at 112#, while Creech won two bouts at Wright State and lost in OT to Ray in their state placement bout. Hickman was a state semi-finalist at 103# before losing to Toukonen and falling to sixth. This year Creech won the mammoth GMVWA over two-time state place winner Boyd and is undefeated. Ray was second at the MIT losing to state champion McBurney in the finals for his only loss. Hickman, after a great early season, struggled at the CIT at 125# losing big time to Barnett and failing to place. He may be better placed here at 119#.

Toukonen is jumping two weight classes and that is often difficult. Last year he defeated eventual Division I state champ McBurney at the Top Gun and then placed second to the virtually unbeatable Adkins at Wright State. He did so by winning two early bouts one on a tie breaker and the other 1-0 controlling each bout with his size. At 119# he dominated at Barnesville, but lost two close bouts at the Top Gun. State qualifiers Wright and Carder are the other two choices at this district, with Black, Dillion and Wood (Jackson) as other possibilities.

125#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: KEVIN MAEHL (OLENTANGY)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2. Spencer (Edison Local) | 14. Noftz (Clyde) |
| 3. Cooper (Buckeye) | 15. Sheffield (Loveland) |
| 4. Stacy (Indian Creek) | 16. Worley (Big Walnut) |
| 5. Abbuhl (Claymont) | 17. Dunfee (Ravenna) |
| 6. Gucciardo (Kenston) | 18. Hopkins (Coventry) |
| 7. Z. Baker (West Holmes) | 19. Hoffman (Milton Union) |
| 8. Helton (Norwalk) | 20. Rea (Salem) |
| 9. Allen (Springfield Shawnee) | 21. Friedt (Teays Valley) |
| 10. Horne (Hillsboro) | 22. Hathy (Conneaut) |
| 11. Adcock (Elida) | 23. Melvin (Dayton Christian) |
| 12. White (Hubbard) | 24. Schumacher (Shelby) |
| 13. Trivisonno (Lake Catholic) | 25. Errett (Graham) |

This would seem to be a four-cornered contest for the state title. I never anticipated seeing defending state champion Maehl at this class, and he has to be one of the biggest 125s in the state. Last year he was a surprise winner (at least to me) after finishing second in his district. He controlled his first three bouts and then slowed down the pace in defeating Burns 3-2 for the title. His match with Burns was one I found exceedingly well managed. He is undefeated this year and he crushed an excellent field at the Top Gun blasting both Daugherty and Haimerl. He will be most vulnerable early when he is closest to having to make weight. After that, it will be tough.

I had Spencer at the top of my list all year, but I'm not sure he can go with Maehl, but then again I'm not sure he can't. State runner up as a sophomore, he was at a most difficult weight class last year losing to eventual champ Byers 12-2 and finishing third with a win over Cooper. He's undefeated this year and has over 100 wins and just five losses in the last three years. He dominated the OVAC and easily deserved the OW.

Stacy was a state qualifier at 130# last year, but went two and out there after having defeated pre-meet favorite Doyle in the sectionals. He was third at Richmond Hts. at 130#, but otherwise has an unblemished record. He should be away from Spencer at the state meet.

Cooper has been perfect this year including titles at Buckeye, the MIT and his third Dies trophy. Like Spencer, he was a state semi-finalist at 119#, but lost to the excellent Legarth 9-3. He should be ready for great things this year.

It's a dynamite quartet with Maehl slightly ahead of Spencer at this reading, with Cooper and Stacy just slightly behind.

I'm not sure I've ever had five of my top 10 choices at any weight class come from the Eastern District. Beside Spender and Stacy, Sky Abbuhl - third last year at 112# - will be a major factor. He had a sensational tourney last year winning four times and losing only to state champion Tompkins. State qualifier Baker also returns as does the solid Horne. It will be very tough to leave two of this quintet at home for the state meet.

State qualifier Gucciardo was only fifth at his district, but then won two consolation bouts at Wright State to place sixth. He won at Kenston this year, but failed to place in the tough WRC conference meet. White was a state alternate last year with his slam-bang style and was undefeated until the Dies when two tough losses dropped him into fourth place. Trivisonno, with a similar style, should also qualify here.

Maehl heads a district that includes four other state qualifiers, but I don't see them as a serious challenge to his preeminence here. Helton, Adcock, Noftz and Worley all have previous state experience, but very little state success to date. They were a combined 2-6 last year with only Helton and Adcock winning a bout. They should do better this year, but state placement will be difficult.

It's a substantially weaker field at Wilmington. I expected to see Battles (Springboro) and Jordan (Monroe) at this class, but neither are apparently competing. That leaves Allen at the top of my list, but he has had a year of ups and downs. The rest of this contingent will be welcome first-round opponents for the rest of the field.

130#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: RICHARD BURNS (HILLSBORO)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2. Hess (Graham) | 15. Raber (Marlington) |
| 3. Farley (Watkins Memorial) | 16. Hockaday (Watterson) |
| 4. DePolo (Bellevue) | 17. Kovaleskie (Clyde) |
| 5. O'Dell (Eaton) | 18. Smith (Monroe) |
| 6. Pendleton (Indian Creek) | 19. Mostoller (Medina Highland) |
| 7. Kellerman (Perry) | 20. Grambo (Teays Valley) |
| 8. Davis (Walsh Jesuit) | 21. Durkin (Padua) |
| 9. Wheeler (Steubenville) | 22. Lawton (Avon Lake) |
| 10. Gilbert (Valley View) | 23. Liebacher (Perkins) |
| 11. Turle (Twinsburg) | 24. Valerio (Edgewood) |
| 12. Brankatelli (Orange) | 25. Lozier (Loveland) |
| 13. Edwards (Claymont) | 26. Yackey (Dover) |
| 14. Walker/Venzel (Olentangy) | 27. Weichman (Ravenna Southeast) |

I was looking forward to a Maehl versus Burns rematch for the title at 130#, but with Maehl certification at 125# that is unlikely to happen. Burns had a great year last season going 37-2 - with both losses seemingly preventable. He had Wentz beat at the MIT but gave up a late takedown and then lost in overtime, and then in the state finals "messed up" by permitting a slow, down-tempo bout and falling 3-2. Burns won the MIT this year in easy style 12-4 over New, but did not seem as intense on the mat as last year.

Nevertheless, he remains undefeated and certainly in control of his own destiny at this weight class. Should Spencer and Burns win back-to-back it would be only the second time that Eastern district wrestlers have done so since Keenan and Moxley in 1984.

(Very high scores for Harris and Wilkinson.)

Burns' principal adversary is likely to be three-time state qualifier Doug Hess. Ironically, Hess, who was fifth last year, was scheduled to meet Burns in the MIT semi-final (in a dubious bit of pairings), but missed out because of flu. Hess has a wide variety of tools in his arsenal and if the Graham coaches see a slow pace as best, he will be able to execute it against Burns. Gilbert was a Division III district champ last year and he, along with O'Dell, will be favorites for the last two berths. However, there is good depth here with Smith, Valerio and Lozier all capable of reaching Wright State.

Pendleton is likely to be here - although Indian Creek might leave Stacy at 130#. In either case, they will be the sole challengers to Burns. Pendleton qualified at 125# last year and drew Maehl in the first round - and it was quickly two and out. Burns defeated him 19-8 at last year's districts. Wheeler was solid at the OVAC, and along with Edwards they should battle for the last two spots. Pendleton defeated Wheeler 7-6 at last year's district in the consolation semi-finals, while Edwards lost his only bout there. Edwards did win the Barnesville title and took a solid sixth at the Top Gun. Also check out Yackey, Durben (Coshocton), Brison (Sheridan) and Smalley (WCH).

Farley was third at the MIT and fourth at the Top Gun en route to what has been a very successful year for him. A state qualifier last year, he had a terrible draw losing on first period falls to both Burns and Murphy. He and DePolo look to be the two best at Galion. DePolo has won just about everything except the Clyde, where Hess defeated him 5-3 and Avon lake where he gave two-time Burnett his best battle of the year losing 6-3. Hockaday was runner-up at the CIT but that was the result of not only some good wrestling, but good fortune as well. The rest of those listed are above average, but, except for the top duo, they will intimidate many at the state level.

The last five state champions at this weight class have emerged from the Northeast District, but that string is unlikely to be extended in 1998. The one unknown is Kellerman who has made rapid progress in the last 12 months. With a title at Wadsworth and a runner-up finish at Waite he seems the best of a not-so-strong group of 130s. Davis, as we have seen so many times with Walsh wrestlers, has really progressed with a second at the CIT and a fourth at the Top Gun - both at 135#. Turle is a workmanlike wrestler who can win the close ones, while Brankatelli has big-time upset potential. Two to watch who will be strong in coming years are the freshman Stough (Copley) and Hada (Harvey). The former, in particular, could even be a significant factor this year.

135#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JIM SANNER (CHARDON)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Mackesy (Indian Lake) | 12. Ashton (Perry) |
| 3. Cox (Perkins) | 13. Torrence (Anthony Wayne) |
| 4. Blackburn (Clyde) | 14. Hyland (Crestview) |
| 5. Brown (Olentangy) | 15. Ewing (Indian Creek) |
| 6. Nicola (Lake Catholic) | 16. Monogioudis (Buckeye Local) |
| 7. Horner (Canton South) | 17. Puterbaugh (Milton Union) |
| 8. Peters (Claymont) | 18. Street (Coventry) |
| 9. Coleman (Bellevue) | 19. Cripe (Edgewood) |
| 10. Berry (Springboro) | 20. Jo. Vedra (Rossford) |
| 11. Troy Smith (Teays Valley) | 21. Mamone (Padua) |

22. Ferri (Milton Union)
23. Lara (Ravenna)

24. Carrerer (Beechcroft)
25. Mills (Philo)

I think we can anticipate a large number of close, hard-fought battles at this weight class with the eventual champion able to win more than his share of those kind of contests. And it would not be a major surprise if a relative unknown grabbed the title - much like what happened when Brian Hilliard who was fourth at his sectional, came on to top the likes of Morgan, Santiago and Gabriel in what for me was the most surprising championship sequence in 1997.

Jim Sanner, my choice this year, has a wealth of experience. He was sixth at 130# two years ago after losing a one-point bout to Santiago in the championship bracket. Last year it may have been a small obstacle that tripped him up. He lost a tough district final to Skinner at Firestone and ended up with a difficult first round bout - while Skinner had a tech fall in his first bout and went on to grab the state title. This year he is 19-1 having lost focus in the finals at Kenston and gotten tossed for four at the buzzer by Nicola to tie their bout. Less than 30 seconds later it happened again and Nicola ended up with a miracle 11-7 OT win. It should be a lesson that will last the rest of the year.

Nicola will again be a principal challenger at Firestone. Besides his Kenston title he was third at the CIT -- losing surprisingly to Feldman -- and has one dual loss, an 18-10 defeat by Division I choice, Bertin. Horner, a Massillon Jackson transfer, has been very good at Canton South - including a third at the Top Gun at 140#. I think he'll want to get down to 135# for the tournament process, because he matches up better. The rest of the group is solid and I particularly like Ashton's chances to surprise. Brenner (Canfield) could be a long-shot to qualify here.

The powerful Cox and Brown were teammates last year for Olentangy, but they could well be the district finalists here. For some reason Cox was at 140# last year where he was district semi-finalist (including a win over Gilmore) before losing a one-pointer to Hiles and falling all the way to sixth - one spot from Wright State. This year he has been on a mission - beating state qualifier Crilley to win at Galion, pinning Wood to win at Tiffin, and creating general havoc in the SBC. Brown was the district champ at 135# last year, but then was mashed by Sommer in the first round. He came back through consolations to the fifth place bout where Sommer nailed him again. Fortunately Sommer is at 140# this year. Brown was second at the Top Gun losing to Forward 7-3 in the finals. State qualifier Blackburn will also play a huge role in the resolution of this weight class. Just down from 140# he upset Cox in SBC Duals with an overtime victory. He also won at Edison and should meet Cox at both the sectional and district level. While this trio looks strongest there is a lot of good talent at this district. Eight of my top 25 compete at this sectional with only five berths at state. The consolation rounds will be tremendously hard fought.

As anticipated in last year's report Peters only a freshman became the 7th son in that family to qualify for state action eclipsing the mark set by the DiSabato family. This year

he looks to have placement potential as it begins to look like he could be the best of the clan so far. He should win the district title at Miami Trace and that will likely provide reasonable pairings. Last year he won two state level bouts and this year he should surpass that. I've listed Ewing, Monogioudis and Mills with Spicer (New Lexington) and Kusmaul (John Glenn) as other possibilities.

The story at Wilmington will likely revolve around Lucas Mackesy. A two-time state qualifier he was third last year losing only to Burns 4-1 in the semi-finals. He is undefeated this year and certainly has finalist potential. State qualifier Berry is a respectful step behind him while state qualifier Puterbaugh, Cride and Ferri will battle for the last spot. Willman (Kenton Ridge) and possibly Schlaegel (Graham) are possible challengers.

140#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: TV MORGAN (GRAHAM)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2. Murphy (Perry) | 14. Hoover (Utica) |
| 3. Wallace (Valley View) | 15. Jones (Maysville) |
| 4. Rawling (Walsh) | 16. DeLong (South Point) |
| 5. . Sommer (Crestwood) | 17. Stoffregan (Trenton Edgewood) |
| 6. Harrison (Bath) | 18. Gordon (Dover) |
| 7. Borjas (Oak Harbor) | 19. Waits (Loveland) |
| 8. Birden (Steubenville) | 20. Travis Smith (Teays Valley) |
| 9. Fisher (Bellevue) | 21. Bray (Coventry) |
| 10. Lynch (Turpin) | 22. Frankino (Orange) |
| 11. Kuhn (Louisville) | 23. Smith (Clyde) |
| 12. Hansen (Lexington) | 24. Trentanelli (West Geauga) |
| 13. Carbaugh (Avon Lake) | 25. Snyder (Miami Trace) |
| | 26. Linden (Olentangy) |

Undoubtedly, the single biggest upset at last year's state meet was Ty Morgan going down to defeat 9-7 in the semi-final at 135#. The fact that a sophomore wrestler has lost to a three-time state qualifier and third place winner from the previous year was so surprising indicates how quickly all of us grew to respect Morgan's enormous skills. Quick and incredibly skilled on his feet, Morgan had ground out 39 consecutive wins in 1996-97 before allowing a four-point move that shattered his hopes for four consecutive titles. What was impressive was that this freshman state champ came back and beat two good wrestlers to finish third. Watching Morgan at the MIT it looked like his energy level might have been a little low. After all, 140# is very tough cut, he seems to feel substantial individual pressure, and some of his teammates (notably Hess) had the flu. Still he beat Iacaboni in the semis before losing to Anderson in the finals. Since then he

seems rejuvenated winning big at Clyde and the Top Gun and he remains a heavy favorite here.

State qualifier Wallace will exit Wilmington with Morgan and that will put in the other half bracket. He, too, is quick and good on his feet, but on a somewhat lower plane than Morgan. He certainly has high placement hopes. Lynch, Stoffregan and Waits will be left to battle for the last state berth and it should be a real scrap. Positive pairings will help and that means high placement in the two sectionals - each of which qualify eight to the district level.

