

103#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: BRENT McBURNEY (MASSILLON PERRY)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2. Barrett (Libbey) | 15. Bowersock (Wapakoneta) |
| 3. Lenhard (St. Edward) | 16. McKinney (Sandusky) |
| 4. Dies (Akron Springfield) | 17. McKinley (Sylvania Northview) |
| 5. Roy (Fairfield) | 18. Boggs (Mt. Healthy) |
| 6. Golembiewski (Massillon Jackson) | 19. Webb (Westland) |
| 7. Dimitris (Brecksville) | 20. Carney (West Chester) |
| 8. Varga (Brunswick) | 21. Federico (Willoughby South) |
| 9. Sabin (Eastlake North) | 22. Dobbins (Barberton) |
| 10. Slaby (Maple Hts.) | 23. Auciello (LaSalle) |
| 11. Percival (Amherst) | 24. Poling (Rogers) |
| 12. Ramirez (Fairmont) | 25. McCreary (Marion Harding) |
| 13. McGuire (Hilliard) | 26. Knight (Moeller) |
| 14. Singhoff (Colerain) | 27. Purcell (Dublin Coffman) |

The last few years have been a prognosticator's dream at 103#. Dominant names like Shaun Smith, Tomazz Wilson, and Todd Boerner held forth while underclassmen like Wilcox and Kulczycki were leaders in their districts. It made things so much more clear-cut and left time to analyze how the top three or four would fare against each other. In 1997, that environment has disappeared to be replaced by a much more complex one. What we have now is a large pool of roughly equivalent wrestlers - many in their first real year of varsity wrestling. And, what one observes, is a kind of Brownian motion as they collide with one another with almost random results. Quantum mechanics has always fascinated me because of the counter-intuitive results it successfully predicts. I'm reminded by this weight class of the Uncertainty Principle which tells one that more closely you understand a particles structure the less you know about its location and visa-versa. It seems particularly appropriate here since the longer I study the principle participants in this exercise the less I can predict the final results.

My choice is Brent McBurney who the past two years served as state champion Shaun Smith's back-up, and last year consequently competed at 112#. He has already this year won at the Ironman, Massillon Perry, and Medina while compiling a blemish-free record -- at least until an upset loss at Alliance. A powerful competitor he is difficult to score upon and methodically grinds out convincing victories.

McBurney emerges from the strongest district - one that features six state caliber participants. Granting McBurney one of the three designated state berths further squeezes the options of the remaining quintet. Dies has shown rapid improvement. He was a strong third at Brecksville losing only a one point decision to Division III choice Allega and defeating state qualifier Slaby. He was a convincing winner at North Canton shutting out his last two opponents, and was third at Firestone losing only to Division II

pick Adkins. Golembiewski has had a much more erratic set of results. He was third at Solon (at 112#) and fourth at Wadsworth losing to both Dobbins and Sibbio. At the Jackson Duals he led Dimitris 5-0 when he was turned and pinned. Like McBurney he was behind a state place winner, Nettle, and had to compete often at 112#. The freshman Dimitris is currently 25-1 with wins over Allega to capture the Brecksville title, the aforementioned Golombiewski, Varga, and McKinney. Poised well beyond his years his only defeat was an overtime decision to Allega. Varga, like Dimitris, is not a physical brute but he checks in with a 12-1 record and tourney titles at Hudson and Brunswick. Dobbins is, perhaps, a small step behind the rest but can compete with any of this group but McBurney. This is clearly the best district and the top five could qualify anywhere else. Unfortunately two will be left home, including Hagen (Ellet).

There are certain parallels to the Perry District when you examine the circumstances at Mentor. Again three qualifiers with a deep pool of potential qualifiers. The major differences are that this group is not quite at the same high performance level that one sees at Perry, but, at the same time, there are ten possibilities rather than six. Mason Lenhard, the freshman sensation from St. Edward, was a cadet national champ last summer and displays a marvelous set of moves. However, he will not be one of the larger 103's and could be overpowered as happened with McBurney. He is a future (maybe, even present) star in high school wrestling up to the turn of the century. Incidentally, his back-up Mike Huang totally dominated at Marion Harding and Troy and will be a major factor in the future. Sabin won at Solon and Richmond Hts. and was a finalist at Hudson before losing a hard fought bout to Varga. Right behind him is a state qualifier Slaby who has had a bit of disappointing year primarily due, I believe, to a certain lack of aggressiveness on his feet. Percival has not wrestled as rigorous a schedule as the others, but his final round fall of Ramirez at Tiffin was impressive. This foursome would appear to have the high probability of capturing the three tickets to Wright State. However, Federico is certainly a contender as are Maher (Midpark), Diaz (Lorain Southview), Vito (Solon), Hubbard (Elyria), and Magyar (Brush).

The sprawling Rogers district is not as strong as the Perry or Mentor. Two-time state qualifier Barrett made the drop to 103# and this powerful senior should place this year. He has lost all three of his previous state bouts. McGuire is probably next best with Bowersock -- winner at St. Johns and runner-up at Marion Harding -- a step behind. Huang beat Bowersock 16-0 at Marion Harding. After that it's a wide-open competition with those ranked augmented by Owens (Mansfield Madison), Lybarger (Mount Vernon) and Velasquez (Clay).

Roy, like Barrett a senior and state qualifier, also has dropped to 103#, and once comfortable with weight should head the Southwest delegation. Ramirez did beat him by a point at Fairfield, but that was his first week at 103#. He has placement potential. Behind him is a tightly grouped pack that includes Ramirez, Singhoff, Boggs, and Carney. It should be a very spirited competition at the district level, but it will be difficult for any of this group other than Roy to place.

112#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: ROCKY RA TUFF (MARION HARDING)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2. Wilcox (Oak Hills) | 15. Balog (Medina) |
| 3. Peretti (Boardman) | 16. Zielinski (Moeller) |
| 4. Icenhour (Hilliard) | 17. Saley (Akron Springfield) |
| 5. Skock (Madison) | 18. Diglia (Elida) |
| 6. Key (Vandalia Bulter) | 19. Caruso (Brecksville) |
| 7. Jayne (St. Edward) | 20. Fuqua (Amhertst) |
| 8. Byers (Eastlake North) | 21. Siebert (Ashland) |
| 9. Bloomfield (Tiffin Columbian) | 22. Cook (Solon) |
| 10. Abella (Northland) | 23. Tagliareni(Pickerington) |
| 11. Percifull (West Carrollton) | 24. Seifullah (Stow) |
| 12. Iori (Elder) | 25. Pierson (Beavercreek) |
| 13. McCreery (Wadsworth) | 26. Soldatek(Toledo Start) |
| 14. Daugherty (Wayne) | 27. Branch (Centerville) |

From almost any perspective it appears likely that there will be a two-man battle for the state title at 112#. Ratliff is the type of wrestler that you like to see do well. He is very aggressive looking to score at all times and is willing to take risks to put people on their back - as evidenced by his high fall percentage. Additionally, he'll move up a weight class to find the most challenging match-up not concerned with "protecting" his record. Last year as a freshman, he defeated the very tough senior Zane Stickel to win his district and came to Wright State with a 37-2 record. He had the look of a finalist, but got "caught" by Nettle in the quarter-finals and eventually ended up fourth - losing a one-point bout to Stickel in the consolation finals. Significantly, he defeated Wilcox 9-2 in the consolations. This year he has floated between 112# and 119# with tremendous success winning major tourneys at Galion, Marion Harding, and Sylvania Southview with relative ease. His only loss - in the Gorman finals -- was at 119# when he challenged my 119# choice, Roger Merrell. He opened the match by taking Merrell down (the first time that had happened this year), but, perhaps got over aggressive, was quickly reversed and pinned. Absent such a circumstance he should breeze through this field with the exception of Wilcox.