Much of Morgan's competition should come from the Northeast District where a top trio of wrestlers awaits him. Murphy is a real scrapper looking to become a four-time state qualifier. Last year at 125# he lost a narrow two-point decision to Burns in the quarters and then dropped a 1-0 heart breaker in his state placement bout. He defeated state qualifier Drake to win at Wadsworth and now stands 29-0 in frequent action. Morgan will not want him to be close in the third period. Rawling has a lot of talent, but it's not always consistently employed. I remember last year at the Firestone District everyone commenting on Rawling's one-point opening round to a sectional fourth place finisher. The consensus was that the better wrestler gave away the match. After that, of course, Hilliard won his next seven bouts for a district and state title. I've wondered what would have happened if Rawling had won 6-5 (which could have easily happened). This year he was sixth at the Ironman, but was runner-up at the Powerade in Pennsylvania, first at the CIT and fourth at the Top Gun losing to Morgan 9-3 in the semi-finals. The third member of this trio is Sommer, fifth last year after a semi-final loss to Hilliard. He was runner-up to Morgan at the Top Gun losing 10-3, but won at Hudson and Kenston with major decisions each time. The last two qualifiers, whoever they may be, are likely to be a step or two below this threesome.

There is an interesting brew of wrestlers at Galion with three returning state qualifiers. Harrison was district runner-up to Brown last year and then after an opening 18-11 win over Rawling battled Morgan losing only 10-7. He split his two consolation bouts and did not place. This year he has wrestled in smaller tourneys like Bucyrus and has not had the tough competition like some of his peers. Fisher and Hoover are also state qualifiers but they were shut out at Wright State last year. Fisher won at Bellevue but lost a narrow decision to Boias at Oak Harbor and was TF'ed by Morgan at Clyde. Hoover has wrestled well in several smaller tourneys. Add in Borjas and Gorman champ Hansen and that's a respectable quintet of qualifiers. Smith, Linden and, perhaps, Vogelsang (Lima Shawnee) are other possibilities.

Birden and Jones lead a somewhat depleted Miami Trace group that returns no state qualifiers. Jones came close last year losing the consolation final 4-2 to Dixon. DeLong, now a junior, lost to Birden 4-3 in the first round of districts and looks nominally to be third best. I've listed Gordon and Snyder, but Moore (Tri-Valley), Clemons (Hillsboro), Cutright (Athens) and Lane (Vincent Warren) are also possibilities. Also watch out for the Claymont entry whether it is Hastings or Piccin.

145#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: OSCAR SANTIAGO (CANFIELD)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2. Erwin (Graham) | 14. Avery (Milton Union) |
| 3. Gilmore (Galion) | 15. Andrews (Marysville) |
| 4. Ross (Minerva) | 16. Carter (Dayton Northridge) |
| 5. D. Grove (Claymont) | 17. Hensley (Monroe) |
| 6. Benedum (Coventry) | 18. Crosby (Teays Valley) |
| 7. Ray (Hamilton Ross) | 19. J. Milhoan (Beaver Local) |
| 8. Gibbs (Fairview Park) | 20. T. Moore (Tri Valley) |
| 9. Plikerd (Benjamin Logan) | 21. Goldsmith (Philo) |
| 10. Kucera (Trinity) | 22. Canty (Columbus DeSales) |
| 11. Hiles (Licking Valley) | 23. Hunter (Hillsboro) |
| 12. Siaper (Perry) | 24. Smith (Bellevue) |
| 13. Je. Vedra (Rossford) | 25. Tramonte (Medina Highland) |

There are some seniors who enter the state tournament that you just feel deserve a state title. They've paid their dues, had some successes and some disappointments, too, and have provided a consistent standard of excellence. Oscar Santiago would appear to be one such example. As a sophomore his takedown was ruled just after the buzzer and Shawn Bristow escaped with the win 4-3, and then earned his state title the next afternoon. Santiago finished third. Last year he pulled the huge upset defeating Morgan, but then lost to Hilliard (whom he had previously defeated) 9-5 in the finals. This year he has been the champ at Kenston and the Dies, while compiling an undefeated record. However, a state title is no sure thing with three excellent challengers rated right behind him.

Erwin wrestled for Springfield Northeastern last year in Division III, and finished third at 135# after losing a semi-final overtime bout to the eventual champ. This year he appears to be enjoying the much higher visibility Graham program and Ron McCunn and Jeff Jordan have certainly polished this gem. He has won tourney titles at the MIT, Top Gun and Graham tournaments, and remains undefeated to date. Working out on a daily basis with Morgan, Lensman and the like has enhanced his takedown arsenal and he can score on the mat.

Ross has been at 152# all year, but I believe he will choose to compete here. He was second at Clyde and third at the Top Gun along with a title at Smithville. Last year he was the state alternate at this class losing 5-1 for fifth place.

Gilmore has been a sensational youth wrestler and placed twice at Cadet Nationals. This year he has won big at Galion, the Gorman and Marion Harding,.-but lost twice at

the Top Gun to finish fourth. Already a two-time state qualifier, he has lost his three state bouts by a combined 37-5 score. Revenge this year and next should be sweet.

The Firestone District will be rugged. Besides Santiago and Ross, Benedum, Siaper, Kucera and Gibbs have state placement potential. Last year Kucera won the sectional final over Gibbs 13-5, and then won the fifth and last qualifying ticket to Wright State while Gibbs was eliminated. However, Kucera got a terrible draw landing in the same quarter bracket with Santiago and Gabriel. This year Gibbs has won at Solon and Brecksville while Kucera was third at Southview and second (to Mauro) at the CIT. I've put state qualifier Benedum ahead of both of them based on two state tournament wins last year and a great 1997-98 season marred only slightly by an upset loss to Eaton at the Dies.

Gilmore will not have a clear path to the Galion District title. Hiles was the district champ at Gilmore's weight class, but lost quickly at states. He has won this year at Teays Valley and Brookhaven and has been consistently ranked first in the Columbus area. State qualifier Vedra also returns along with district stalwarts like Andrews and Crosby. Still, if Gilmore performs at the anticipated level he should win here.

Grove should pretty much dominate at Miami Trace. He was a semi-finalist at the Top Gun losing to Erwin 11-5. He has spent much of the year at 152#, but will compete here. Jess Milhorn was a strong third at the OV AC and should do well here unless, of course, his brother moves down pushing him up to 152#. Besides those rated I've also have a list of positives for Drum (Logan Elm), Thomas (Meigs) and White (Sheridan).

There are just too many good wrestlers at 145# at Wilmington for some not to bail out to the somewhat easier 152# class. Erwin, Ray and Pork Plikerd are all state qualifiers with the first two district champs and the latter a two-time participant at Wright State. Avery, too, reached states last year and reached the quarter-finals. Both Hensley and Carter were district fourths just missing qualification, the latter losing in overtime. Factor in Givens (Springfield Shawnee) and Yearly (Wilmington) and something has to give. Look for some of this crew at 152#.

152#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: CHARLIE BIEL (COVENTRY)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2. Moore (Springfield Shawnee) | 8. Sharp (Bellevue) |
| 3. Coe (Clyde) | 9. Archer (Maysville) |
| 4. Melaragno (Ashtabula Edgewood) | 10. Schafrath (Triway) |
| 5. Sveda (Walsh Jesuit) | 11. Cruyton (Kenston) |
| 6. Akers (Claymont) | 12. A. Milhoan (Beaver Local) |
| 7. Schlaegel (Graham) | 13. McFarland (Marlington) |

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 14. Gibbs (Goshen) | 21. Santee (Perry) |
| 15. LeBeau (Miami Trace) | 22. Sony(London) |
| 16. Glorioso (Lexington) | 23. Bobo (Springfield NW) |
| 17. Tomsik (Fairview Park) | 24. Kuykendoll (Trenton Edgewood) |
| 18. Musick (Teays Valley) | 25. Montano (Oak Harbor) |
| 19. Moore (Wauseon) | 26. Altieri (Indian Creek) |
| 20. Heston (Fairfield Union) | 27 Ferrell (Paulding) |

Biel hit the Trifecta last year finishing second at the sectional, district and state level - twice to state champion Anderson and once to Pak. This year it's been all first places for Siel -- at the Dies and Wadsworth and Doylestown as he dominated from the first week of the season.

Biel will emerge from a talent laden district. Melaragno qualified at this weight last year and won a consolation bout. A big raw-boned wrestler he began the year at 171# and has gradually worked his way down. He was fourth at 160# at the MIT. Alex Sveda like his brother transferred from Revere to Walsh Jesuit after his sophomore year -- and he has begun to follow the same upward path as Viktor. After a bit of low start, he won the CIT and was 7th at the Top gun. Melaragno beat him by a point at last year's district. Cruyton and McFarland were 1-2 at Kenston, and Cruyton was second to Mahone at the WRC. Tomsik was the Srecksville champ, while Santee was runner-up to Biel at Wadsworth. There are a lot of strong contenders here and while the freshman Scholes (Lake Catholic) will be overmatched at the district level, he is someone to watch for in the future.

Moore was fourth at Wright State last year and has gone 17-2 this year -- losing only at the MWC, once to Mahone and the other out-of-state. This will be his fourth state trip should he make it through the district rigors. Schlaegel, a two-time qualifier will be at either 152# or 160#, but should qualify either way. He was an impressive fifth at the Top Gun, and has placed at every tourney entered. The last spot is wide open. My guess is that Carter and/or Hensley may migrate up from 145# to match up with Bobo and Gibbs here. Also in this mix are Ramsey (Loveland), Magee (Springboro) and Fahnestock (Bellfontaine).

There is a wealth of contenders at Miami Trace. State qualifiers Archer and Akers return at this class. Archer, the defending district champion, was second at Tiffin and undefeated elsewhere. Akers has wrestled a busy schedule - placing only fourth at 160# at Barnesville and finishing sixth at the Top Gun. He has split two bouts with Schlaegel and nearly beat Division III choice Schuler. He is difficult to predict in terms of performance level. Milhoan is also a returning state qualifier moving up from the 135# class. That leaves the excellent LeBeau, Richmond Hts. champion Altieri, and Van Dine on the outside, not to mention Fulk (New Lexington), Fielder (Vincent Warren) and Pletcher (Philo). Since 160# is not a lot easier, determination and good pairings will be the order of the day for this large group.

It's a much smaller group at Galion and there are five places that qualify for Wright State. The junior Coe stands out here with a consistent record of good performances. A state qualifier last year, he won at Clyde and was second at Edison and Southview while wrestling at 160#. Of note is that he finished ahead of Sharp, Ross and Schlaegel at Clyde and his loss at Southview was a 15-14 thriller to Division I star Mcintire. Sharp pinned Schlaegel while Glorioso decked Archer and both boys should qualify out of this district. Montano is kind of a wild card here. At times he can be outstanding and then pretty ordinary. He is the type that can spring .the big upset. The remainder of this field is pretty humdrum, though Musick could provide some fireworks.

160#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: MARK BECKS (LAKE CATHOLIC)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2. Brightman (Dayton Northridge) | 14. Deluca (Norwalk) |
| 3. Hieber (GaHon) | 15. Holbrook (WCH) |
| 4. Mason (Ravenna Southeast) | 16. Franz (Kenston) |
| 5. lensman (Graham) | 17. Dozier (Beaver local) |
| 6. Spurlock (Bellevue) | 18. Anzalone (Chaminade) |
| 7. K. Melaragno (Ashtabula Edgewood) | 19. Johnson (CNE) |
| 8. Evans (Hillsboro) | 20. Mclane (Upper Sandusky) |
| 9. Miller (Teays Valley) | 21. Edsall (Ravenna) |
| 10. Lindsay (Steubenville) | 22. lenyk (Canfield) |
| 11. Durkin (Padua) | 23. Moore (Rossford) |
| 12. lane (Milton Union) | 24. Cooper (Paulding) |
| 13. J. Grove (Claymont) | 25. Nethers (Licking Valley) |

This is probably the most eagerly anticipated weight class in Division II and, perhaps, in the entire tournament. It features six outstanding wrestlers, and two have already made a significant impact on state championship wrestling.

Last year Brightman completed a perfect 40-0 season by capturing the state title at 160# over returning runner-up Chad long. Except for an overtime quarter-final bout with Dennis Crossen, Brightman dominated some of the best in Ohio, including a 11-5 win in the final. This year lensman nipped him in the Graham final 3-2 in a down tempo bout. Lensman, who could meet Brightman at the sectional, district and state level (should he stay at this weight class) also won at Clyde - over Spurlock -- and was fourth at the Top Gun and third at the MIT.

Becks, fourth at 140# two years ago as a sophomore, won 35 bouts last year losing only to the great Joe Heskett at the district and state finals. Any other year Becks would have probably been champ at 152# rather than runner-up. His closest state win was by a comfortable four points. Becks is undefeated this year and won at Kenston and the CIT

-- crushing Division I ace Sellet 17-8. Also at this district is Mason who placed at 145# last year and was second at the Top Gun to Hieber. His free-wheeling style makes for lots of action and bushel loads of points.

The other major participant is Cadet National runner-up Ryan Hieber who won at GaHon, Marion Harding and the Top Gun -losing only to Wright in the Gorman finals. He, too, is a returning state qualifier. Right behind him at Galion is Spurlock who has blossomed as a middleweight these past two years.

Clearly, pairings will be important. One would anticipate that Brightmart Becks and Hieber would be district champs. Hopefully, Becks and Brightman would be apart, but whoever draws Hieber in the semi-finals would have double duty to win the state crown. In any event, Becks would seem to be too quick for this field and he should dominate on his feet. Hieber, a Greco-Roman specialist,- has some great throws that must be defended, but Wright wore him down and defeated him in the third period with three takedowns. Becks could do the same.

At Firestone the duo of Becks and Mason are clearly ahead of everyone else. My belief is that the excellent Smith (Copley) who certified at 160# may elect to go back to the far easier 171 # class - especially since state champ Preston will apparently wrestle at 189#. It will be a tough decision. Besides those listed, I could have rated Kosiewicz (Trinity), Adeniyi-Bada (Field) and Verner (Walsh Jesuit).

Hieber and Spurlock head a somewhat thin Galion district. Miller, a qualifier last year, ranks third here and is an integral part of a very fine Teays Valley team. He was third at Clyde losing 10-4 to Lensman, and lost to Evans at 171 # in the final at Teays Valley. He won at Hamilton Twp. After that, it's pretty much open season with any number of possible contenders for the last two spots.

The three qualifiers from Miami Trace will not have it easy at Wright State. Horne certainly will more than hold his own against all but the top five or six, but the other two qualifiers will struggle.

171#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: ZEB MILLER (OAK HARBOR)*

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2. Smith (Copley) | 8. Shrickel (Carrollton) |
| 3. Cole (Beaver Local) | 9. Bauer (Ravenna) |
| 4. Clark (Louisville) | 10. Weeks (Olmsted Falls) |
| 5. Davis (Norton) | 11. Jones (Walsh Jesuit) |
| 6. Pentorn (Perkins) | 12. Dondzilla (Indian Creek) |
| 7. Canale (Canfield) | 13. Ake (ASV) |

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 14. Knull (Graham) | 20. Alford (Coshocton) |
| 15. Kosch (Paulding) | 21. Anzalone (Chaminade) |
| 16. Casteel (Loveland) | 22. Smith (Buckeye Local) |
| 17. Weimer (Springboro) | 23. Glover (Licking Valley) |
| 18. Barnett (Galion) | 24. Leifer (Lima Shawnee) |
| 19. Rugh (Darby) | 25. Nixon (Milton Union) |

* On the assumption Nick Preston (Columbus DeSales) will compete at 189#.

There is a substantial air of uncertainty that permeates the 171# weight class. Already not the strongest of weights, it has become further weakened by the apparent change in plans for defending state champ Nick Preston. He is certified at 171# and was an easy choice to repeat his sterling triumph which included unseating state titlist Josh Didion in overtime. Now, however, a knee injury which will force a three to five week layoff has evidently called for a change in direction. He will recuperate and lift, but returning to 171# is no longer feasible. Make no mistake -- a healthy Preston has between 80%-90% of winning here. If he is not here, then it's a wide open contest. One last item, this was already an unbalanced weight class with most of the wrestlers exiting the Firestone District. Now that is even more evident with Preston's departure.

My choice, Zeb Miller, is the fourth in a line of outstanding Oak Harbor brothers who share great athletic talent and lively and interesting first names (Ferd, Chad and Tait). A state qualifier two years ago at 160# as a sophomore, he missed placement by a single point. He missed all of last year with a long-term injury but has returned this year with renewed success. He was second at the MIT losing a 2 point overtime bore-a-thon with Kinley, but won at Oak Harbor and the SBC Duals. He showed great resiliency in beating Bauer by 1 and Endicott by 2 at the MIT.

I was hoping the SBC Duals would give me a better read on Penthorn. but he did not wrestle either Miller or Dew. However, he has had a great winning season at Galion with a fall over Barnett and finishing second at Tiffin to Division I state placer Grover 12-11. I rate him second best at Galion. Kosch was sixth at this district last year, but appears to be devastating everyone in his path. However, he has not yet wrestled a succession of state caliber performers as of now. Barnett, Rugh and Leifer are other possibilities here and they will match up reasonably well with everyone, except the Northeast District qualifiers.

It does appear that this weight classification is the most geographically unbalanced in Division II. Eight of my top 13 will compete at Firestone - with only five qualifying. I was tremendously impressed with state qualifier David Smith last year during the district action. Very strong, he lost to Brett Becks 12-9 in the semi-finals before finishing fourth. Becks defeated him again - this time 11-8 - in their state placement bout the following week. This year he has certified at 160#, but I believe may opt to wrestle here. Clearly it will be easier to qualify at 160#, but there are four or five superstars there that make being state champion a low probability event for Smith. At

171#, the district qualification process is chancier, but the probability of a state title is substantially higher. At any rate, I ranked him here, and he has had a great season finishing a strong fourth at the tough Ironman, second at Copley and first at Wadsworth. He has not yet lost to a Division I wrestler. Clark missed state qualification by 1 point at 152# last year - finishing sixth - but has been solid at 171#. He won the Top Gun defeating Knull 11-0 in the semis and then pinning for the title. He also won at North Canton and sustained his only loss in a 4-3 battle with Division I Dobies in the Wadsworth Final. Not well known early in the year, he is a powerhouse at 171# this year. Like Clark, Davis was a successful 152 pounder last year who bowed out of district action in the second consolation round. This year at Solon he looked like a midget 189 pounder, but he was a finalist before being pinned by Corrigan. He has remained at 189# - with great success - but he gives up a lot of size. He won the Dies and Norton handily and was third at the MIT. Still, he has certified at 171# and he has a legitimate shot at a state title at that weight. Watch for him, he likes to score and he could go a long way here.

Canale is another relative unknown with excellent credentials. He has won at Cuyahoga Falls and the Dies and was second at Kenston to Osolin by a point. Not a lot of name recognition here - yet. Bauer, a state qualifier at Rootstown last year, has moved right into the Ravenna starting lineup without missing a beat. He pinned in the title round at Solon and also won the WRC. He was fourth at the MIT losing to Miller 9-8. Weeks and Ake have strong seasons, as well, while the sophomore Jones has been moving forward with a rush. He was third at the CIT and then won seven bouts at the Top Gun losing only to Clark 5-2. He defeated Knull, Osolin and McGregor in that period.

The Miami Trace District does not look strong. Knull, Casteel and Weimer head this field. but their past records would not indicate confidence when opposing contestants from other parts of the state. The advantage Knull has is a schedule that has taken him to the Top Gun, MIT and Clyde tourneys. He has suffered some losses, but he is far more battle-hardened than much of his competition here. Sweeney (Varlisle) and Harrison (Valley View) could also score at this district.

State qualifiers Cole and Schrickel lead the Miami Trace District. Both were state quarter-finalists. and they have continued their winning efforts this year. Cole is undefeated at 21-0 which includes the prestigious OVAC title at this weight. Schrickel wrestles few tourneys, but has been outstanding in dual meet action. Cole defeated Schrickel 6-4 in sectional action last year in their only meeting. There will be spirited competition for the last spot. Dondzilla and Alford have to be the favorites, but Smith is also very good. He may opt to compete at 160#, however. I also like Shonk (New Lexington). White (West Holmes) and Douglas (Philo).

189#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: ANDY HAMPTON (RAVENNA)

TOP CONTENDERS

2. Corrigan (Twinsburg)
3. Preston (Columbus DeSales)
4. Novakovich (Lake Catholic)
5. Floyd (Hamilton Ross)
6. Kuhns (Bellevue)
7. Wensink (Perkins)
8. Williams (Trenton Edgewood)
9. Wegesin (Galion)
10. Charity (Hubbard)
11. McDaniel (Teays Valley)
12. Harkness (Maysville)
13. Hart (Springfield Shawnee)
14. Zelinsky (Revere)
15. Edwards (Steubenville)
16. Dale (Lima Shawnee)
17. Barniak (Buckeye)
18. Wetherall (Buckeye Local)
19. Sanders (Milton Union)
20. Coleman (Beaver Local)
21. Bloomfield (Bucyrus)
22. Hart (West Holmes)
23. Volpe (Louisville)
24. Brown (Fairfield Union)
25. Sosa (Clyde)
26. Newell (Meadowbrook)
27. Mechir (Padua)

Last year only six of the 32 Division II qualifiers at 171# and 189# were underclassmen. As we saw at 171#, that lead to a substantially weaker field. but for some reason - possibly a large reservoir of talent last year - there are still a lot of high quality performers at 189#. -

In fact, there are at least five outstanding contenders in this weight class who have all the talent required to be a state champ - and, in fact, one of them already is. Three of that number come from one district, which means that there is a one-third probability that four of the top five could end up in the same half of the draw. If the Galion and Wilmington champs are together, then the second and third place finishers from Firestone would be with them creating an incredibly lopsided draw. That's assuming, of course, that everyone performs as anticipated. Even in the other two-thirds of the cases, the Firestone champ would have just one of the other four in his half bracket. Given that set of conditions, winning at Firestone takes on added urgency.

The top trio at Firestone includes three returning state qualifiers, two of whom have placed at Wright State. Hampton, the big Ravenna junior, upset Corrigan in the first round of last year's districts and rolled to the finals before being pinned by Knupp. He then won three bouts at states to finish fifth - a great performance for a sophomore. This year he has won at Solon and the MIT, but was taken down three times by Corrigan in the WRC final and lost 9-5. Corrigan was fourth in states at 171# two years ago as a sophomore. However, last year he was only fourth in the district and failed to place at Wright State winning only one bout. This year he has been champion at Solon, Hudson, Kenston and the WRC. Novakovich qualified at 215# last year, but was drastically undersized and got hammered at Wright State.

This year he has made substantial progress. He lost to Corrigan 17-7 in the Kenston final, but gave Rowland a real battle losing 10-8 at the CIT finals. Then in a recent dual he nipped Division I state champ Andy Hrovat 7-6. Despite his loss to Corrigan, I still

favor Hampton to win it all. He has a history of improvement during the season, whereas Corrigan may struggle slightly as the season wears on and Hampton gets bigger. The key to the state title is likely to be that district's championship. It's a big jump down to the next layer with Charity, Barniak and Zelinsky as principal contenders. However, none of this group is assured qualification and the battle for the last two spots should be wide open.

Preston faces a formidable group of 189s at Galion. Still, he was brilliant last year upsetting state champ Didion in the district and then doing it again in overtime to win the 171# state title. This year has been spent at 189# with the intention of moving down to 171# just as he did last year. While at 189# he won easily at DeSales pinning Hart - and nipped Rowland by two to take the Midwest Classic. Assuming he's healthy (and we know he'll be rested), he could easily win it all at 189# this year.

Kuhns had a great year in 1997 but was injured in the league meet and didn't get out of the sectional. This year he has been champ at Bellevue, Avon lake and Clyde. Wensink may have surpassed Kuhns, but there is no way of knowing that now. He was second at Galion losing a difficult 9-8 bout in the final and then won handily at Tiffin. Wegesin had a great first half of the season winning at Galion and Marion Harding, but then stumbled badly at the Gorman and finished fourth. It was much the same at the Top Gun where he failed to place though he did get a difficult draw. Dale and McDaniel look next best and I've listed three other possibilities.

The fifth top contender is state placer Floyd exiting from the Miami Trace District. A dominating district champ at 171# last year, he was a state semi-finalist before losing to Didion and fell to fifth place. This year he is 16-1 with his only loss to state champion Hrovat at the MIT final. Williams qualified as a sophomore at this weight last year, but got only one bout at Wright State. He has already lost three times this year including by fall to Floyd in the Edgewood final. Hart is 15-4 with a difficult schedule and should grab the third qualification spot. .

The field is very weak at Miami Trace. No state qualifiers return. Harkness seems to be clearly the best of this group, and he did finish a strong third at Tiffin. Wetherall, Edwards and Coleman all have previous district experience and all placed at the recent OVAC extravaganza. I came very close to ranking Griffith (Hillsboro), Rolli (Morgan) and Becker (Dover).

215#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: TOM WEILBACHER (COLUMBUS DeSales)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2. Kania (Oak Harbor) | 4. Allen (Springfield Shawnee) |
| 3. Salisbury (Norton) | 5. Boyuk (Indian Creed) |

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 6. Deluca (Bellevue) | 16. Graybeal (Salem) |
| 7. Shumate (Galion) | 17. Lambert (Miami Trace) |
| 8. Hegedish (Twinsburg) | 18. Bibler (Perkins) |
| 9. Jackson (Tipp City) | 19. Surnear (Fairless) |
| 10. Kirkpatrick (Minerva) | 20. Hembree (Loveland) |
| 11. Scott (Teays Valley) | 21. Ratliff (New Lexington) |
| 12. Menegay (Louisville) | 22. Conner (Clyde) |
| 13. Jones (Chaminade) | 23. Presby (University School) |
| 14. Sparks (Howland) | 24. Herron (Dover) |
| 15. Wilson (CNE) | 25. Bishop (Logan Elm) |

Between 1992 and 1997, Columbus DeSales had seven different placers at the State at 171# or above. In terms of enrolling and developing big men, they have done an outstanding job. Of that seven, three were state champs and two others were runners up and at 215#. Tom Weilbacher is a relatively strong favorite to add to that state championship total. Last year Weilbacher compiled a 41-3 record in finishing third at Wright State with two of those losses to Viktor Sveda. The latter one was in the state semi-finals when Weilbacher took the heavily favored Sveda to his back and nearly pinned him. In one of the most dramatic bouts of the meet, Sveda came back to win 8-7. Incidentally, Weilbacher defeated the Division I champ Faunda at the Top Gun. This year Weilbacher is undefeated claiming titles at DeSales, Top Gun, CIT and MWC. His raw power and unexpected quickness have made most of his bouts totally one sided, but it will be a lot closer at Wright State. .

Weilbacher's chief pursuer is likely to greet him for the first time at the Galion District. Kania was fourth at Wright State to cap a banner season. He twice lost to Weilbacher - a close 11-9 district bout and by fall in the state consolation finals. This year he, too, is undefeated winning at Oak Harbor and the SBC dual, but missing the MIT due to illness. Deluca also returns after finishing second to Weilbacher in the district final 14-6, but losing twice at states. He was first this year at Bellevue and Avon Lake, but had a bad weekend at Clyde finishing fifth after a narrow loss to Courtad and a larger one to Scott (who he defeated 11-2 in last year's district). Factor in the excellent Shumate - who was third at the Top Gun and first at Galion and the Gorman along with an OT loss at Marion Harding - and Scott, and one can understand the difficulty other potential qualifiers like Bibler, Conner or Holloway (Olentangy) will face.

No other district can match Galion for both "up front" power and depth. There is an interesting cast of characters at Firestone. Salisbury went to state last year as a heavyweight - a very light heavyweight - probably the smallest one to qualify. This year he has moved down to 215# (with the 275 pound transfer Hallett helping to convince him) and has done very well. He won at Norton and the Dies and was second to Hampton at Solon. He has excellent quickness and mobility. Hegedish would be ideal for the old 175 pound weight class we had for many years. He's just a shade too big for 171# and Corrigan blocks his path at 189#. So he's been at 215# and hasn't done badly at all, finishing third in both tournaments (Solon and Hudson) in which he competed. He

has excellent knowledge and experience, but he will be giving up a lot of size. The rest of those rated all have some positives and negatives. Graybeal, for example, has an undefeated record but has wrestled a relatively weak schedule and has no district experience. A hot weekend for any of them, or for Dohse (Ravenna Southeast) or Hartlaub (Avon lake) could mean a ticket to Wright State.

There is really just one main man at Miami Trace. David Boyuk is far above the rest of the group. last year he won the OVAC and was No.1 in the area, but for some inexplicable reason (injury?) never got out of the sectional. This year he has been outstanding losing only a two-point overtime battle to the West Virginia state champ Pratz in this year's OVAC finals. Lambert drifts between 215# and heavyweight. but should surface here at tourney time. last year at heavyweight his district lasted 61 seconds. The rest of the choices are part analysis, part guess work and part hunch.

State qualifier Allen again leads the Southwestern contingent. Last year he went into the states with a 43-1 record and a district crown, but lost 13-1 to Kania. However, he came back in fine fashion winning three consolation bouts to finish fifth. State qualifier Jackson also returns and should lock up the second state ticket. Both Wilson and Jones are good and it's difficult to choose between them. Wilson was fourth at heavyweight (one spot from qualification) and Welch, who defeated him for the third and last spot, ended up fourth at Wright state the next week. Jones was fourth at GMVWA and has wrestled well all year.

HVY.

PROJECTED CHAMPION: TIM ANDERSON (CLYDE)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2. Kobus (Geneva) | 14. Martin (Shelby) |
| 3. Hawk (Elida) | 15. Crock (Ravenna Southeast) |
| 4. Welch (Eaton) | 16. Tyrell (Galion) |
| 5. Poe (Bellaire) | 17. Boone (Hillsboro) |
| 6. Hallett (Coventry) | 18. Mangum (Minerva) |
| 7. Heskett (St. Clairsville) | 19. Hughes (Bellevue) |
| 8. Deaton (Franklin) | 20. Angelica (Steubenville) |
| 9. Mohner (NOCI) | 21. Easton (West Geauga) |
| 10. Fabian (Oak Harbor) | 22. Sonnie (University School) |
| 11. Sobey (Padua) | 23. Berry (Blanchester) |
| 12. Crow (Teays Valley) | 24. Garrison (Graham) |
| 13. Williams (Purcell) | 25. Cottrell (Claymont) |

Last year nine of 16-man heavyweight bracket were underclassmen and, in addition, another Division I state qualifying heavyweight (John Hawk) is now in Division II. That makes for a very crowded field many of whom have wrestled each other several times.

So, for example, "A" wallops "B," "B" defeats "C" and "C" whumps "A" making for not only difficulty in ranking, but even in logic flow. Almost everybody here will be able to say they defeated someone ranked higher and, perhaps, lost to someone ranked lower (though that is not often remembered). One thing that all this turmoil will generate is an exceedingly interesting competition with even more upsets than heavyweights usually generate.