Wilcox, now a junior, is a highly heralded youth wrestler who made good on that promise. He has finished fifth at 103# the last two years in a curiously identical manner. Both years he entered state competition totally undefeated (a combined 56-0) and reached the semi-finals before twice falling to Shaun Smith (10-1 and 6-0). He then lost a consolation bout before coming back to take fifth. That can't happen exactly the same way this year since he lost in the SWOCA finals at 119# to Bein -- his first regular season loss ever. He did win the mammoth GMVWA title at 119# as well as at St. Xavier and has been pretty much his dominating self in the local area. Very strong he will have to neutralize Ratliffs superior quickness to win, and that is certainly a

possibility -- particularly if he can capture the initial takedown. Their battle should be one of the most interesting of the tourney.

There is a substantial drop-off between the top duo and the rest of the field. For example, at Perry the field is headed by Peretti -- a strong winner at Kenston - who is coming off a successful sophomore season which saw him not only reach Wright State but 'win two bouts there. However, Ratliff defeated him 14-2 in the consolations. He has good placement potential, nonetheless. The quartet of McCreery, Balog, Caruso, and Saley should battle for the last two slots with the promise of especially fierce competition. Both Balog and Caruso missed qualification last year by a takedown -with Balog's loss coming to Peretti. There is something of a round robin aspect to this competition with McCreery having beaten Saley at North Canton, Saley defeating Caruso at Brecksville, and Caruso winning over Balog last year.

Mentor features several competitors with good upside potential. Skoch, for example, was a district finalist last year as a freshman and looked very impressive until Kulczycki wore him down in the finals. In his first round at States he threw away a won match (ahead 7-2 in the third period) to Bloomfield in overtime, and did not get a second chance. Physically, he's a dynamite competitor, but Madison wrestles a schedule that is ill-designed to prepare their top people for the rigors of state competition. Byers looked fabulous at Hudson and Solon and lost only to Peretti at Kenston. He missed stated qualification by one bout last year, and since he and Skoch emerge from the same sectional they will be apart at Mentor. The freshman Jayne could be the surprise package at Mentor or Wright State. As might be expected of a ninth grader he has had a season of hills and valleys. He won at Medina including an impressive 13-6 win over state champ Holmes and an 8-2 triumph over Balog. He also was second at the Ironman defeating West Virginia state champ Shank (after being decked by him the previous week). On the other hand Tompkins TF'ed him and he lost two out of three in Pennsylvania. When he is hitting on all cylinders -- as he was at Medina -- he can be a real handful - but the real strong 112's will be a tough match-up for him. Fuqua cannot be overlooked despite poor tourneys at Tiffin and Avon Lake -he was one point from Wright State last year, while Cook, Seifullah, and perhaps Chavers (Warrensville) are other possibilities.

The huge Rogers district is headed by Ratliff with Icenhour the next best shot at placement. A state qualifier in 1996 Icenhour just recently returned to 112# and looks to be very strong there. He should be away from Ratliff at Wright State, and if Wilcox ends up in the same half bracket with Ratliff (hopefully not), he could potentially be a finalist. After that it should be a dogfight for the last three spots. State qualifiers Diglia and Bloomfield return, but neither is a lock to replicate that feat. Diglia, in particular, is at risk. Abella and the emerging Soldatek are real possibilities -- the latter with recent wins over Quick and state qualifier Daughtery. In addition to the ranked Tagliareni and Siebert watch for Wensinger (Fremont Ross) and Cook (Mansfield Madison). State qualifier Armstrong (Groveport) will apparently not compete this year eliminating a real factor at this weight, while state alternate Stephens (Westerville North) has struggled up at 112#.

Wilcox, as always, will dominate at Centerville. However, there are lots of potential candidates for the .remaining qualifying berths. State qualifiers Daugherty and Zielinski are sure to be factors although neither has done particularly well against first rate competition. Key was one point away from Wright State last year while Pierson, Iori, and Percifull are solid performers. There is a lot of depth here with Branch, Heggood (Glen Este), Kaplan (Sycamore), and Mau (Fairborn), perhaps, only a half step behind. Wilcox will cruise, but there will be mayhem and upsets in his wake.

119#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: ROGER MERRELL (MANSFIELD)

TOP CONTENDERS

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|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2. Nash (Uniontown Lake) | 14. Collins (St. Xavier) |
| 3. El-Hayek (Boardman) | 15. Obermyer (Glen Este) |
| 4. Guillozet (Greenville) | 16. Simon (North Canton) |
| 5. Highsmith (Toledo Start) | 17. Griffey (Sylvania Southview) |
| 6. D. Smith (Lexington) | 18. Jackson (Hamilton) |
| 7. Bentley (Groveport) | 19. Darwish (LaSalle) |
| 8. Osolin (Eastlake North) | 20. Rolf (Defiance) |
| 9. Kallai (Wadsworth) | 21. Kennedy (Midpark) |
| 10. Thompson (Wapakoneta) | 22. DiCillo (Mayfield) |
| 11. C. Smith (Marion Harding) | 23. Lyons (Moeller) |
| 12. Bertin/Grecol (St. Edward) | 24. Smith (Kenmore) |
| 13. Simmons (Westerville North) | 25. Mazzarella (Westlake) |

For the second consecutive year this is a weight class that is unlikely to send pulses racing among the spectator base. It is one of the weaker fields of the 14 in Division I and returns relatively few standouts from last year.

A singular exception is my projected champ Roger Merrell who does provide excitement every time out on the mat. Like Ratliff he is a big-time pinner with a flair for the quick fall. Already a two-time state qualifier this seasoned junior is once beaten this year at both 119# and 125#. He has already won at the Gorman, Marion Harding, and Madison events while compiling about an 85% pin ratio. Last year he was third at this class losing only to the very strong senior, Kich and avenging his district loss to Moore with a fall. His inexplicable loss at Mapleton to the freshman Fink and his only relatively close call this year with Goodwin were at 125#, but I don't anticipate him having many at 119#. He's fun to watch, and he's totally dangerous every second of his bouts.

Merrell's toughest competition is likely to come out of the Massillon Perry district. Both Nash and El-Hayek placed last year, and their strategy, I suspect, will be to slow the pace when wrestling Merrell. Last year Merrell defeated Nash in the

quarter-finals 5-2 in a hard fought bout, and Nash has wrestled several down-tempo bouts this year. Nash has been at 125# all year, and could well choose to stay there - especially if Kulczycki is unable to compete. El-Hayek was fifth at 112# last year winning four bouts.