Rather surprisingly - considering the number and quality of the local Division II schools - the last heavyweight from the Northwestern District to win a state title was Rick Young nearly a dozen years ago in 1986. This year, however, two of my top three choices come from that area.

Tim Anderson was the district runner up last year to two-time state heavyweight champion John Kelley and, in fact, was the only district wrestler to go the full six minutes with Kelley. At the state level he lost an 11-10 bout with Poe and was promptly eliminated. This year he is undefeated with titles at Clyde, Edison, Southview and SSC Duals - while racking up a very high fall percentage. This year he's defeated Fabian 10-1 and Mohner 12-3 among the top group of heavyweights. Hawk, who lost to Anderson last year, has had injury problems in his career but is now apparently healthy. A Division I qualifier last year he, too, lost his only bout falling 3-2 in overtime versus Salvino. This year he won at Tiffin and Rogers and has not often been seriously challenged. State qualifier Fabian returns and should also grab a qualifying berth. He failed to place at the MIT losing to Turner by fall and being outmaneuvered by quicker Sonnie 3-1. He did defeat Hughes to win at Oak Harbor. Crow is rated first in the Central District while Tyrell has had both ups and down. Tyrell is a good example of the vicissitudes of being a heavyweight. He was first at Galion, second at Marion, only fourth at the Gorman and didn't place at the tough Top Gun. This is a big group with no one mentioned weighing less than 260 pounds. A sleeper pick here might be Martin who has been consistently good in every appearance.

The Firestone District is also very strong. Kobus competed in Division I last year but failed to qualify out of the Massman Perry District. This year he won the multi-state Midwest Classic and followed with a second place finish at the Top Gun losing only to Turner and upsetting Division III state champ Dean Taylor. The immense Hallett is an all-state football player with incredible strength. He is already a two-time state power lifting champ and an all-state shot putter. A state qualifier last year at Coventry, he provides the final link in a chain of excellent upper weight wrestlers for Norton. Mohner, the CIT champ, is up from 215# and has excellent mobility. He has good placement chances with the right draw. Sobey was a surprise state qualifier last year, and he can win a lot of bouts. He will be tested by this much stronger than last year district at heavyweight.

Poe and Heskett have met a number of times in the last few years with Poe winning most of them; but it was Heskett who got the big prize, so far, by winning in the OVAC final. It is ironic that while Poe seems to win more often it is Heskett who owns an OVAC

title, a district championship and a state place. These two are clearly the best at this district with Boone and the improving Angelica a step behind. The sophomore Cottrell is also a rising star, but will probably struggle to qualify this year. At the state level both Heskett and Poe have reasonable low placement chances once again. Last year Poe won two bouts but fell one win short of placing, while Heskett won two to make the semi-finals before falling to sixth.

Welch was a district third, but was outstanding at the state meet. After a first round pin he battled two time champ Kelley into overtime before losing 4-3. Then he won three consolation bouts before being caught in the same funky move by Wolford that eliminated Poe and finished fourth. As the highest returning state placer, he may well do better than his current ranking of fourth. Deaton, too, went to states and won one bout before losing to Heskett and then being eliminated in the consolation? -- He is currently 12-2 including a fall over Boone to win at Franklin. Williams looks good as a third choice, but Berry, Garrison, Monroe (Urbana) and Grothjan (Springsboro) are other hopefuls.

TEAMS

1. Graham - From a formulaic perspective, there are at least five teams with excellent shots at a state title. Graham must be a slight favorite because their big point scorers - Hess, Morgan and Erwin - seem a shade surer and they have substantial back-up strength in Lensman, Schlaegel, Knull and Wooten. It would be their first since Ron McCunn coached them to victory in 1982.
2. Columbus DeSales - Weilbacher and Preston are bankable for somewhere around 50 points, while Pusateri, Barnett and Carey can contribute if they are comfortable at their new weights. The upside is the freshman Barnett with tremendous potential and a lot of people like Canty, Bowman and Bazemore who could get to state. The downside is Preston's injury problem. A title would vault them into a tie with Coventry for most Division II team titles with four.
3. Clyde - A team that just keeps on improving and now has to be placed in the top tier of teams. The opening lightweights all could qualify for Wright State with West and Jennings particularly good. They'll need a big performance from Coe and Blackburn - and Kovaleski, Smith and Conner could help. If it comes down to heavyweight~ Anderson should win it for them. Of any of these teams they have the most chances to win.
4. Walsh Jesuit - Six state titles and two runner-up trophies - all in the decade of the '90s - is an incredible team performance. However, if they win it this- year, and that is not such a far-fetched prediction, it will undoubtedly be Bill Barger's sweetest and most rewarding triumph. The lightweights with Rooney, Daugherty and the freshman Romano are excellent, while Rawling, Jones, Sveda and Davis

can also score at the state level. On a hot weekend they could win it all - and almost all of them return next year.

5. Lake Catholic-- Two state champs - Becks and Simmons - can score a lot of points, and Novakovich will do well at the tough 189# class. Nicola is their next best hope of putting some points on the state board with Trivisonno and Cook other possibilities. Again, this team has the firepower to be state champs.
6. Ravenna - Hampton and Hayes are favorites at 189# and 103# respectively, but back-up scoring is suspect. Bauer is a scoring threat at 171#, but then it's up to people like Dunfee, Lara, Edsall and Davis.
7. Oak Harbor -- Certainly not your basic great dual meet team, but Kania and Miller should be finalists and Fabian could contribute some, too. That might be 50 points which is easily in the Top Ten.
8. Clavmont - They may not be quite as powerful as was originally anticipated, but they are certainly not toothless. Toukonen and Abbuhl are returning state place winners, while Peters, Akers and Grove have state experience. That is a great nucleus to start with, but it remains to be seen how much scoring they can do at the state level.
9. Galion - They have a lot of upside potential - enough I believe to make the top five. Gilmore, Hieber and Shumate are the big guns with the first two having finalist potential. If they can get extra help from Wegesin, Tyrell. Barnett and maybe, McClintock they'll move up.
10. Coventry -- Biel is the main man, but Benedum, Bray, Street and Hopkins are all potential! state scorers. The key will be get out of that tough Firestone District with as many as possible.
11. Perry -Three-time state qualifier Murphy should score big and all those middleweights -- Kellerman, Santee, Ashton and Siaper -- need to chip in. The real question is how much has this team progressed in the last two years -- the answer is likely to be a lot.
12. Twinsburg - Corrigan has finalist potential while Brooks and Michalek have placement potential. Hegedish could surprise a lot of 215s and Turle could win some close bouts, and then they're easily in the Top Ten.
13. Norton - The upper weights of Davis, Sailsbury and Hallett could score heavily, but the real key is a hot weekend for the mercurial Vail!.

DIVISION III

No team has repeated in Division III since Richmond Hts. accomplished that feat in 1983 and 1984. Last year Delta missed duplicating their 1996 triumph by only four points in the closest team finish since 1994. Last year also marked the first time that the Central District failed to have an individual champ since the inauguration of division III back in 1976 - and, in fact, did not even have a finalist. As in Division I, it was also a banner year in terms of my forecasts with 11 correct predictions and either second or third choices winning the other three weight classes. .

103#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: DEAN FAZIO (MANCHESTER) TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Lester (CVCA) | 14. Stevens (Hillsdale) |
| 3. Lorenz (Grandview Hts.) | 15. Harmeyer (Reading) |
| 4. Ongalibang (River Valley) | 16. McDowell (Jonathan Alder) |
| 5. Pressler (Margaretta) | 17. Shaddow (Chagrin Falls) |
| 6. S. Finneran (Sandusky St. Mary) | 18. Sharrits (Delphos ST. John) |
| 7. Stanek (Chanel) | 19. Francis (Barnesville) |
| 8. Bright (Dixie) | 20. Magoteaux (Versailles) |
| 9. Hockenberry (Northwood) | 21. J. Smith (Cory-Rawson) |
| 10. Hochwalt (Oakwood) | 22. Parsons (Loudonville) |
| 11. Coljohn (Independence) | 23. Aring (Eastwood) |
| 12. Wilds (North Union) | 24. Fernandez (Elyria Catholic) |
| 13. Webb (Ayresville) | 25. Scott (Williamsburg) |
| | 26. Kirtley (Streetsboro) |

I think it's strictly a two-man contest between Fazio and Lester, with Lorenz possibly able to play an ancillary role in the final outcome. Fazio, now a junior, was third in the State last year at this weight class losing only to Jesse 7-5 in the semi-finals. He campaigned much of this year at 112# finishing third in the MIT there (including a 2-1 win over Jesse). I'm guessing it's a reasonably tough cut, but Fazio is a big 103 pounder. Lester, only a freshman, is a prodigy. He is small for the weight, but he just flows from one move to the next and he has a genius for balance -- it's so natural, effortless. In his first varsity tournament, Lester won the Ironman and then the next week won at Hudson -- defeating returning Division I state qualifier Varga 10-1 in the finals. At the MIT he cruised into the finals before losing to my Division II choice Hayes 8-6 in a bout that could well have gone the other way. At the Dies, Lester whipped Fazio in the finals 5-2 for yet another tourney title. They will meet, very likely, at the sectional, district and probably the state finals. Lester has won round one, but I think in the end Fazio will win the war on superior size and a readier acclimation to Lester's style. But make no mistake, Harry Lester will, before he's through; leave an indelible mark on Ohio high school wrestling.

The rest of the Elyria Catholic District is unlikely to give the top duo a real battle. The one exception might be the freshman Stanek who was third at Solon and won handily at Wadsworth and Troy. I'll be interested to see how he matches up with Lester. The remainder of those rated may, in reality, if Stanek is as good as I believe, be contesting for only one state berth.

Lorenz was sixth at this weight last year after winning what is now the Marion District. Fazio pinned him in the quarter-finals, but he did win three state bouts. He has won several small tourneys, but didn't place at the MIT losing two tough overtime bouts to Laughlin and Purcell. He had three close battles in winning this district last year, but it won't be nearly that tough this year -- except against Ongalibang. This is a wrestler who has been consistently strong all year and has good upside potential over his already high rating., Wilds and McDowell would be my other two choices to qualify which would shut out the Eastern District portion of the tournament unless Francis can pull an upset. Jesse Shirley (Northmor) has district capabilities at this weight class and would be only the second young lady to qualify for district action in Ohio.

Two state qualifiers return at this weight class at Xenia. Bright, a two-time state qualifier, had a terrible draw last year catching Fazio first (losing 8-2) and then hitting Lorenz in the first consolation round (losing 7-4). Winning a district title should help this year. Bright, much to his credit, entered the MIT and won two bouts. Hochwalt, also a state qualifier, has had an excellent year as well and should return to Wright State. Harmeyer has had a great year for Reading and should battle with Magoteaux for the last berth.

Usually the Fostoria District is loaded at this class, but it hasn't happened this year. Pressler and Finneran look to be best and probably in line for a middle to low place. Pressler has had a big year for Margaretta winning at Oak Harbor and Edison, and finishing third at Marion Harding where Ongalibang defeated him 13-5. Last year, Sean M. Finneran qualified at this weight class for Sandusky St. Mary, but he is now at 125# and this is Sean J. Finneran -- anything to confuse me. Anyway, this Finneran is also excellent and will battle Pressler for the top spot. At the SBC Duals, Pressler won their individual battle 7-6. Hockenberry won the Sylvania Southview in handsome style at 103#, but has been at 112# much of the year. He will be in the same crowded sectional as Finneran and Pressler. The other two qualifiers will probably not have a long shelf life at Wright State.

112#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: TRISTAN BOYD (LIMA CENTRAL CATHOLIC)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2. Allega (Independence) | 6. Sibrel (Lakota) |
| 3. Jesse (Hopewell-Loudon) | 7. Evans (Jonathan Alder) |
| 4. Stultz (Delta) | 8. Adler (Beachwood) |
| 5. D. Opfer (Sandusky St. Mary) | 9. Clum (Northmor) |

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 10. Schultz (Brookville) | 18. Gebura (Black River) |
| 11. A. Roush (Mohawk) | 19. Curnes (Martins Ferry) |
| 12. Wytko (Jackson Milton) | 20. Kleman (Bluffton) |
| 13. Brooks (Cadiz) | 21. Day (Preble Shawnee) |
| 14. R. Opichka (Madeira) | 22. Kuchta (Streetsboro) |
| 15. Fields (Summit Country Day) | 23. Cusick (River Valley) |
| 16. Tardiff (Woodridge) | 24. Flora (Mechanicsburg) |
| 17. O'Grady (Shadyside) | 25. Smilek (CVCA) |

I'm not sure I've ever been more puzzled by a weight class. There are so many unanswered questions, and in the limited time available so little relevant data on which to answer them. Questions like, (a) can Boyd perform at peak levels for three weekends at 112# after being at 119# and 125# all year?, (b) will we see the fabulous freshman Drew Opfer at this weight or will it be his two-time state champion brother Jared?, (c) What can we expect from Brian Stultz now that he is wrestling at his optimal weight?, (d) how will last year's two state finalists Allega and Jesse compete against a new top trio of challengers? Quite honestly I do not know the answer to any of these questions, and because of that cannot really provide fact-based rankings to the extent that occurs at most other weight classes.

The choice of Boyd is predicated on an affirmative answer to the first of the questions that I posed. He was state runner-up to Jared Opfer at 103# two years ago and then last year lost to Opfer in the semi-finals at 112# and placed third -- in spite of nagging injury problems. This year he has been sensational -- winning the CIT, the "A" Classic and Van Buren while finishing second at the GMVWA -- all at weights of 119# or 125#. Two years ago at 103# he did defeat Allega 3-1 in the state semi-finals.

Both Drew and Jared Opfer have certified at 112#, but I'm guessing we will see the younger brother, Drew, at this weight class. He is a little bigger and more aggressive than his older brother and has compiled a great record in his freshman year. I was particularly impressed with his 12-6 dismantling of the excellent Josh Quick and his 2-1 win over Townsley in the SBC Duals. If Jared competes here, of course, then all bets on Boyd are off.

Stultz chose to compete at 119# last year at tourney time rather than at the far more optimal 103#. He still managed state qualification at the higher weight class, but did not score at the state level. This year at 112# he won at the GMVWA and Perrysburg while finishing second at the Top Gun. My guess is that he will be exceptional at this weight during the tourney process.

Allega and Jesse have both had great seasons, but not overpowering ones. Jesse won all his usual fare of smaller tourneys, but was fourth at the MIT losing close bouts to Spires and Fazio. Somehow, he always seems very aggressive against opponents he perceives as weaker, but rather defensive against the better boys. He needs to trust his substantial abilities if he is to win at 112# this year. Allega, the canny veteran, continues to react well to moving up to 112#. He won against Division I state placer Saley at Brecksville, and

continues to dominate weaker opposition. His 13-11 overtime win over Adler was a tribute to his comeback abilities.

The Fostoria District will be a real donnybrook -- five of the top six ranked individuals will compete there and state qualifier Roush and state alternate Kleman also return. The pairings should be good with Stultz, Opfer, Boyd and Jesse exiting different sectionals. Sibrel was fifth at 103# last year for Lakota, but will compete for Elmwood this year. Even with his state placement I'm not sure he can compete with my top quartet. Besides Roush and Kleman, one can also anticipate some victories from Grime (Archbold), Studer (Edgerton), Moore (Columbus Grove) and S. Smith (Cory Rawson), but it's difficult to believe that they can compete with the top group.