This year he was second at Kenston losing, rather surprisingly, in overtime to Michalek, and fourth at the Ironman including a loss to Byers of Walsh Jesuit. The freshman Kallai and Simon are both tough but have been somewhat inconsistent. Kallai won at Wadsworth after a fifth at North Canton while Simon triumphed at North Canton but finished third at Wadsworth losing to Kallai in the semi-finals. Behind this quartet are Scott and Smith with Bucur (Hudson), Artino (Nordon), Artino (Stow) and Pavkov (Barberton) other possibilities. Former state qualifier Wright (Dresden Tri-Village) also returns at this class, but will need to be in absolutely top form to qualify.

The Rogers District has tremendous quantity at this weight, but "up-top" quality after Merrell may be suspect. There are probably a dozen viable candidates for the five qualifying berths, but there are few within this number that have state placement potential. Leading this pack are Highsmith and Smith -- both former state qualifiers. Talven Highsmith captured the fifth and last qualifying spot last year, but was a quick first round casualty. This year he won at Sylvania Southview and St. John (both on technical falls) and finished second at Northwood -- all at 125# pounds. Drew Smith was second in Division II at 112# as a sophomore coming from a district fifth to the state finals. Then last year he was hobbled by injuries and fell in district action. So far, in 1997, he has wrestled a very demanding schedule -- especially important with the Division I challenges that lie ahead. He was second in the DeSales Classic (losing in overtime), sixth at the Ironman, second at Tiffin (after getting smoked by Burnett), and third at the Gorman (losing to Merrell). His ability to win close matches may move him ahead of more gifted competition. A potential sleeper is Dugan Bentley who won two district matches at 125# last year (and lost only to state qualifiers). He and Amick alternate at 119# and both have been impressive. Bentley has won several tourneys and defeated the highly rated Icenhour in a dual. After this trio it will be a free-for-all with Thompson, C. Smith, and Simmons marginally ahead of Rolf, Griffey, and Giesige (Celina). Others with upset potential are Altman (Holland Springfield), Adcock (Elida), Sheets (Westland) and B. Campbell (Pickerington).

State qualifier Guillozet heads a relatively non-credentialed group out of Centerville. Guillozet battled eventual state champ Kore Sharpley for six minutes in losing a first round bout 8-6, and then lost a one-point consolation heartbreaker. He wrestles a relatively obscure (at least for me) schedule but won at Troy and is apparently undefeated. While I've listed a number of other potential qualifiers, the current situation seems currently unclear. A major reason is that Wilcox has been at 119# most of the year distorting final results. Still it's difficult to envision Collins, Obermyer, Jackson, Darwish, or Lyons placing at Wright State. Other people to watch might include Drake (Vandalia Butler) and Kreiling (Anderson).

It is very unusual when the Mentor District doesn't place at least one wrestler at every weight class. In fact, the last time it happened was in 1994, but as it currently stands it could well happen at 119#. I've searched long and hard but only Osolin and Bertin (or Grecol) would seem even to have an outside shot. Osolin, only a sophomore, has had impressive tourney results finishing first, second, third, and fourth in his four efforts, all at weight classes higher than 119#. If he can become comfortable at 119# he has real placement potential. At the end of last year I was convinced that Grecol would have a big year in 1997. He came on very powerfully at the District losing to Byers in overtime in the consolations. He looked like he was headed on a steep uphill trajectory. However, injuries have slowed him down and the precocious Bertin may end up as the varsity wrestler, and he, too has outstanding potential. Only a freshman, he placed at Medina at 125# and has been more effective at 119#. I've also listed Kennedy, DiCillo, and Mazzarella, but those are strictly educated guesses for the last spot. It could just as easily been Shears (Madison), Carano (Maple Hts.), or Yost (North Ridgeville).

125#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: MIKE KULCZVCKI (ST. EDWARD)

TOP CONTENDERS

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|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2. Billow* (Nordia) | 15. Goodwin (Wapakoneta) |
| 3. Sommer (West Carrollton) | 16. Jakuszewski (Green) |
| 4. Zimmerman (Holland Springfield) | 17. Barkhurst (Glen Este) |
| 5. Paisz OfVadsworth) | 18. Minton (Dublin Coffman) |
| 6. Branham (Grove City) | 19. Grviv Akron Springfield) |
| 7. Lentz (Mentor) | 20. Amick (Groveport) |
| 8. Linberg (Fairfield) | 21. Patyk (Garfield Hts) |
| 9. Horner (Massillon Jackson) | 22. Newton (Defiance) |
| 10. Poland (Greenville) | 23. Trem (Eastlake North) |
| 11. Se Braunen (Xenia) | 24. Kurtz (Harrison) |
| 12. Campbell (Pickerington) | 25. Kim (North Royalton) |
| 13. Walls (Sandusky) | 26. Cruz (North Ridgeville) |
| 14. Damrunchai (Beavecreek) | 27. Fitch (Massillon Perry) |

The 125# weight class is probably the weakest in Division I and that, in and of itself, makes for a difficult forecasting environment. It is far better (and more fun) to have three or four wrestlers who you can envision as state champs than to have none. In the first case, you can spend productive time analyzing results, comparing styles and considering alternative scenarios. However, if no one at the weight class has the look of a potential champ; it's difficult to know where to turn. Still, state runner-up Mike Kulczycki seemed the obvious choice until the dreaded injury bug struck. Kulczycki has only wrestled once since the third week of the season and that was

probably premature. Now the word is he won't return until sections (and that's the optimistic forecast), and the question that suddenly looms large is -- what now?

With few viable alternatives, I've decided to remain with Kulczycki as my top choice. Last year at 103# he reached the state finals only to lose to his long-time nemesis Shaun Smith 5-3. This year he was second at the Ironman losing a 10-9 thriller to Division III choice Zoloty in a bout that had it been 30 seconds longer would have belonged to Kulczycki. One of Kulczycki's greatest strengths is his ability to wrestle for six all-out minutes. He may fall behind early, but the constant pressure eventually wears down opponents. A classic example was his dual meet win over state champion Adkins last year. Down 7-1 after being headlocked, he eventually pushed Adkins past his conditioning limit, and then won the bout with a flurry of third period takedowns 16-11. My concern is that the injury may not only reduce his wrestling effectiveness, but negate his usual conditioning edge. Still, the sectional and district tourneys are not particularly rugged, and may give him a change to reach the maximum level possible within the framework of his injury. If he cannot compete, my top choice would thus default down to the junior Damien Billow.

The Mentor District is not overpowering. Should Kulczycki not wrestle, Grecol is an exceptional back-up who would have excellent qualification chances at Mentor. After Kulczycki, only Lentz has placement potential at Wright State. When I saw him two years ago, I was tremendously impressed with his potential. However, his junior year was beset with injuries, and though he made a game effort, he was eliminated in the first round of districts. This year he missed Brecksville, but has cobbled together a 16-3 record including some big wins -- over Gucciardo, Patyk, and Osolin. After him, I'm really at a loss. I've listed Patyk - who has shown rapid improvement -- Cruz and Trem. The latter boy has been solid at 130# and could be a real factor at 125#.

Two-time state qualifier Billow heads the Perry District. He has had two tough state draws and failed in three attempts to win at that level. This year with added size and muscle he could well be a finalist -- or champ should Kulczycki not be fit. In the past his exceptional skills were blunted by the raw strength of his older opponents.

Now a junior, that disadvantage should be disappearing. Paisz was third at North Canton (losing to Wrobel), third at Wadsworth (losing to Wrobel but defeating McClanahan) and third at the powerful Alliance Tourney. A returning state qualifier he, too, lost a tough first round bout to Sommer and never got a second chance. He will also be happy to discover that Wrobel will be Division III at Wright State. Horner is a tough, tough wrestler who is difficult to score upon. I was impressed with his third at Solon (losing to Wrobel), but his pin over McAdams was impressive. There are some other excellent wrestlers including Wadsworth champ Jakuszewski, Grvic, Kim, Bartlett (Cuyahoga Falls), and Bentley (Logan.). It will be a rugged threesome that emerges from here.

Based on the last three weeks of results, I've moved Zimmerman to the top of my 125# list at Rogers. He struggled somewhat at 130#, but seems to have found his

niche at 125#. He crushed the field at Perrysburg and won brilliantly at Waite giving back-to-back tourney successes. He now seems on track for a possible state place. State qualifier Branham has been outstanding, but after losing to Zimmerman on a fall dropped into the second position within this district. Campbell took a fourth place sectional placement last year and ended up missing state qualification by a single point. This year he has been up and down, but look for him to be at his best at tourney time. Walls was impressive at Brecksville with four easy wins, but lost to Branham twice at Waite - once 11-10. Goodwin won one bout at districts last year, and battled Merrell in the finals at Marion Harding losing 11-8. Below this quintet it's a wide open open field. I've rated Minton Beard, and Amick, but also like Smith (Findlay) and Grusz (Westerville South).

It's a difficult field to decipher at Centerville. I've changed the relative district ratings several times recently. Leading my list is state qualifier Sommer who had a district second last year and won two bouts at states -- missing placement in a double overtime loss. He was injured .in the semi-finals at the GMVWA and had to default out of the tournament, but seems ~~ady now. State qualifier Linberg and Poland are also excellent while Brannen only lost to Sommer 3-1 in overtime. The big question is where will Damrongchai fit in now that he and Smigel have switched classes. Also watch for Barkhurst and Distel (Colerain).

130#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: -JIM WANDSNIDER (HARRISON)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2. Bukky (Kilbourne) | 15. Bobner (Tiffin Columbian) |
| 3. L. Iacaboni (Nordononia) | 16. Greaslen (Northmont) |
| 4. Ludwig (East Liverpool) | 17. Sc. Brannen (Xenia) |
| 5. Eger (Dublin Coffman) | 18. Hinton (Celina) |
| 6. Ferguson (Lorain Southview) | 19. Rohr (Massillon Jackson) |
| 7. Smigel (Beavercreek) | 20. Holzheimer (St. Ignatius) |
| 8. Roche (Oakhills) | 21. Jenny (Glen Este) |
| 9. Harpster (Wapakoneta) | 22. Riedel (Sandusky) |
| 10. Tolar (St. Edward) | 23. Cameron (Pickerington) |
| 11. Taulbee (Elder) | 24. Henderly (Toledo Start) |
| 12. Plouse (Cuyahoga Falls) | 25. Yost (North Ridgeville) |
| 13. Beard (Defiance) | 26. McAdams (Brecksville) |
| 14. Kallai (Wadsworth) | 27. Mayer (Madison) |

This is a nicely balanced weight class featuring nine returning state qualifiers (at least one from every district except Mentor) and four returning state place winners. While that should engendered spirited competition both at the district and state level the eventual championship should essentially be decided by the top three competitors. My choice is "the experienced senior Wandsnider who was runner-up

last year at 125#. His only loss was to a New Jersey competitor at the Ironman and he has won easily at the SWOCA. In addition he defeated Bukky 3-2 in last year's state semi-finals creating a down-tempo bout that negated Bukky's speed advantage. He also holds an Ironman semi-final fall over Iacaboni.

Bukky won 43 bouts last year en route to his eventual fourth place finish. He has apparently been battling injuries having seen limited duty this year. He was second at the MWC losing to Division II choice Doyle by an 8-2 margin. By the end of last year he was very, very close to a state championship level, but the injuries may have dropped him back. Lou Iacaboni, this year the lighter of the twins, was fifth last year at this weight after losing an 11-1 semi-final bout to the eventual champ Keaton Anderson. Besides a fourth place finish at the Ironman he won the South Florida Invitational and is undefeated in dual meets.

Wandsnider exits from the most difficult district. State qualifiers Roche, Smigel, and Taulbee are all certified at this weight, but none are within five points of Wandsnider. Last year they were a combined 1-4 at the state level. At the SWOCA Smigel won at 125#, but has since moved up while Roche and Taulbee were fourth and fifth respectively at 135#. Taulbee was first at the GMVWA, however. Geaslen, Jenny, Brannen, Lambers (Elder), and Dizon (Wayne) have previous district experience and should battle for state berths.

It's something of a mixed bag at Rogers. However, a healthy Bukky would romp to the district title despite some good talent. Eger was a Division II state qualifier at Watterson and has done well against Division I competition with a win at Upper Arlington and a strong fourth at Medina. Beard has been outstanding at 135# over the talented Muenzer was an eye-opener. He may not be rated high enough here. The rest of the district has a lot of unknowns, but Cameron seems to be gaining momentum and could be a real factor even at the state level. Besides those listed Henderson (Reynoldsburg), and Yetzer (Mansfield Madison) could be factors. The very dangerous state qualifier Harpster (Wapakoneta) has missed the entire year with injuries but apparently will compete in the state tourney process.

The Perry District has six solid candidates for their three state berths. Iacaboni is a clear choice but the intriguing entry is Ludwig. Last year at 135# he cruised into the district finals with easy wins before losing a 5-2 finale. Then at Wright State he defeated Reckman, lost to Marchette, and then won three bouts to finish fifth. This year he's down to 130# and could be a real factor. However, he bombed out at Medina losing early and often and failing to place at 135#. Kallai won at North Canton, but suffered a first-round loss at Wadsworth before winning six consolation bouts to finish fourth. Plouse was a Division II qualifier at Akron St. Vincent last year and won this year at Wadsworth and Western Reserve while finishing second at Hudson. One of this excellent quartet will not qualify along with the Brecksville champ McAdams and the excellent Rohr. Other contenders are Barron (Akron Springfield), Gago (Hoover) and Stewart (Stow).