Allega has a far easier district. Adler, of course, will be back to try and win the next one with the state champion, while state qualifier Wytko will also return. I've listed four others including the young Smilek who would be a top 103# challenger except for the sensational Lester. Nonetheless, Allega should be a high probability choice here based on a state third two years ago and his state title last year. In terms of present competition, he defeated Sibrel 11 0-7 and Jesse 6-2 on his route to the state title. Also to be heard from are Horne (Grand Valley), Rentz (Tuslaw), Tompkins (Mogadore) and Davis (Chagrin Falls).

State qualifiers Schultz and Fields return at Xenia, but the latter may have been overtaken by the younger Opichka. They should be the favored trio for the three berths at state with Day, Flora, and Kelch (Batavia) long-shot possibilities. Schultz, a defending district champion, lost a close first-round but to Gondollast year, but then was hammered by Evans in the consolations. Fields got a tough draw losing to Carrizales and Davis. State alternate Opichka was third at Madeira behind Fields and Brock - both state qualifiers.

119#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JARED OPFER (SANDUSKY ST. MARY)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2. Carrizales (Delta) | 15. Ware (Martins Ferry) |
| 3. Hughes (Black River) | 16. Gondol (Jackson Milton) |
| 4. Simcoe (Johnstown Northridge) | 17. McDivitt (Cardinal) |
| 5. Lowery / West (Lakota) | 18. Dues (Verailles) |
| 6. Jordan (Independence) | 19. Klimak (Streetsboro) |
| 7. Woodby (Monroe Central) | 20. Fedeli (Lima Catholic Central) |
| 8. Perry (Brookville) | 21. B. Gleckler (Evergreen) |
| 9. Borjas (Genoa) | 22. Miller (Beachwood) |
| 10. Hackney (Wellsville) | 23. Weible (Tinora) |
| 11. Thompson (Bethel Tate) | 24. Engle (Reading) |
| 12. C. Coffman (Grandview Hts.) | 25. Maurice (West Liberty Salem) |
| 13. Krokos (Columbia Station) | 26. Crisp (Elyria Catholic) |
| 14. Donahue (Bellaire St. John) | 27. Tokarsky (Summit Country Day) |

Two-time state champion Jared Opfer will likely be at this weight class looking to take home a third state title in only his junior year. Often after a wrestler has won his first two years it starts to get easier, but Opfer faces a strong field this year. Thinking briefly about it, I could remember only one wrestler in Ohio who won state titles as a freshman and a sophomore -- and didn't win four. That was Clint Musser, who never backed down from a challenge, and while it may have cost him a state title, it's also what made him great. As a freshman wrestler in his second varsity tournament, he told me his goal was to win four state titles -- and he nearly did it. After winning the first two he was determined to challenge defending state champion Jonathan Vaughn at 135#. Frankly, Musser was outsized and in his four bouts with Vaughn won only one -- and that was not in the state finals. Vaughn was just too good on the mat.

Anyway Opfer has put together a pair of 47-win seasons (against three total losses) on his way to two state titles. This year he has been equally good putting 'C' together an undefeated season - although not against a particularly high caliber of "; opposition -- which could cost him down the road. He wrestles a conservative, error-free style that grinds down opponents and grinds out victories in record numbers. His long-time rival for the third consecutive year will be Anthony Carrizales. They met in the district semi-finals two years ago at 103# with Carrizales winning, but Opfer then defeated him 9-7 in overtime in the state semi-finals, and then twice more last year in the district and state finals (9-5 and 4-3). But make no mistake, Carrizales is very good and easily capable of evening up their individual record this year. Last year he had only one other close bout in this 12 tournament bouts (against Zach Davis) and can dominate. This year his only losses were to Wilcox and Peretti at the GMWJA and Top Gun respectively. The rest of this district is well behind this top duo. One interesting contretemps is at Lakota where recent transfer Justin West and state fourth place finisher Jared Lowrey will wrestle off at this weight class -- the loser to go at either 125# or 130#.

The only other wrestler that I believe has any significant winning chances against my top duo is state runner-up Joe Hughes. Last year he lost to Burnett in both the district and state finals on his way to a second place medal. Two years ago he extended Carrizales into overtime in the state quarter-finals before losing. An exceptional mat wrestler, he has fashioned another great season and should dominate at Elyria Catholic. There are a lot of state possibilities behind him. Returning are state qualifiers McDivitt, Gonda! and Jordan -- all of whom could qualify once more.

However, Klimak, Krokos and Miller have made giant strides and are on a roughly equivalent plane. Krokos, for example, defeated state quarter-finalist Jordan 3-1 in a recent dual meet. Besides those ranked there is a lengthy list of good candidates including Ketchum (Wellington), Burnett (Chargin Falls), Presti (Aurora) and Jackson (Tuslaw).

It's even more crowded at Marion. I have 13 names on my current list looking at only four qualification opportunities. State qualifier Simcoe heads this group based not only on a great 1997-98 season, but on last year's performance as well. He was district runner-up at this weight to state placer Geiger and won two state bouts losing only to

Burnett and three-time state placer Schmidt. Also back are state qualifiers Woodby, Ware and Donahue, but none are guaranteed a state berth at this log-jammed district. Woodby wrestles for a very small school, but has consistently excellent results. He was a one point loser in the OVAC semi-finals and placed third ahead of Ware. Donahue and Ware have battled all year and will probably again do so at this district. Hackney is a real strong prospect here coming off a runner-up finish at the OVAC where he pinned O'Donahue. Coffman was at 125# last year, but has switched weights with his brother and had a fine season. He lost both his district bouts at 125# last year by a single point. I also like Long (Pleasant) as a potential dark horse candidate based on his recent performance.

At Xenia, Thompson and Perry are nominal leaders at this class, but they face stiff competition. Thompson was in Division II last year where he was the state alternate at 112# losing to the excellent Ray in the go-to-state bout. Right with him is state qualifier Bob Perry who won his first state bout but then lost twice, including a 11-10 heartbreaker in the first consolation round. Dues might be third best, but the freshman Engle is rapidly closing in. If he doesn't make it this year, it will be the last time he fails to qualify.

125#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: BRIAN HAIMERL (READY)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| 2. Davis (Loudonville) | 15. Hartson (Northmor) |
| 3. Bein (Batavia) | 16. B. Opichka (Madeira) |
| 4. Formanek (Aurora) | 17. Campbell (Ontario) |
| 5. N. Coffman (Grandview Hts.) | 18. Hundley (Dixie) |
| 6. Lowery I West (Lakota) | 19. Schaefer (Chanel) |
| 7. Richards (Columbia Station) | 20. Bittinger (Cadiz) |
| 8. S. Roth (Martins Ferry) | 21. Ranker (Seneca East) |
| 9. Lejeune (Fremont St. Joseph) | 22. Plank (Triad) |
| 10. Cecil (Elyria Catholic) | 23. Gerwin (Eastwood) |
| 11. Welly (Mohawk) | 24. Dowler (Black River) |
| 12. Tomaino (Jackson-Milton) | 25. Wyse (Evergreen) |
| 13. S. M. Finneran (Sandusky ST. Mary) | 26. Glasser (Shadyside) |
| 14. Griffith (West Liberty Salem) | 27. Bellamy (Monroeville) |

There are a number of outstanding candidates at 125# - all of whom have outstanding credentials throughout a long and productive career. The top four are all seniors, but nipping at their heels is a nice mix of sophomores and juniors. It may not quite have the firepower of the marvelous competition that this weight class had last year, but it should contain some of the better competition in Division III.

My choice is the outstanding senior Brian Haimerl, who has had an exceptional career at Bishop Ready. Already a two-time state qualifier, he was fifth two years ago at 103#.

This year he upset the highly regarded Luke Spencer to win at Ready and tore through the CIT field in impressive fashion with his closest bout a 10-1 win over

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Trivisonno. He was fourth at Top Gun losing a semi-final bout to Division II state champ Kevin Maehl.

Davis is one of his two principal challengers. Last year he came into the Elyria , Catholic at 32-0 and lost a first-round thriller 8-6. Pulled back into the competition, he finished fourth and barely qualified. Then at Wright State he caught a surprised Haimerl in the first round at won 10-8. He ended up sixth -nursing a nagging injury. This year he challenged Ratliff in the 125-pound final at the Gorman and lost narrowly 8-5. Other than that he is again undefeated.

Bein is already a three-time state qualifier with two fourth place finishes at 119#. He has lost twice in the state semi-finals -- two years ago to potential three-time champ Clark Forward 6-5, and last year to potential three-time champ Scott Burnett. He is also the only wrestler to defeat Justin ,Wilcox outside the state meet - winning at the SWOCA last year.

Haimerl will have solid competition at Marion. State qualifiers Coffman and Roth are both solid performers who have performed well this year. However, Bein beat Coffman 12-0 at the MIT for third place while Roth lost to Spencer in the OVAC finals. Hartson is a marginal fourth choice here with Bittinger, Glasser, Jellison (Union Local) and Thiel (Ridgedale) as other possibilities.

Bein should have little trouble at Xenia. While I anticipate that some of the 119s at that crowded weight class may move to 125#, none are capable of challenging Bein. In fact, it's difficult to see how either of the other two challengers would have much chance of winning more than a single bout at Wright State.

The field at Elyria Catholic, however, is strong and deep and all four qualifiers will have placement potential. State qualifier Formanek shut out Lejeune in the first round at Wright State last year, but then lost two bouts. This year he has wrestled at three different weight classes with good success. He won at Hudson (at 130#), at Aurora (130#), at Clyde (125#), but finished sixth at Brecksville (130#). Richards was the 112# district champ last year and then won his first two state bouts before losing to Carrizales and Lowery to finish fifth. Incidentally he defeated Davis 2-1 in the bout. He has not been quite as effective so far at 125#, but it must be remembered he finished last year with a rush. Cecil, another former state qualifier, got caughtup in that brutal 125# weight class and did not qualify last year. This year he upset Division I state runner-up Dugan Bentley to win at Tiffin and get the Outstanding Wrestler Award. He also won at Avon Lake, but was sixth at the CIT. Making 125# may be an enervating task for him. That leaves

another state qualifier, Tomaino, in the fifth spot (a non-qualifying one), but he is certainly capable of defeating any of the above without it being called an upset.

There are four returning state qualifiers at Fostoria, but they do not match up well with my top group. A possible exception is Lowery Who, after a district fifth place finish at 112# last year, went on to finish fourth at Wright State defeating Roth and Richards in the process. This year he has been a consistent placer, but did lose at this weight class to state qualifier Lejeune at Van Buren. He and his coaching staff will have a tough choice to make on whether to compete here or at 119#. State qualifiers Sean M. Finneran and Ranker are also rated, but I see a wide-open competition here. Besides those ranked, also watch for G. Smith (Cory-Rawson), Weidenhamer (Ayresville) and Clemens (Lima Central Catholic). My view is that any of the five qualifiers, given a hot weekend, could garner a low place at states

130#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: SCOTT BURNETT (ELYRIA CATHOLIC)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2. Geiger (Westfall) | 14. Pratt (Shadyside) |
| 3. Simok (Northwood) | 15. Peyton (Rootstown) |
| 4. Eichhorn (Miami East) | 16. K. Roth (Martins Ferry) |
| 5. Coleman (Calvert) | 17. Kerr (Mapleton) |
| 6. Honaker (Jonathan Alder) | 18. Hoehn (Delphos ST. John) |
| 7. Dean (Genoa) | 19. Deluca (Oakwood) |
| 8. Shipman (Cardinal) | 20. Setmire (Evergreen) |
| 9. Fink (Aurora) | 21. Gregg (Triad) |
| 10. Weller (Iakota) | 22. long (Wellsville) |
| 11. Dembinski (Ready) | 23.. V. Davis (loudonville) |
| 12. Clem (West Liberty Salem) | 24. Walters (Preble Shawnee) |
| 13. Roush (Mohawk) | 25. Coleman (Hartley) |
| | 26. Lang (Waterford) |

I'm not sure how many Ohio wrestlers have won 100 consecutive bouts, but the number is certainly in the low single digits. Until the late 1960's, generally shorter schedules and three year eligibility made it impossible to wrestle 100 bouts in a total career. Tom Milkovich, who was undefeated in high school, finished with precisely 100 wins.

As you read this, Scott Burnett will probably have joined that select group having entered this season with 77 consecutive victories and maintained that pace with wins at Avon Lake, Tiffin and the CIT. Should all go as anticipated, he would conclude his brilliant career with about 115 consecutive victories and an overall record of 152-4. He would end up with three state titles and a fifth his freshmen year.

Still Burnett would probably have higher visibility had some potential dream match-ups occurred. This year who wouldn't have loved to see a Burnett-Kulczycki clash at the Ironman or the CIT, and sensational pairings like Brad Byers or Brian Legarth last year at 119# would have been a season highlight. Somehow the vagaries of scheduling made these impossible, but it does provide a fertile ground for speculation.

Ironically, this has not been a successful weight class for Northeast District wrestlers. Since 1984 only one state champion has emerged from the Cleveland area (Anthony Ralph), but Burnett is a solid choice to overwhelm that small piece of history.

Burnett should have little trouble winning his third district title. Shipman and Fink are solid journeymen wrestlers, but they cannot go with Burnett on their feet. Shipman missed state qualification by one point last year and has wrestled often at 135# this year. Fink is probably best known for upsetting state champion Roger Merrell last year and has had a strong performance season in 1997-98. He was, for example, a finalist at 135# at Brecksville.

Geiger was fourth two years ago at 112# and is a two-time district champ. Last year he lost in the state quarter-finals, however, and did not place. He could easily be a finalist if he draws away from Burnett. He is excellent in the top position. Honaker is, I believe, certified at 125#, but this would seem to have more margin for error at the district level and more upside potential at Wright State. He was one match from state qualification last year and has won at Alder, North Union and West Jefferson this year. The last two qualification spots are wide open, although I believe Dembinski should be favored for one of them. Jason Jefferis (Barnesville), who probably would have been ranked, has not wrestled recently and may be injured.

Two-time state qualifier Simok has moved up three weight classes and has had a tremendous year. He defeated state placer Lowery 15-2 to win at Northwood and then crushed Setmire 11-2 to win at Sylvania Southview. It continued at the Mackey where he pinned in the finals. He has never won at Wright State, always going one bout and out. He'll be challenged by another two-time state' qualifier in Coleman, who has also been a first-round loser in both Wright State appearances. Last year he was a district champion, but got one of those illogical draws meeting the fifth place finisher from his own district (Turnbaugh) and losing in overtime. State qualifiers Weller and Dean -- also first-round losers -- return as does state alternate Roush. The competition below them is good enough so that one of this top five will probably not get out of this district.

Eichhorn won four state bouts last year to finish fifth at this weight class. He should dominate this district with Clem, perhaps, second best. Except for Eichhorn, this is probably where you'll want to draw into for first round action. It is interesting that in the last five years champs have emerged from each of the five major districts in the state -- Northeast, Northwest, Central, Southwest and East/Southeast.