The Mentor District is the weakest of the four. Ferguson seems to be the best here based on strong performances throughout the year. Last year he seemed a solid contender to qualify at 135#, but things kind of fell apart for him. An overtime loss in the sectional final to Toyama provided him with an unfavorable draw which matched him up with Marchette in the quarter-finals. After a 10-4 loss (Marchette's closet bout in the tourney process) he lost again in the consolations and was eliminated. Toyama finished second. This year his only loss was to Bukky. The Padua transfer Tolar is probably next best, and this sophomore has fit well in the Ed's lineup. He was second at Medina. After that everything is hazy with Holzheimer, Mayer and Yost my top choices to fight it out for the third spot. DeForde (Brush), Zelma (Strongsville), Oborn (Maple Hts.), and Hancock (Solon) are other possibilities.

135#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JP. FELTY (MARION HARDING)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2. Hughes (Pickerington) | 14. Smith (North Royalton) |
| 3. Steadman (Eastlake North) | 15. Miller (Lorain Southview) |
| 4. G. Iacaboni (Nordonia) | 16. Muenzer (Clay) |
| 5. Brennan (Oakhills) | 17. Feldman (Moeller) |
| 6. Wahoff (Fairfield) | 18. Grant (Defiance) |
| 7. Reckman (Milford) | 19. Jewell (Wadsworth) |
| 8. Drake (Barberton) | 20. Smith (Miamisburg) |
| 9. Inglis (Kilbourne) | 21. Forster (Dublin Coffman) |
| 10. Gulley (Massillon Perry) | 22. Bowser (Sidney) |
| 11. Conway (Sandusky) | 23. Columbi (Mayfield) |
| 12. Scruggs (Sycamore) | 24. Cockayne (Beavercreek) |
| 13. Wrtzberger (Madison) | 25. Wheeler (St. Edward) |

This is the sixth weight class as one moves up the normal scheduling process, and in Division I there is an interesting story to be told. Since the weight classifications changes made in 1988 the 135# championship has always been won by a Northwest District (Mentor or Perry) participant, running from Fried through Marchette. Before 1988 the 132# weight was the sixth class in order and you have to go back to 1973 before you find somebody outside the Northeast District taking the title. That winner, by the way, was Mike Chinn is an outstanding middleweight from Grove City. So unless Steadman or Iacaboni can pull a first-class upset a streak of some 23 consecutive years will finally end.

It doesn't look good for the streak with the redoubtable Felty looking for his first state title. A transfer from Teays Valley where he was a Division II state place winner, Felty didn't miss a beat in Division I with a second place finish at 130#. Both of his losses last year were to Anderson, the last one by a 5-4 count. He is undefeated this year and must be considered a strong favorite in 1997.

He competes in one of the tougher districts at Rogers. Hughes could be his district and state finalist competitor and yet he continues to puzzle. At the end of last year he was hitting on all cylinders including a sectional title and a quick trip to the district semi-finals. There, on Saturday, he lost three times (twice to boys he had beaten before), the last one finishing off his state chances. This year at Medina I was anticipating a Morgan/Hughes final when he lost a semi-final bout to a former victim. Somehow, I think he'll sort it out at the state level this year. There is a big drop-off after the top duo with Inglis, Muenzer, and Conway next best. However there is a lot of upset potential here with people like Hansen (Lexington), Salzmann (Celina) and DeClerq (Toledo Start) eagerly awaiting an upset chance.

Steadman was very successful at 140# but his drop, I believe, maximizes his state chances. His only loss in four major tournaments was to Division III state champ Anthony Ralph, and he does have a victory over Iacaboni. He has at least some chance of maintaining his district's winning streak at this weight. Wirtzberger and Miller are the second and third choice here, but after that it was a tough struggle to find any names at the Mentor district. There seems to be a reattack of viable state candidates here. Wirtzberger was very impressive as a 130# pound sophomore last year, but has been at 145# much of the year. He could be a big surprise to a lot of people at 135#. Miller, too, is down a weight class after spending all of last year at 140#. Then, as a sophomore he reached districts, but lost in the first round and was eliminated. This year he had been very effective at the lower 135# weight class. He was third at the giant Midwest Classic at Worthington Kilbourne and took another third at Waite defeating Muenzer and Kaminski, but losing to Conway.

Iacaboni faces a much more daunting task at Perry. Last year he was third at 125# in district action but lost a quick fall at Wright State in the first round and was eliminated. This year he was fourth at the Ironman and has but one other loss -- to Steadman. Drake has moved ahead of state qualifier Gulley in this district with impressive wins at Firestone and Wadsworth. Gulley was fifth at Medina (losing to Hughes) and failing to place at the Ironman. This trio will be challenged by Smith, Jewell, and possibly, Curtright (Athens.)

The best balanced competition will probably occur at Centerville. There state qualifiers Brennan, Wahoff, and Reckman will tangle with upcoming stars like Scruggs, Smith, Bowser, and Cockayne. Brennan had a busy off-season moving up two weight classes and transferring from Elder to Oakhills. Last year he won two bouts at Wright State. Wahoff has been competing at 145# most of the year with mild success, but it should be a much better story down at 135#. A fine youth wrestler he's due to hit his stride this year. Reckman, along with his siblings, have seemingly been around forever, but this is apparently it for the family. Mark has a good chance of being the second in the family to grab a state place.

140#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: KEATON ANDERSON (PICKERINGTON)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2. J Janson (Moeller) | 14. Studer (Mansfield Madison) |
| 3. Maynard (St. Edward) | 15. Kellhofer (Geneva) |
| 4. Gamby (Dublin Coffman) | 16. Spaulding (Westland) |
| 5. Ricciardi (Kent Roosevelt) | 17. Sechoolcraft (Beavercreek) |
| 6. Weinfurtner (Athens) | 18. Swenton (Solon) |
| 7. French (Alliance) | 19. Pace (Talawanda) |
| 8. Lange (Nordonia) | 20. Anderson (Medina) |
| 9. Pagan (Lorain Southview) | 21. Harris (Sandusky) |
| 10. Der. Schuler (Whitmer) | 22. Patty (Mayfield) |
| 11. Dusina (Kilbourne) | 23. Lattavo (Glen Oak) |
| 12. Kaufman (Wadsworth) | 24. DiSalvo (North Olmsted) |
| 13. Plowman (Miamisburg) | 25. Lanier (Fairfield) |

As presently this is probably the strongest, deepest weight class in Division I. There are outstanding competitors from every part of the state, and several districts (most notably Perry and Rogers) are overcrowded with state caliber performers. What I anticipate happening is a flow of athletes to 145# (despite Nakamura's imposing stature) making the two classes more equivalent in terms of overall ability. Even should this occur 140# will be one of the premier competitions at this state tourney -- one which both spectators and coaches should find most fascinating.

Defending state champion Anderson has moved up two weight classes with no loss in efficiency or productivity. A state qualifier as a 9th grader, Anderson really hit his stride last year winning the title at 130# totally dominating every bout except his 5-4 final round win over Felty. He remains undefeated this year including his first title at Medina against a very representative field - including a 17-11 win in the final over Maynard.