135#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: CLARK FORWARD (ARCHBOLD)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Jones (Martins Ferry) | 15. Stoll (Edison) |
| 3. Kleman (Lima Central Catholic) | 16. Whaley (West Jefferson) |
| 4. Vogel (CVCA) | 17. Zimmerman (Loudonville) |
| 5. Frisch (Hopewell-Loudon) | 18. Phillips (Bethel Tate) |
| 6. Anderson (Elyria Catholic) | 19. Jacobs (Garaway) |
| 7. Roberts (Westfall) | 20. Buchanan (Kirtland) |
| 8. Brink (Liberty Center) | 21. Krendl (Delphos St. John) |
| 9. Je. Jefferis (Barnesville) | 22. Lambert (Columbia Station) |
| 10. Busbey (Lincolnview) | 23. Finkes (St. Bernard) |
| 11. Chernett (Beachwood) | 24. T. Gleckler (Evergreen) |
| 12. Grillot (Versailles) | 25. Gertz (Lockland) |
| 13. Wylie (Grandview Hts.) | 26. G. Patzakis (Richmond Hts.) |
| 14. Rizzo (Cuyahoga Hts.) | 27. Gilchrist (Mogadore) |

While there are certainly competing arguments, it is my view that Clark Forward is probably the best junior wrestler in Ohio. He has lost twice in his first two years of competition -- once as a freshman in a two-overtime battle in the state finals and once last year at the Top Gun on his way to his first state title. He continues to sprint up a very steeply inclined performance curve, and despite the possible presence of two state runners-up in Jones and Coljohn at this weight, he is not likely to have a close bout any time during the three-week state tournament process. Looking ahead, one could easily visualize Forward winning three state titles, and if so, he would become the 12th Ohio wrestler to be a four-time state finalist. Of the 11 to this point, eight won four state titles while three others (D. DiSabato, G. Goad and C. Musser) took three titles, but lost convincingly the other time. -

There should be excellent competition underneath Forward at Fostoria. State qualifier Kleman defeated Anderson and A. Davis on his way to a CIT title, nipped Brink in winning at the "A" Classic and decisioned Frisch (in overtime) winning at Van Buren. If he wrestles well at the district he should be away from Forward at Wright State. Kleman missed by one point in placing at this weight class last year. State qualifiers Frisch and Busbey are back, but it is Frisch who has had a much better year. He won at Hopewell-Loudon and was second at the "A" Classic (to Forward) and Van Buren (in overtime to Kleman). He was also a semi-finalist at the MIT. Someone to watch though is Brink who at 135# should be very strong. He was a solid sixth at the MIT winning five consolation bouts, and also did well at the "A" Classic: Two dark horse candidates for qualification here are Smiley (New London) and Price (Swanton).

State runner-up Jones is a superb competitor. Already a two-time state qualifier, he was runner-up at this weight class last year losing a tough 6-4 decision to Stratos. This year he is undefeated and won the OVAC with five falls. This is a tough weight class, but he should do very well. State qualifiers Roberts, Jefferis and Wylie all return, but they were

unable to win a single state bout last year. Whaley should challenge all but Jones in this top quartet, while Jacobs -- having recovered from a horrendous auto accident last year -- has lower odds of making it to Wright State. Other possibilities are Bracken (Tusky Valley) and McQuire (River Valley).

The Xenia District will not play any substantive role in the resolution of this weight class at states. Except for geographical proximity they are not close to the rest of what will be at Wright State. State qualifier Grillot returns and should lead this district, but he failed to place at Graham and may be overmatched at the state level. He lost his only bout 15-0. Phillips will be competing in Division III for the first time while Finkes and Gertz are well behind Grillot.

I'm unsure as to how it will all work out at Elyria Catholic. Vogel has been outstanding this year winning big at the Dies and finishing third at the MIT -- losing only to Division I choice Bertin 6-4 and crushing Maher (8-4), Troy Smith (10-2) and Frisch (11-4) in the consolation rounds. If he can maintain his focus he should place. Anderson is a defending district champion who was a state semi-finalist before losing to Forward and ending up sixth. He was first at Tiffin, but struggled at the CIT -- losing by fall to Kleman and Nicola and finishing sixth. Many times such anomalies are illness related I however. I was impressed with Chernett at Richmond Hts. and I think he may easily out-perform this ranking. The last berth is wide open and besides those listed, Kiss (Rootstown), Zorn (Tuslaw) and Goins (Wellington) should all be contenders

140#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: RON BAUM (SANDUSKY ST. MARY)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2. Coljohn (Independence) | 14. Hill (Arcadia) |
| 3. Roberts (Chagrin Falls) | 15. Kile (Ayresville) |
| 4. Bushman (Delta) | 16. Simpson (Eastwood) |
| 5. Turnbaugh (Ontario) | 17. Hershey (West Salem Northwesten) |
| 6. Kaiser (Barnesville) | 18. Asterino (West Liberty Salem) |
| 7. Woods (Elyria Catholic) | 19. Smith (Cardington) |
| 8. Godbey (Lockland) | 20. Barga (Versailles) |
| 9. Gore (Ready) | 21. Carter (Loudonville) |
| 10. Dobson (Martins Ferry) | 22. Grime (Archbold) |
| 11. Gable (Delphos St. John) | 23. A. Gleckler (Evergreen) |
| 12. Jedick (Lutheran West) | 24. Waters (Sidney Lehman) |
| 13. Rhoades (West Jefferson) | 25. Bradstock (Wellington) |
| | 26. Batdorff (Covington) |

During the decade of the '90's the eventual state champs at this class have exited from only two districts. In the even numbered years the Northwest District has triumphed

while in the odd years victory has gone to a Northeast District participant. One thing is certain there is no dominant figure here as we saw in Burnett and Forward at the last two weight classes.

Clearly it's the Northwest District's turn and Ronnie Baum would seem to be a natural selection. Competing at 145# last year he was the Fostoria District champ and then won three state bouts before losing in the final to Butch Inghram. It was a strong and somewhat surprising run and boded well for his senior year. This year has not been quite as smooth as Baum, now getting co~fortable at 140#, has hit a few tough patches. However, come tourney time he should be at least a marginal favorite to move up one state notch from last year.

Tony Coljohn's year has had some interesting parallels with Baum. Coljohn who finished fifth two years ago at 125#, was at a brutal weight class last year that featured a returning state champ and three returning state runners-up. He, too, made the finals losing to Forward 6-4 for the 130# title. He, too, has had some tough bouts this year, and like Baum, has a difficult decision to make. Coljohn certified at 135#. He must decide whether to "lock heads" once more with the vastly improved Forward there, or come up to 140# where a state title probability is very likely much higher.

The district has an interesting amalgamation of competitors. Bushman, now a junior, qualified at 135# last year with a 35-3 record and won a state bout before being pinned by Erwin. This year he was third at the GMVWA losing to a Kentucky wrestler in the quarter-finals, but then trouncing him handily for third place. He won at Perrysburg, but struggled at the Top Gun twice getting pinned by relatively unknown competitors. State qualifiers Gable, Kile and Turnbaugh are also back, but it's only the last boy who has had a consistently great season. Both Gable and Kile have had some peaks and valleys, but Gable did win the "A" Classic and was third at Van Buren, but lost twice relatively early at the CIT. That's five returning qualifiers, but there are no guarantees here. Both Simpson and Hill have sparkled with Hill winning at Van Buren, Arcadia, and Gibsonburg. Add in Grime and Glecker along with Wasserman (Lakota), Schroll (McComb), Kingery (Genoa) and Wagner (Van Buren) and it should provoke some outstanding wrestling.

At Elyria Catholic I'm expecting big things from Roberts this year. At Wright State he lost a tough 4-2 first-round decision to the powerful Erwin, and then hammered Bushman 19-2 in the first consolation round before being eliminated. He won handily at Richmond Hts. this year and has high placement potential.

Coljohn and Roberts lead at Elyria Catholic, but Woods is about due to have a breakout year. He missed state qualification by a single point last year, and was second at Tiffin and third at the CIT. His best win, though, was a tough victory over the excellent Fisher to win at Avon Lake. The last qualification spot is wide open.

It's a tightly grouped field at Marion, but I'm not sure this group has many potential place winners. Kaiser is probably the best here, but he can be inconsistent. However, he's

coming off a championship at the OVAC and should be primed for state competition. Gore qualified last year as a freshman, and should return again this year. Dobson is part of that fine group of middleweights at Martins Ferry. He was fourth at the OVAC and third at Barnesville (in a tourney where Kaiser failed to place). He lost in overtime last year in his go-to-state bout. Rhoades is certainly a top contender for that last state ticket as is Smith and Langoehr. Smith, the only wrestler on the Cardington team, has participated in a number of high quality tournaments and done very respectably. .

State qualifier Godbey lost twice at Wright State last year, but performed at a high level. Both defeats were by three points to the highly regarded Kaminski and Kleman. He is 18-1 so far this year winning a number of smaller school tourneys in the Cincinnati area. I also like both state alternate Asterino and Barga. Both of them could spring a first round surprise if they are overlooked. Watch out for Waters who has moved down from 152#. He won three district bouts last year.

145#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: MARC JAMEYSON (WELLINGTON)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2. Corder (Cadiz) | 14. Stevenson (West Liberty Salem) |
| 3. Hoff (Liberty Center) | 15. Blevins (West Jefferson) |
| 4. Kaminski (Cardinal) | 16. Sedivec (Elyria Catholic) |
| 5. Tracy (Ayresville) | 17. Byrd (Oakwood) |
| 6. Wright (West Salem Northwestern) | 18. McCrate (Columbus Grove) |
| 7. Weaver (Martins Ferry) | 19. Grimes (Smithville) |
| 8. D. Carrizales (Delta) | 20. Hagemeyer (North Baltimore) |
| 9. Thomas (North Union) | 21. DeMaria (Stritch) |
| 10. Hoffer (Mechanicsburg) | 22. Wulber (Versailles) |
| 11. Woodland (Grandview Hts.) | 23. Sears (Hopewell Loudon) |
| 12. N. Patzakis (Richmond Hts.) | 24. Masters (Triad) |
| 13. Harman (Fremont St. Joseph) | 25. Clark (Johnstown Monroe) |

This is undoubtedly the most wide-open weight class in Division III and, perhaps, in the entire state this year. It's always difficult to decipher intentions, but it would not surprise me that this already variegated field would be augmented by several of the 140s.

As I kept coming up with sequels for my ever-present list making Jameyson and Corder generally headed the 145# column, although Hoff and Kaminski gathered some serious attention. The consistent Jameyson eventually was a compromise choice based primarily on the strength of his consistent performances. He has won both of the smaller tournaments entered and was a solid third at the MIT with impressive wins over Crosby, Ray and especially Ryan Smith. Last year he was fourth at 140# -- losing twice to Steffel.

I would judge Corder's credentials to be virtually equivalent to Jameyson's since he, too, was fourth last year (at 145#) losing to state champion Inghram and Quaintance. This season he won the OVAC and has had a great year after a slow first week. State qualifier Weaver will join Corder at Marion. Corder defeated him 12-4 in the district semifinals, and he lost and was eliminated in the first round of states. Three Cental District wrestlers are rated next, and I perceive them to be very closely matched. Each of them won two district bouts last year and Blevins and Woodland were just one victory from state qualification. Any of them have state placement possibilities although it will require their best efforts to manage that target.

Jameyson won't have it easy at Elyria Catholic. Kaminski appears to be a superior athlete who occasionally is victimized by an unanticipated defeat. He was 20-1 with several tourney titles before going over to Toledo Waite where he finished a disappointing 7th -- albeit in the most difficult weight class there. Last year he transformed his district third into a pair of early round state victories before a narrow semi-final loss dropped him all the way to sixth place. While Wright may not have Jameyson's credentials he has been a most difficult opponent for him. At last year's district Jameyson escaped with a 6-4 overtime win, while this year he won at Black River 4-3. Wright won this year at Hopewell-Loudon and Doylestown and should grab a third qualifying spot. Patzakis, Grimes and Sedivec should be the favorites for the last spot, but there may be others undetected by me who could capture that spot.

State qualifier Hoffer leads the Southwest District with a perfect 12-0 record in his own area, and a second place finish at Alder losing 4-2 to Thomas. Stevenson and Byrd are currently ahead in terms of the last two spots, but Wulber, Masters and Vaccari (Madeira) are roughly as good. Again, this group will be seriously challenged in terms of state placement.

As I said earlier Hoff received substantial consideration as the top choice here. Last year he lost to eventual state runner-up Baum in the district finals 4-3 in two overtimes. It's interesting to speculate how Hoff might have done given Baum's draw. At any rate he won two state bouts before losing his state placement bout to Quaintance 4-3 after having pinned him in district action. Now a junior, Hoff looks to be better than last year and a favorite at this district. He was sixth at 152# at the MIT including a 7-5 win over Tracy. Tracy, also a state qualifier, got a tough draw at Wright State losing to two-time champion Anthony Ralph, and then getting bounced by two-time place winner Jeff Blanton. Hoff also beat him at the "A" Classic final at 152#, 12-8, but Tracy is still a substantial threat. Carrizales, a cousin of the 119 pounder, is a transfer from Napoleon, and has had solid success at Delta this year. He missed by one win from placing at the Top Gun and won the mammoth GMWJA. I've listed a number of other possible contenders which could also have included Welly (Fostoria St. Wendelin), Uncapher (Spencerville) and Ackerman (Monroeville).

152#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: DEAN SCHULER (DELTA) TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2. Delamatre (Edison) | 15. Rismiller (Versailles) |
| 3. Sedgmer (Cadiz) | 16. McKean (Black River) |
| 4. Charles (Wellington) | 17. Reineck (Fremont St. Joseph) |
| 5. Petersen (Garrettsville Garfield) | 18. Hummel (Brookville) |
| 6. Ward (Martins Ferry) | 19. Haney (Sandy Valley) |
| 7. Cook (Aurora) | 20. Ramirez (Eastwood) |
| 8. Angle (Ridgewood) | 21. Nussbaum |
| 9. Schierloh (Lockland) | 21. Salem Northwestern |
| 10. Milby (Worthington Christian) | 22. Anthony (Columbia Station) |
| 11. Pajestka (Cuyahoga Hts.) | 23. Karr (Tinora) |
| 12. Polk (Milbury Lake) | 24. Knight (Miami East) |
| 13. Tacosik (Union Local) | 25. Garza (Hicksville) |
| 14. Miller (Hopewell Loudon) | 26. Hirt (Reading) |

My top two choices both are from the Northwest District, both were state qualifiers last year, and both wrestled in classes other than Division III in 1997. Schuler, my top pick, is a junior who transferred from Toledo Whitmer where he was a Division I state qualifier and, in fact, defeated Ryan Fair in the first round. Now at Delta he won at the GMVWA pinning state qualifier Kapustka and also at Perrysburg with a 20-7 major decision. He was a finalist at the Top Gun, but lost to Vince Zmith in overtime for his only defeat of the year.

Delamatre was a Division" qualifier at Milan Edison - which slipped barely under the enrollment limit and moved to Division III this year - and he, too, won his first round state bout before losing to eventual state champion Anderson. This year he was second the opening week at Edison, but won at Bellevue, Marion Harding and Toledo Central Catholic. I thought he might certify at 145# where he would probably have been the favorite, but he will wrestle here instead. A major plus is that should all go about as anticipated at the district level, he and Schuler would not meet until the state finals. One interesting note -- 25 years ago Robin Rayfeld, the Delta coach, placed at the state level for the first time by defeating a Milan Edison wrestler. He's hoping Schuler will be able to do the same thing.

Somewhat ironically, the rest of the Fostoria District is very weak. I've singled out Miller, Reineck and Polk as potentially the last three qualifiers, but they are nowhere near the level of a Schuler or Delamatre. For one of the few times in this forecast it must be reported that there is little depth in the Northwest District.