He'll certainly be challenged by Janson who will be making his fourth trip to the state tournament this year. Last year he picked up his first three state wins dominating his half bracket at 135# before running into his old nemesis, Sonny Marchette, who tech failed him for at least the third time in the finals. Janson certainly has to be overjoyed that Walsh Jesuit is now a Division II school. This year Janson has won the SWOCA and OCC, and quite honestly, had not been challenged until Marchette TF'ed him again at Alliance. A Janson-Anderson matchup has caused me no end of thought, and my current choice of Anderson is by the narrowest of margin.

Gray Maynard, now a junior at St. Ed's, was the Nevada State Champion last year before returning to Cleveland. A powerfully built young man he has had to acclimate to the rigorous St. Edward's schedule, but that has helped drive his clear improvement. Against Anderson -- his only loss to an Ohio wrestler -- he captured three takedowns, but showed a disturbing proclivity to go to his back as Anderson won the bout with three, three-point near falls. We have seen that in other losses to out-of-state

competition (though only at the highest level), and it will need to be rectified before the state tourney process. Nonetheless, this boy has real talent and will be a factor this year and next. Many may remember his father, two-time state champion Ian Maynard, the last wrestler to win a state title for Cleveland South.

Right behind this top trio is a formidable group with five returning state qualifiers any of whom has the ability to upset one of the top three. My guess is that, perhaps, one or two of that group, though, may elect to compete at 145# although the road to the finals there will also be strewn with obstacles. All in all, it does provide the various coaching staffs with some interesting options to consider over the next month or so.

Anderson heads a deep district, but with five qualifying berths the top contender should be able to reach Wright State. I was much impressed with Gamby at Medina and with continued improvement he could be in line for a low place. He has certified down a weight class from last year, and if comfortable at 140# it may be the right decision. Schuler was very impressive at Tiffin, but it was a relatively weak field and so it remains unclear how well he can perform at this difficult district. Clearly, however, the talent is there. Dusina was a major surprise last year. He entered the district as a sectional fourth place finisher with a 16-1.3 record. Two upsets later he was. in the semi-finals where Feeney pinned him in 12 seconds. Nonetheless, he persevered to grab the fifth and last qualifying spot in a strong field. This year he has had a far more successful year winning the Wolfpack Invitational and finishing second at the Midwest Classic.

While none of my top-rated trio competes at Perry this is a strong, very deep district. It includes three returning state qualifiers and at least five other wrestlers with strong credentials. Many of this group have been at 145# some, upon surveying the assembled field, will opt to return to the higher weight class. Riccardi was sixth last year at 140# -- twice losing one point bouts including a 2-1 squeaker to state finalist Feeney. He began this year with a second at Hudson (152#) and a third at Kenston (145#), but since moving to 140# he won at Firestone and was second at the Western Reserve losing only to Marder. Weinfurter is a two-time state place winner with a solid record of performance. Last year he was sixth at 135# after reaching the semi-finals. This year at Medina Gamby defeated him twice in hard-fought, close bouts. He has done a good job of meeting tough competition. French lost the third and final qualifying berth to Weinfurter 1-0 last year. He, too, has lost to Marder this year while finishing second at Solon and first at Richmond Hts. Lange has moved up from 119# and this sophomore was very impressive last year at Mentor pushing state runner-up Kich to the limit in the consolation round before losing 8-5. He was a strong fifth at the murderous 140# weight class at the Ironman and won at 152# in Florida. With Kaufman, Anderson, and Lattavo also competing some good folks will be left home.

At Mentor there is a substantial gap between Maynard and everyone else. I've ranked Pagan, Patty, DiSalvo and Swenton, but they will struggle at the state level. Swenton always has seemed a high potential performer, but except for his title at the Midwest Classic he remains something of an enigma. He was third at Solon, but only fifth at the Western Reserve -- although in fairness it was a very strong field. Other possibilities

include Noga (Willoughby South), Pollack (Mentor) and Sawyer (Strongsville). This would have been a stronger field except that Steadman and Wirtzberger smartly moved to 135#.

Janson will be pretty much unchallenged at Centerville. The quality level takes a fairly dramatic step downward after Janson although Plowman and Schoolcraft have upset potential. A pair of long-shot specials here might be Boudrow (Colonel White) or Bianco (Elder).

145#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: YOSHI NAKAMURA (ST. EDWARD)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Hoover (Akron Springfield) | 14. Edwards (Westerville South) |
| 3. Mallah (Toledo Woodward) | 15. Dean Schuler (Whitmer) |
| 4. Marroquin (Defiance) | 16. T. Carraher (St. Xavier) |
| 5. Shanklin (Fairfield) | 17. Sierleja (Brecksville) |
| 6. Hagedorn (Sycamore) | 18. Gerwe (Milford) |
| 7. Mullins (Perrysburg) | 19. Fenos (North Royalton) |
| 8. J. Mahone (Solon) | 20. Stachowitz (Garfield Hts.) |
| 9. Auker (Mt. Vernon) | 21. Moccia (Nordonia) |
| 10. Zmith (Fitch) | 22. Shipp (Dunbar) |
| 11. Wright (East Liverpool) | 23. Taylor (Xenia) |
| 12. Urban (Toledo St. John) | 24. Holtzapple (Wapakoneta) |
| 13. Luneke (Wayne) | 25. Brown/Dysart (Pickerington) |

One of the strongest favorites in Division I - has to be defending state champion Yoshi Nakamura. Last year he cruised through the tournament process and, against strong opposition, never had a close bout. The bad news for the rest of the field is that he is even better this year. Nakamura is a splendid example of the inter-relationship of various combat disciplines. A ten-time national judo champion he never wrestled until his freshman year at St. Edward's. His incredible sprint up the learning curve is well-documented by his results, and he continues to improve. His incredible quickness and outstanding balance leveraged by a keen intelligence gives him exceptional long term potential. There is much discussion about marvelous senior quartet at Walsh this year (all of it deserved), but Nakamura may have as much (or even more) to offer for the future. This year he remains undefeated including wins at the Ironman and Medina, and my only quibble would be that he, too often, ignores opportunities for leg attacks although part of that may be because of his eagerness to record the fall. Incidentally, this is another weight class dominated in the past by Northeast district contestants. The last ten titlists have come from that region and since 1979 only Monte Dagley has won the 145# championship and lived outside the Northeast District. Nakamura would appear to be a good bet to maintain that streak.

At Mentor state qualifier James Mahone would seem to be the only other competitor with possible state placement potential. He won at the Western Reserve and Midwest Classic tourneys, and was third at Solon losing only to Marder. Up three weight classes he has outstanding quickness and strength. The rest of the field at Mentor seems very non-descript with Stachowitz perhaps next best. Other thoughts might be Taus (North Ridgeville), Keller (Midview), and Smith (Lorain Southview).

Shanklin spent much of the year at 152#, but I rate him marginally best over Hagedorn at Centerville. He was a state qualifier as a freshman, but last year lost 10-9 and 9-8 district bouts and stayed home. This year he was third at the SWOCA and second at Kenston at 152#, but easily won at Fairfield at 145#. He'll challenge anyone except Nakamura at this class. Returning state qualifier Hagedorn is right with Shanklin. After a third place finish at the district level he entered the state tourney with 10 losses, but then won two tough bouts before losing a 15-10 semi-final to Hrovat. Two further losses -- including one to Hoover -- gave him a sixth place finish. This year his only loss has been to Janson in the SWOCA final and he won easily at Sycamore. The rest of this group is not at the same level although certainly capable of an unexpected win. Besides those listed Spang (Beavercreek), Wilson (Harrison) and Griffith (Centerville) are possibilities.

Hoover was a solid fourth at this weight class including wins over Marroquin, Mullins, and Hagedorn. I've rated him second best based on that fine performance, but I am uneasy based on second place finishes at North Canton (a 10-3 loss to Porter) and Firestone (an 11-8 loss to Mason). He was the champ at Brecksville and he did have nine losses last year even while finishing fourth. He'll need to be at peak efficiency to reach the finals. Probably second best is Wright who was fourth at this district last year losing a tight 5-3 battle to reach Wright State. He did not have a good Medina tourney and will be challenged by those in this district rated below him. There are well over a dozen Smiths mentioned in this report (and one Highsmith) but Vince Zmith is unique. He won three district bouts last year and this season handily captured the Wadsworth title. He is my favorite for the third (or even second) qualifying berth. Sierleja, Fenos, and Moccia are also possibilities with the latter pushed Lip a weight when Lange moved down. Brown (Logan) has lost two close bouts to Dusina and could be a factor here.

There is a tremendous amount of uncertainty at the Rogers district. Mallah has compiled a tremendous three year record at Toledo Woodward but has yet to qualify for state action. He wins a lot of 23-8 type matches but then drops the crucial 9-8 decision. This year he has the tools to be a finalist at this class, but his past record creates uncertainty. Marroquin is another wrestler with a tremendous record, but, perhaps, against suspect competition. He was a state qualifier at this weight last year, but he had to win his first round bout to have any chance (Heskett was in the same quarter-bracket), but instead was "decked" by Hoover. This year he is just crushing everybody, but unfortunately everybody does not include any of the top people at this class. So, again, uncertainty exists, although his win at the Rogers was a good sign. I know that Marroquin has certified at 140# and that will provide coach Joe Carone with a very interesting decision about the best location for arguably the best wrestler on this team.

With Anderson at 140# and Nakamura at 145#, the probabilities are substantially against Marroquin winning the state title at either weight class. The issue then becomes where is the highest state placement most probable. To me, at least, that's an easy question. The field below Anderson is much superior to the one here at 145#. While I've ranked Marroquin fourth at this weight, he may, in actuality, be just about even with Mallah and close to Hoover. So it's my guess that Marroquin will choose to stay at 145# unless, of course, he just feels so much better at the lower weight class. State qualifier Mullins beat Marroquin in a sectional final last year 16-12 and utilized that pairings advantage to a second place district finish. He won one consolation bout at Wright State and was hammered by Hoover 10-4. He was third at Hudson losing only to Riccardi. State qualifier Auker, Shuler, Edwards, and Urban will battle for the last two spots with Brown, Wensinger (Fremont Ross), and Wurster (Ashland) also in the hunt. Dysart (Pickerington) would be a formidable foe at this weight if he can recover quickly enough to compete.

152#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: SHANE MELLOR (PICKERINGTON)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2 Walker (Upper Arlington) | 15. Friedman (Hudson) |
| 3. Davis (Xenia) | 16. Fair (St. Edward) |
| 4. Sellet (Harrison) | 17. Padgett (Fairfield) |
| 5. M. Mahone (Solon) | 18. Holtz (North Royalton) |
| 6. Brown (Lorain Scuthview) | 19. Snyder (Glen Este) |
| 7. Neapolitan (Boardman) | 20. Watkins (Sylvania Southview) |
| 8. Bessen (Hilliard) | 21. Diaz (Oakhills) |
| 9. Larrison (Kilbourne) | 22. Watters (Wadsworth) |
| 10. Gable (Perrysburg) | 23. Peacock (Cleveland Hts.) |
| 11. C. Chandler/Ward (Shaker Hts.) | 24. Daisher (Fitch) |
| 12. S. Smith (Marion Harding) | 25. Mcintire (Holy Name) |
| 13. M. Chandler (Massillon Perry) | 26. Havlin (Mt. Healthy) |
| 14. Neely (Princeton) | 27. DeWald (Tiffin Columbian) |

One of my favorite essayists is Stephen Jay Gould, the world-famous zoologist, whose dominant themes deal with evolution. In particular Gould rejects the idea that evolution represents the ladder of progress moving ever onward and upward – that evolution can be represented by an inverted cone - small in the kinds of life at the beginning and steadily widening, diversifying even since. Instead he promotes the concept of contingency where if you were able to replay life's tape many times evolution might well take a radically different pathway ending very often without intelligent life. Because just small changes in initial conditions are so critical each replay could lead to a substantially different result. So it is with this weight class where any of a dozen different contenders have some probability of winning. My guess is that a dozen different replays of this weight class (were it possible) would yield a wide diversity of results.

Actually early in the year I felt that either Joe Chandler or Andy Hrovat would move down to 152# and thus take the lead position here. It isn't going to happen so it's a wide open competition, and don't be surprised if a couple of the 145's move back to 152# figuring they have a better chance of winning here than upsetting Nakamura.

It happens that two of the best 152's are probably in Columbus and I've chosen state qualifier Shane Mellor to win it all. Mellor qualified at 160# last year, but wrestled only once in a losing cause. Walker, nearly as good as Mellor, had precisely the same experience at 145# losing a 2-1 bout to eventual third place winner Gulbrandsen. This year Walker has been undefeated at 152# while Mellor was a loser at Medina in the 160# final to the excellent Joe Chandler. There is good depth at this district with state qualifier Bessen, the excellent Larrison, Gable, and Shannon Smith. With five openings there is plenty of opportunity for everyone, but the competition here will be much tougher than anywhere else. Other possibilities are Watkins, DeWald, McWilliams (Gahanna Lincoln); and Sancraint (Rogers).

While the two top-rated 152's reside in the Columbus area the two next best will exit the Centerville district. In fact it would be no huge surprise if this duo ended up as finalists instead of Mellor and Walker. Davis, the senior, is already a two-time state qualifier who has lost two first round heartbreakers at the state level and been eliminated each time. This year he has been very successful up two classes losing only twice by very narrow margins to Walker (10-7) and Division II. Wallace (10-8 ot). He will be a very tough competitor for my top twosome. The junior Sellet should also be a dominant figure at Centerville. He won relatively easily at the SWOCA and had little trouble at Fairfield, as well. A state qualifier last year he lost two very tight bouts and made my list as a possible champ by his senior year - but with this field he could accomplish it a year earlier. The rest of the Centerville group is pretty much in disarray with movement down from 160# intermixed with those remaining at 152#. I think you'll want to draw into the last three qualifiers at Wright State.

Mahone is undefeated against Ohio competitors. Brown seems to have been battling the injury bug, but if healthy, should be competitive with anyone here. He had a tough draw at Wright State - losing to eventual champ Harris and the powerful LeBeau sandwiched around his only victory. I've listed Chandler, Fair, Peacock, and Mcintire, but I could have almost as easily mentioned Starkey (Mentor), Dominick (Euclid), Oster (Westlake), or Overman (Maple Hts.). Chandler, a move in from Purcell, has the strength and speed to do well here.