Lucas Sedgmer heads a solid contingent of 152s out of the Marion District. Last year he entered the district with 10 losses - certainly a relatively large number at that juncture -- but swept through the competition to take a district title, and then won his first two bouts at state before losing to James Miller. However, two additional victories, including a fall over Charles, netted him a third place medal as a sophomore. This year he took the OVAC title at 152# going back-to-back with teammate Corder. Chris Ward is up five

weight classes this year after qualifying at 125# last year. He was second to Sedgmer at the OVAC and won at Barnesville, but was upset by Tacosik in the final at Bellaire St. John. Milby and stat~ qualifier Angle are positioned for the last two spots, but Tacosik and Haney have both demonstrated upset potential. This will be a strong qualifying quartet with Riffle (North Union), Gerdeman (Hartley) and Smurden (Grandview Hts.) waiting in the wings.

Charles had a great junior year. He ended up with 38 wins, a district runner-up trophy and a fourth place state medal. Sedgmer beat him twice in the state meet, but he had four other victories. He was third at the MIT -- losing only to the excellent Lange -- and defeating Angle on a major decision, and won at Black River and Buckeye. I'll be interested to see how well he does against Schuler and Delamatre. One of the best "unknown" wrestlers in Division III is the unheralded Chris Petersen. Already a two-time state qualifier, he has won at Jackson-Milton, Aurora, Cardinal and the Dies this year against generally tough opposition. Last year he lost an overtime decision in the state quarter-finals to eventual runner-up Baum, and ended up fifth. He is not someone you want to overlook. Cook is also relatively unknown. He had an excellent season last year with good state placement potential when injury cut him down before the sectionals. This year he beat Hoff to win at Hudson at 152# and also won at Aurora, but was injured at Clyde. I've ranked four other possibilities, but Straube (Kirtland), Opalich (Hawken), and Schmidt (Wood ridge) also deserve consideration.

There are no returning, state qualifiers at Xenia, but Schierloh was the state alternate at 145# and has compiled a 17-1 record this season. He should be the pacesetter here with Rismiller and Hummel from long-time Division III powerhouses as next best.

160#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: DUSTIN WILSON (BARNESVILLE)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2. Robinson (Manchester) | 15. Hoylman (West Liberty Salem) |
| 3. Clark (Union Local) | 16. Goble (Black River) |
| 4. Esposito (Chagrin Falls) | 17. Kirkland (Ready) |
| 5. Mauser (Aurora) | 18. Friscone (Columbia Station) |
| 6. Shawley (Tinora) | 19. Wigfield (Tusky Valley) |
| 7. Bonnigson (Margaretta) | 20. D. Statzer (Tri-County North) |
| 8. Alexander (Grandview Hts.) | 21. Vicente (Cincinnati Country Day) |
| 9. Marsh (Richmond Hts.) | 22. May (Mohawk) |
| 10. Ehram (Delta) | 23. Brierly (Ridgewood) |
| 11. Walton (Hawken) | 24. Kirby (Grand Valley) |
| 12. Garcia (Edison) | 25. Good (Mechanicsburg) |
| 13. Rhodes (Versailles) | 26. Schnitkey (Archbold) |
| 14. Blankemeyer (Columbus Grove) | |

I am always delighted when questions which would seem not to be amenable to analysis turn out to have a strong quantitative and data directed answer. For example, on November 16, 1532, the Incan emperor Atahualpa, the absolute monarch of the largest and most advanced state in the New World, met with the Spaniard conquistador Francisco Pizarro at Cajamarca. Pizarro led 168 Spanish soldiers in completely unfamiliar terrain more than 1,000 miles from possible reinforcements while Atahualpa was in the middle of his own empire of several million subjects and immediately surrounded by his army of 80,000 soldiers. And yet, within eight months the Spaniards took control of the entire Incan empire. How is it not only that Pizarro emerged victorious, but that it came to be that Pizarro traveled there to capture Atahualpa rather than Atahualpa going to Spain and capturing King Charles I? It turns out that modern analysis can answer fully, or in part, this and related questions (see *Guns, Germs, and Steel* by Jared Diamond) in a manner that utilizes data analysis and reasoning in wonderfully clever ways. So it is that in many cases questions involving performance levels and final outcomes could probably be more completely and accurately answered had we but the time and data to contemplate and analyze.

Unfortunately those level of resources are rarely available to forecasters, and so at 160# logic must give way to guesswork and intuition because the contestants are so closely matched with little to differentiate them. And maybe that's not so bad since much of the charm of sport is the uncertainty and unpredictability of the outcome.

There are probably five participants (or likely more) who could win the state title at 160#. Wilson was fourth at Wright State last year at this weight - losing in overtime in the semi-finals. This year he took the coveted OV AC title and has compiled an enviable record blemished only by a loss to local rival Clark' who he has beaten twice.

Robinson is a two-time state qualifier who finished fifth last year winning four bouts during the proceeding. This year he got off to a slow start because of Manchester's extended football season which saw them lose the state title in five overtimes. He was a semi-finalist at 171# at the MIT, but wore down on the second day, and finished sixth. Since then he has dropped to 160# and finished second to my Division II choice, Biel, at Dolestown and fifth at the Dies. He still is not hitting on all cylinders, but should do so by tourney time. Incidentally he lost to Wilson in last year's consolation finals in overtime.

At Marion, Wilson must contend with former state qualifiers Clark and Alexander. He and Clark have had a spirited rivalry this year which has generated some close, relatively high scoring bouts. Brierly, Wigfield, and Kirkland look to be vying for that last ticket with Comisford (Johnstown Northridge) another possibility.

. Robinson faces some excellent opposition at Elyria Catholic. Esposito qualified at 145# last year, but a one point opening round loss and failure to reach the consolation round gave him only one state bout. This year he is undefeated at 16-0 with wins at Richmond Hts. (over Marsh) and Brooklyn. Mauser was a tremendously talented youth wrestler who has some injury problems. Last year he still reached the state level at 140# and was second to Petersen at Aurora. On a hot weekend he could gain a very high

place. Marsh last year also competed at the state meet losing twice (16-0,15-13). He was second at both Richmond Hts. and Kenston. The excellent Walton could be left out here, and that would be a shame. He lost to Esposito 4-2 in the first round of districts, and then in his go-to-state bout lost 1-0 in two overtimes

The Xenia District again returns no state qualifiers (last year only seniors qualified at 145#, 152# and 160#). State alternate Rhodes and Hoylman look to be strongest here with Statzer, Vincente and Hirt hoping to capture the third and final qualifying spot. This group is unlikely to cause consternation at the state level.

It's very interesting at Fostoria. Garcia really does not compete against many Division III wrestlers -- and so it is difficult to judge how well he will perform. He did defeat state qualifier Bonnigson 7-3 in the SBC Duals, but has been less than scintillating at other times -- losing, for example, to Goble. Here is clearly a time when more and better analysis is needed. Bonnigson ended the year with 17 losses, including two at the state meet. He had more defeats than any other state qualifier which indicates his resiliency and his ability to win at critical junctures. He gave up 16 points in both his losses, but would not be pinned. Shawley is an intriguing candidate. Last year he took a 31-3 record into district competition, but lost to eventual state champ Tony Cooke in the quarter-finals. Bonnigson knocked him out of the second round of consolations in overtime. At the MIT Shawley took the excellent Division I wrestler Ryan Fair into overtime before losing in the first round and then won four consolation bouts before Melaragno tripped him up. Blankemeyer won both the "A" Classic and Van Buren while Ehram did well at the Top Gun. There shouldn't be too many challengers beneath this group.

171#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: BRIAN ENDICOTT (ELMWOOD) TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2. Morgan (Columbia Station) | 14. Stebleton (Berne Union) |
| 3. Sintobin (Delta) | 15. Anderson (Bethel-Tate) |
| 4. Dew (Sandusky ST. Mary) | 16. Mattmuller (Aurora) |
| 5. Penson (Richmond Hts.) | 17. Baker (Bridgeport) |
| 6. Wasiniak (Norwalk ST. Paul) | 18. Buchanan (Kirtland) |
| 7. Kincaid (Waynesville) | 19. Thacker (Lakota) |
| 8. Sands (Hawken) | 20. Frank (Grandview Hts.) |
| 9. Lee (Tusky Valley) | 21. Crosier (Barnesville) |
| 10. Bosco (Archbold) | 22. Schuller (Monroeville) |
| 11. Wagner (Springfield CC) | 23. Peltier (Sidney Lehman) |
| 12. Lance (Loudonville) | 24. Beckett (Shadyside) |
| 13. Dempsey (Delphos ST. John) | 25. Statzer (Tri-County North) |

This is not one of the stronger weight classes in Division III with only four returning state qualifiers and no returning state place winners. Each district is relatively well balanced so

that it is unlikely that the numbers game will keep some really qualified wrestlers from making it to Wright State. -

I was tremendously impressed with Brian Endicott at the MIT. He was a returning state qualifier it is true, but he had only finished fourth in his district and it had been two and out at Wright State -- although he drew Rowlands first and then Robinson, who defeated him by just 2-1. At the MIT he barged through the first three rounds, setting up a meeting with my Division II choice, Zeb Miller, in the semi-finals. For the first four minutes Endicott controlled the bout leading 9-4 at that juncture. Then Miller wore him down in the last stanza, eventually triumphing 12-10. Nonplussed, Endicott won two smashing consolation bouts over Smith and Bauer to finish third. Assuming an increase in stamina he's the one to beat.

At Elyria Catholic, Morgan, also a returning state qualifier, has assumed the lead position. He is undefeated this year with wins at Columbia Station and Buckeye, and has rarely been challenged. Penson and Sands both compiled outstanding seasons and seem in line for state qualification. Sands has won at Hawken and Canal Fulton the latter including a win over Adeniyi-Bada -- while Penson was first at Richmond Hts. and fourth at a tough Kenston weight class. Lance would seem to have the inside track for the fourth berth, but will meet substantial competition in that quest.

Endicott will face a varied assortment of foes at Fostoria. As always, there is yet another Sintobin at Delta, and this one is also very good. Last year as a sophomore he escaped the tough 160# district with one-point victory for the fifth qualifying spot. He showed substantial resilience after losing his semi-final 9-8 to Tracy and then being beaten by two points by Endicott in the consolation semi-finals. He did win a state bout, but lost in the consolations again to Tracy. This year he has been in three rugged tournament -- third at the GMVWA, third at Perrysburg and sixth at the Top Gun. Dew has been somewhat erratic this year, but he can perform. He had a very tough draw at last year's 189# district. He lost 6-5 to eventual state runner-up Bostleman, and when Bostleman lost in overtime in the next round he was eliminated while in the stands. Wasiniak should also qualify but there is a real logjam for the fifth spot. Besides those listed consider Everhart (Mohawk), Miller (Plymouth), and Borer (Calvert).

The Marion District is very weak. I've struggled to come up with suitable names which is generally the opposite problem I face. Most districts have more reasonable state candidates than state berths at virtually every weight class. The real question is deciding which of the group is most deserving. This is not an issue at 171#. Lee probably came closest to state qualification last year winning two consolation bouts after a first round loss, but falling 12-0 in his go to state bout. This year he has been dominating in that area southeast of Canton and should qualify easily. The other three berths are wide - open.

State qualifier Kincaid leads the field at Xenia, and he should do very well here again this year. He traveled to the MIT to broaden his competitive horizons indicating a strong desire to win. Wagner has been very good this year and should capture a qualifying ticket.

However, there has not been a lot of interaction between various geographical segments of this district, so its not clear as to the relative ranking of those listed.

189#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: TOM ROWLANDS (READY) TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2. Engel (Reading) | 14. Pohlman I Wietholter (Versailles) |
| 3. Bostleman (Archbold) | 15. Symczak (Genoa) |
| 4. Sutter (Grandview Hts) | 16. Orlando (Wickliffe) |
| 5. Tracy (Ayrsville) | 17. Sharpe (Greeneview) |
| 6. Whitesel (Black River) | 18. Smith (Delta) |
| 7. Robinson (Richmond Hts) | 19. Wells (Monroe Central) |
| 8. Schreiber (Cuyahoga Hts.) | 20. Hedges (Deer Park) |
| 9. Dell (Spencerville) | 21. Border (Ridgewood) |
| 10. Bruney (Martins Ferry) | 22. Gery (Carey) |
| 11. Charmley (Independence) | 23. Skowronsky (Columbia Station) |
| 12. Rutherford (Streetsboro) | 24. D. J. Grewell (Newcomerstown) |
| 13. Gallaro (Sandusky ST. Mary) | 25. Bindel (Lima Central Catholic) |
| | 26. Apking (Preble Shawnee) |

I always have just a little feeling of uneasiness when a weight class looks to be essentially a three-man contest. What it means is that someone is going to get a significant advantage by being paired away from the other two top contenders. I mean there's nothing anyone can do about it -- its inherent in the pairings system overwhelmingly favored in the United States -- but there's always just a little hint on inequity in the way it resolves championships. In this particular case we have state titlist Engel, his finals opponent last year state runner-up Bostleman, and last year's third place medalist at 160# , Rowlands. My view here is that Engel probably should be the one with the easier half-bracket based on his level of previous state performance.

Engel capped a marvelous 41-0 season I~st year by sweeping through four bouts at Wright State last year the closest of which was a 5-1 finals victory over Bostleman. Since the school classification split in 1971, no small school Cincinnati upper weight wrestler had ever won a state title. This year Engel has been equally outstanding reeling of nineteen consecutive wins including a major title at the SWOCA (his second) with a sterling win over the excellent Division I competitor, McCaffrey.

And, yet, I think Rowlands may be better. A 125-pound state qualifier just two years ago he has blossomed into a devastatingly quick upper-weight competitor. He was third last year at 160# and over the summer was Cader national champion in both free-style and Greco-Roman competition. This year his only loss was to Division II state champion Nick Preston in overtime. He won the CIT and the Top Gun -- beating Bostleman 20-8. He is not a big 189-pounder, but then neither is Egel. Their bout, will . be a sensational match-up.

Bostleman has lost to both of the top ranked wrestlers, but cannot be overlooked in this contest. Since Engel, Rowland, and Bostleman are all likely to be district champs the pairing could be such that Bostleman would be in the half-bracket opposite the other two. The winner of an Engle-Rowlands semi-final might be so depleted both mentally and physically that the very solid Bostleman might prevail. Don't get me wrong, Bostleman is very good, but he is probably in the normal course of events a half step behind the other two.

All three state qualifiers and the state alternate last year return at this same weight in the Xenia District. That should not bother Engel since he had three first period falls and a 22-7 victory in his four bouts -- but it does create good competition for the last two spots. State qualifier and district runner-up Sharpe was only second at Bellbrook and fourth at Trenton Edgewood, and may be vulnerable. State qualifier Wietholter has not been in the starting line-up on a consistent basis, and has been replaced by Pohlman -- second to Sanders in overtime at Graham. State alternate Hedges also returns and needs to get a better district pairing. Last year Engel, Hedges, and Wietholter were in the same half-bracket at district, and Sharpe got something of a free pass to the finals. Apking was also in that same crowded half-bracket and he could challenge this year.

Bostleman's primary competition at Fostoria is likely to be Adam Tracy -- sixth at 160# last year. Tracy is a wrestler who loves to flurry, and score a lot of points quickly, but, of course, he can give them up as well. He lost to Rowlands last year 14-6, and Bostleman was just too sharp on his feet as he won 17-8 in the "An Classic final. At the MIT he was a second-round loser to the excellent Norton wrestler Tim Davis in the second round 19-16, but then three consolation bouts before losing to Salsberry 14-10. I think you see a pattern here. There is a big drop-off after this top duo with Dell Gallaro, Smith, Symczak, Gery and Bindel all battling for the last three spots. Also possible contenders are Shamhart, (Huron), Howard (Woodmore) and Bryant (Riverdale).

Sutter will be reasonable competition for Rowlands at Marion. A state qualifier at 171# last year he lost to the eventual state runner-up in the quarter-finals in overtime. He was a strong fourth at the MIT and has high potential again. This top duo is well ahead of everyone else here. OVAC runner-up Bruney is probably a marginal favorite for the third spot, but there are plenty of other challengers -- like those ranked and Farthing (West Jefferson), and Harsh (Jonathon Alder).

With Bostleman, Rowlands, and Engel each heading a district they all will be looking to draw in the same half-bracket with the Elyria Catholic champ. The identity of that wrestler is not nearly so clear-cut. There are no returning state qualifiers and no one can be said to have dominated. Whitesel won three district bouts last year and has taken titles at Buckeye, Tri-West and Black River. He lost his go-to-state bout 1-0. Schreiber, who I nearly overlooked until he won so decisively at St. Marys, is 22-2 with something like an 80% pin ratio. Last year he won two district bouts. Robinson is right with this group -- losing to Whitesel 7-4 last year - and finishing second at Richmond Hts., and fifth at

Kenston - losing twice by one point to Delguyd. Rutherford, Orlando and Charmley would seem to be the only serious contender for the last state berth.

215#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: WAYNE CHAPPELL (STREETSBORO)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 2. Goldsbury (Ready) | 14. Ky. Whitling (Tusky Valley) |
| 3. Courtad (Aurora) | 15. Reichert (Versailles) |
| 4. Myers (Wellington) | 16. Meade (Ayresville) |
| 5. Young (Delta) | 17. Hopkins (Smithville) |
| 6. Orr (Bluffton) | 18. Nolan (Norwalk St. Paul) |
| 7. McHugh (Chagrin Falls) | 19. Fetter (Covington) |
| 8. R. Grewell (Newcomerstown) | 20. Tank (Genoa) |
| 9. Daring (Carey) | 21. Flora (Miami East) |
| 10. Wesson (Shenandoah) | 22. McCoy (North Union) |
| 11. Wilhelmy (W. Salem Northwestern) | 23. Pierce (Steubenville Central Catholic) |
| 12. Hershberger (Garaway) | 24. Rahe (Indian Hills) |
| 13. Lingruen (Liberty Center) | 25. Hale (Springfield Northeastern) |
| | 26. Mirsalis (Richmond Hts) |

There are a wide variety of ways to evaluate individual wrestlers and develop some appropriate set of rankings. Clearly, though, the most powerful tool is examining head-to-head match ups where the top contenders have faced off against one another. Unfortunately wrestlers from different parts of the state often do not compete with one another -- especially in Division III -- so that match-ups where they exist at all are from the previous year. It is better than in the past when the vast majority of teams wrestled,

at most, one tournament and followed a schedule of local dual meets until state tourney time. Nonetheless, most match-ups are from last year's state tournament process and I remain wary as to their significance - especially in the upper weight classes. But they are better than nothing and must be viewed in the context of either improving or declining performance in the current season.

This is particularly true at 215# where many of the top contenders have met the past two seasons with results that are in some ways contradictory. During the early portion of the year I had pretty well locked in on Wayne Chappell as my top choice. After all, he is a district champ who finished an unexpected third at 215# last year, and whose point total was the difference between a state team title and fifth place. He did this winning two overtime bouts and an 8-7 squeaker. At the MIT he was runner-up to Hampton, and wrestled well throughout the tourney.

However, two other wrestlers have had breakout seasons. Dustin Goldsbury, a 189# state qualifier last year, won at Ready and then was second to Division II choice Weilbacher at

both the CIT and Top Gun. In that stretch he has had a number of big wins including those over Cronin and, significantly, Chappell, 11-7. Courtad has also blossomed. He has won at Aurora, Clyde and Brecksville facing topnotch competition. Last year Chappell defeated him 17-3 at the sectional level, but that is clearly not an appropriate metric now. Factor in state placer R. Myers who has had a rock solid year, and the resurgent Young who has had a chance to wrestle on a regular basis, and suddenly everything is in doubt.

Chappell, Courtad, and Myers are a terrific trio at Elyria Catholic. Myers has had the same kind of quiet year as in 1997 when he was fifth at Wright State -- except he's been even better. He won at Black River and Buckeye and was fourth at the MIT -- losing his only two bouts of the year to Tanner in both the championship and consolation round. McHugh, only a 10th grader, has tremendous athletic ability. He was second at Richmond Hts. and first at Brooklyn, and could challenge for state place this year. Next year he's going to be right at the top of the list. Wilhelmy had a tough district losing 6-5 to Otero and 8-6 to Courtad after a very fine junior season. This year he won at Doylestown, but he was hammered at Black River by Myers. He will have to be in peak form or get a huge pairings break to unseat one of my top four here.

Goldsbury is the clear leader at Marion although this is a very representative field. State qualifier Wesson transferred from West Liberty/Salem to Shenendoah and has done well winning at Barnesville, finished second to West Virginia state champ Pratz at Shadyside, and again losing to Pratz to finish third at the OVAC. He'll be challenged by a trio of fine 215s all from the same general geographical area in Whitling, Hershberger and Grewell. Last year Goldsbury defeated Grewell 15-14 in their go-to-state bout, while Hershberger lost by three in the same situation. When they come that close the previous year you kind of hope they make it the next time. However, that's five solid candidates and there are still McCoy, Pierce, Grear (Barnesville), C. Schwind (West Jefferson) and Catera (River Valley) with state potential here. Based on their high scoring efforts in the past this weight class should capture fans' attention from the very first round.

The Xenia District, on the other hand, does not appear to be nearly so strong. There are no returning state qualifiers and no one has taken a dominating position in the area. My top choice is the senior Reichert who competed at heavy weight last year. Flora and Fetters made it to the consolation semi-finals at 215# last year, and that's probably credentials enough to make them slim favorites for the last two qualifying spots. Rahe, Hall, and Kelch (Batavia) are other possibilities.

There is an interesting mix of talent at Fostoria. Young, who eventually ended up at 189# last year, has crafted a fine season at 215#. He was third at the powerful GMWI/A losing only to my Division I choice Hensley in the semi-finals. That was followed by a title at Perrysburg and a solid performance at the Top Gun where he placed after a narrow 2-1 loss to Chappell in the quarter-finals. Orr defeated Daring twice in recent weeks -- by fall to win the "Au Classic and in overtime 12-10, to win at VanBuren. He was also second at Northwood to Division I state runner-up Ciesinski 22-10. Daring has those two final losses to Orr, but won at Hopewell Loudon and was sixth at the MIT -- losing,

however, by fall to Chappell and Myers. Lingruen, Nolan and Meade have all had some successes this year and have state qualification capabilities. Tank heads a secondary list that also includes Dominique (Archbold), Smarr (Arcadia), and Steffenhagen (Margaretta).

HVY.

PROJECTED CHAMPION: ROB TURNER (KIRTLAND)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2. Taylor (Delta) | 14. Kisilewicz (Columbia Station) |
| 3. Box (Liberty Center) | 15. Kiba (Smithville) |
| 4. Davis (Carey) | 16. Krill (Edgerton) |
| 5. Ray (Sherwood Fairview) | 17. Krisha (New London) |
| 6. Dawson (Wellington) | 18. Lewis (North Union) |
| 7. Ku. Whitling (Tusky Valley) | 19. Link (Versailles) |
| 8. Hadlock (Black River) | 20. Morrison (Aurora) |
| 9. Clepper (Batavia) | 21. Wallace (West Liberty Salem) |
| 10. N. Schwind (West Jefferson) | 22. Murphy (Springfield CC) |
| 11. Bowers (Pleasant) | 23. Bailey (Jonathan Alder) |
| 12. Lampe (Sidney Lehman) | 24. Shirkey (Archbold) |
| 13. Palomo (Margaretta) | 25. Farber (Sandy Valley) |

All of us would like to live in a world where perfect justice prevails, but real life has personally taught each of us that capriciousness, unfairness and error exist almost everywhere. Somehow, though, perhaps because the rules are totally defined, most fans expect something akin to perfection when it comes to athletic contests. A thousand excellently refereed bouts are quickly forgotten, but one that is totally bollixed endures seemingly forever. I'm no different. It's still nettles me, for example, that Lamar Washington was the victim of horrendous officiating in the state finals - and that was eight years ago.

All of this is prelude to one of the most intriguing rematches likely to occur at Wright State. Dean Taylor finished second at heavyweight as a freshman, thanks in part to a tremendous draw, and then last year took the title winning three one-point decisions in the process. He was immeasurably aided by some incomprehensible refereeing in the semi-finals where Kirtland's Rob Turner, despite being the complete aggressor, was twice penalized for stalling in a 2-1 loss to Taylor. It was one of those bouts where an objective observer (I, after all, had chosen Taylor to win) could only shake his head in despair. In an otherwise marvelously officiated tournament, it won my vote for "stinker of the year."

Taylor is a very small heavyweight (he originally certified at 189# last year) who has tremendous youth wrestling experience. Physically small and unimposing, he nonetheless crushes opponents' mistakes in a big hurry. He's best, however, in close matches where he seems to have an uncanny sense as to how to maneuver the officiating and pick up critical

stalling points while not endangering himself. He will certify at 215#, but likely be at heavyweight where his slightly suspect conditioning is generally not as apparent. Taylor has been solid all year, winning the giant GMWVA with ease including an 18-second pin the final. Only a junior, he will be-favored by many.

Rob Turner has grown into a 6'5", 270-pound giant with tremendous strength and good athleticism. An all-state football player headed for Purdue, he ended up third last year with four dominating wins and the controversial loss to Taylor. Interestingly, he beat McDonald 10-2 in the district finals, while Taylor defeated the same opponent 6-5 for the state crown. Turner's biggest problem this year has been a lack of competition. He won the MIT with four falls, none extending him into the third period.

To win he will have to pressure Taylor from the start and make it clear who is the aggressor. Should he get a takedown, his ability to turn people should be an enormous advantage.

The Fostoria District has a number of heavyweights with placement potential, but none that should unduly trouble Taylor. He has beaten them all in the past. In particular the trio of Box, Ray and Davis are all about equal, and certainly next best here. Box was runner-up at the MIT this year including wins over Dawson and Clepper, and then lost in overtime to Davis in the "A" Classic finals. He was a state qualifier last year as a freshman winning one state bout. Davis is a smaller, quicker heavyweight who also made it to Wright State last year winning two bouts -- and losing 7-1 to Turner. Taylor defeated him 21-10 in the district bout. He did not place at the MIT, but as mentioned earlier, defeated Box at the "A" Classic. Ray, also a state qualifier, was an exciting third at the MIT over Dawson and has won several smaller tourneys. Taylor also defeated Ray 7-2 last year at sectionals, while Turner pinned him in 20 seconds. That leaves the last qualifying berth relatively wide open.

Turner should not be challenged at Elyria Catholic. State qualifier Dawson and Hadlock are roughly equivalent as they have split a pair of bouts this year ~ Dawson winning at Black River and Hadlock at Buckeye. Dawson was fourth at the MIT losing to both Box and Ray. Again, the last berth is up for grabs with the eventual place winner likely to come from the trio of Kisilewicz, Kiba and Morrison.

The other two districts Xenia and Marion -- are substantially weaker. State qualifier Clepper should dominate at Xenia. He was fifth at the MIT, but was pinned by both Box and Ray. He has tremendous size, and can punish mistakes in a big hurry. The quartet rated from this district -- Lampe, Link, Murphy, and Wallace -- rate substantially behind Clepper and will not match up well with most qualifiers from other districts.

Kurt Whiting had a tough draw at Wright State last year, and was never really in either of his bouts. This year he has continued to dominate his local area and definitely has low placement potential. Schwind has made vast improvement and will be Whiting's top challenger. Bowers probably has the best shot at the third spot, but there are other possibilities with Lewis in the forefront of the group.

TEAMS

Delta -- Like St. Edward in Division I, this is a team that towers over its competition. They have an opportunity to surpass Ready's amazing 1982 record of 119 points - accomplished with only four places being awarded in 13 weight classes. Had they chosen to wrestle their best line-up last year, they would very likely be going for their third consecutive team title - something that has never happened in Division III. Their strength is A. Carrizales, Taylor, Bushman, Schuler, Stutz and Sintobin, but D. Carrizales, Ehram, Young and Smith could also help out. An awesome team that returns most of its stars next year.

Ready--I suppose it is conceivable that if Delta goes into a death spiral and everything goes perfectly for Ready that they could steal away the team title -but I wouldn't wager on it. My guess is that Haimerl, Rowlands and Goldsbury are their only state scorers, but what a trio -- all could be state finalists. Gore could be a helper while Dembinski, Kirkland and Castorano are long shots.

Sandusky St. Mary -- They have been in the Top Ten the past six years (the longest streak in Division III). and have been in fifth place or better five of the six times. They generally have done it on a team basis with a lot of qualifiers and scorers. This year it should be more individual with two-time champ Jared Opfer leading the way with younger brother Drew, Baum, Dew and the two Sean Finnerans (at 103# and 125#). Remember, this squad was 60% points from a team title last year without getting a point from one of the senior stars.

Wellington -- A team that goes quietly about its business of scoring lots of team points. Three placers return from last year in Jameyson, Charles and Myers, and Dawson was a qualifier. Add in possible help from Ketchum, Bradstock and Goins and this is easily a top five squad.

Aurora - A team that is difficult to peg because of the weight changes and some inconsistent wrestling. However, the big five of Fink, Formanek, Cook, Courtad and Mauser is impressive. They could better this ranking by a couple of places.

Elyria Catholic -- That outstanding freshman class is now seniors and it's about time they put up some big numbers. Burnett is good for close to 30 points and Anderson, Woods and Cecil should score, too. If Sedivec can contribute, they will do very well.

Independence -- They were fifth last year and could duplicate that feat in 1998. Aliega and Coljohn are the core nucleus, but Jordan has state experience, too. Both Charmley and the younger Coljohn could also play a role here.

Archbold - Forward is about as certain of collecting 25 points as you can get, while Bostleman should be a top three placer. That leaves the brothers Grime, Bosco and Shirkey to help out. It doesn't look like it'll be enough to make the top five.

Martins Ferry - They have a solid line-up from 112# to 152# with Bruney at 189# as possible help. The Kay man is state; runner-up Dan Jones, but Dobson. Ware, Weaver, Curnes, Dobson, Ward and the Roths are all of state qualifying caliber. The issue is whether they can score at that level.

Grandview Hts. -- This is a team that has a history of getting a lot of people to the state meet, but not scoring a lot there. The last two years they've been 16th and 15th -- not bad; but they can do better. Suttef and Lorenz, could score heavily, alld Alexander and the Coffmans are strong, Add in Wylie, 'Woodland and Frank and this is a team with top five potential- but I've said that before.

Manchester -- It's pretty much a two-man team, but Robinson and Fazio could both be finalists. It's difficult to see who else could help at this level.

Cadiz -- Corder and Sedgner are a dynamite back-to-back combii lation that should score heavily at Wright State. If Brooks is for real and Bittinger can help out they'll move up a few places

Bamesville -- I'll never forget 1984 when this team came from nowhere to win a state team title. It won't happen this year, but Wilson, Jeff Jefferis and Kaiser are very good and Greer, Francis, Lucas and Jason Jefferis could help

Lima Central Catholic- Boyd and Kleman are the linchpins of this team, but younger teammates like Bindel and Fedeli may be ready to contribute.