State qualifier Neopolitan heads a relatively weak Perry District. He took the district title despite seven regular season losses, including a win over eventual fourth place finisher Hoover, and then won one out of three hard-fought state bouts. This year he failed to place at the Ironman and was third at Kenston losing to Shanklin. Chandler has missed a substantial part of the year, but he did triumph at Massillon Perry. He is up three weight classes and may be stronger there since he seemed to run down a little at the

end of last year. Gerbino, Friedman, Holtz, and Watters will all push him as they vie for the two qualifying spots behind Neapolitan.

160#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JOE CHANDLER (MASSILLON PERRY)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2. Hrovat (St. Edward) | 15. Osolin (Eastlake North) |
| 3. Maher (Pickerington) | 16. Greenleaf (Stow) |
| 4. Copeland (Massillon Jackson) | 17. Carraher (St. Xavier) |
| 5. Witt (Sidney) | 18. Thompson (Barberton) |
| 6. Mumin (Warrensville Hts.) | 19. Perry (Holland Springfield) |
| 7. Fadel (Cleveland Hts.) | 20. Schwaberon (Akron Springfield) |
| 8. Young (Centerville) | 21. Stepanovich (Berea) |
| 9. Boston (Gahanna Lincoln) | 22. Dusseau (Upper Arlington) |
| 10. Wagers (Harrison) | 23. McGoun (Medina) |
| 11. Bell (Moeller) | 24. McGreger (Manfield Madison) |
| 12. Copper (Waite) | 25. Tepley (Garfield Hts.) |
| 13. Gay (Waite) | 26. Bias (Rogers) |
| 14. Tomaszewski (Tiffin Columbian) | 27. Ebersole (Whitmer) |

This is another fine weight class that should feature excellent competition and should also be a harbinger of the future as two of my top three choices are juniors. There is also a nice mix of styles with strength, speed, takedown artistry, and mat skills all plainly evident. As I said earlier I anticipated some of this group moving to the far easier 152# class, but only Mellor made that change so the action should be exceptional starting with the quarter-finals.

Still despite the depth of competition I think it's likely to come down to a three way struggle that was foreshadowed when all three competed at Medina. The winner there and my choice today is the only senior in the top trio Joe Chandler. Already a two-time state qualifier -- he was fourth at 145# two years ago - Chandler won at Medina principally because of his excellence on his feet. He dominated both Root and Mellor from the neutral position, and apparently has done the same all this year. However, Chandler will not be either the biggest or strongest 160 pounder at Wright State. Hrovat had ten losses entering the state tourney, but he wrestled brilliantly-aided by a wonderful pairing -- and reached the final before being pinned by Heskett again. He was the only wrestler to extend Heskett into the third period during his streak of 11 straight falls in the tourney process. This year he was third at Medina (losing to Mellor), but defeating Root 9-3 in the consolations. He was second at the Ironman and was one of the few Ed's wrestlers to win all three of his bouts in Pennsylvania. Initially expected Richie Root to wrestle at this since he competed here at Mentor and also certified at 160#. Apparently, though, the weight was just too enernating and he has moved up to 171#.

Chandler and state qualifier Copeland should stand head and shoulders above the rest of the Perry district. Both are good on their feet and Copeland is particularly quick. Behind this group are a pool of 160's who have been trading wins over the past few weeks. Greenleaf, Thompson, Schwaberow, and McGoun will all be vying for only one spot so the bracketing could well be crucial. A sectional title could help lubricate the qualification process for the top contenders. .

Mentor has a strong array of 160's headed by state runner-up Hrovat. Fadel was an easy winner at both Solon and Brecksville and he has crafted an excellent senior year for himself. His only loss that I've recorded was to his close rival Sulieman Mumin. Sulieman the Great was arguably the greatest of the Ottoman emperors with battlefield skills that took him all the way to the walls of Vienna. This Sulieman also has developed into an excellent combatant with real state placement hopes. Mumin was the champ at Kenston and nipped Fadel 6-3 in their dual meet. These two have the inside shot at the two spots after Hrovat, but Osolin, Stepanovich, and Tepley all have district experience. Osolin was fourth at Solon dropping an 8-2 decision to Copeland, and was second at Kenston losing only to Becks. Stepanovich, now a junior was impressive at last year's district battling the favored Porowski deep into overtime. He is 15-2 currently.

The Centerville district also has a crowded field, but with five state berths up for grabs the margin for error is a little wider. State qualifier Witt now looks like the best since Roots move to 171#, but Young, Wagers, and Bell are all experienced warriors. Bell missed state qualification in an overtime loss in his go-to-state bout while Young and Wagers also needed just one more win to qualify. This is a powerful quartet, but the two sophomores Gay and Carraher cannot be overlooked. The first is an exceptional athlete who needs to gain in consistency while the latter has shown good improvement. It will be a real battle here. .

The weakest group of participants will probably come from the Rogers district. Maher was a state qualifier at 171 # last year and this big junior is very good. He was runner-up at Medina -- including a 3-2 win over Kinley -- but Martin totally dominated him in the finals taking him down four times in a 9-2 bout. Boston has come on strong in the Columbus area, but is a clear step below Maher. The rest of this group will struggle at the state level -- if they can get that far. Cooper had two chances to qualify, but a 11-9 loss shut the door the first time and he got hammered in the fifth place bout. He has struggled this year, however, and Tomaszewski, Perry, and Dusseamuyay have passed him. Tomaszewski won again at Tiffin and has put together an impressive year. Last year, however, he lost his two district bouts by a combined 20-0 score. With such a crowded field close early round bouts can be anticipated and an early mis-step could spell disaster.

171#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: BO JAMES (AKRON SPRINGFIELD)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2. Martin (Beavercreek) | 15. Grover (Vvhitmdr) |
| 3. Sletvold (Fitch) | 16. Urdzik (Brecksville) |
| 4. Root (West Chester Lakota) | 17. Kapostka (Centerville) |
| 5. Heard (Princeton) | 18. Kozma (North Royalton) |
| 6. Kinley (St. Edward) | 19. Cooper (Mt. Vernon) |
| 7. Noggle (Turpin) F | 20. Hohlbein (Toledo St. Francis) |
| 8. Abrams (Lebanon) | 21. Locsei (Mentor) |
| 9. Dobies (Garfield Hts.) | 22. Barton (Grahamn Lincoln) |
| 10. Franke (Clay) | 23. Schaefer (Medina) |
| 11. Barry (Lakewood) | 24. Freson(Roger Bacoh) |
| 12. Roller (Alliance) | 25. Korte (Celina) |
| 13. Lammers (Wayne) | 26. Padiak (Glen Este) |
| 14. P. Porowski (North Ridgeville) | 27. Akenberger (Bowsher) |

My view at 160# was that it was likely to be a three way struggle with a strong pool of possible contenders somewhat in the background. At this weight class that type of environment has been taken to an extreme case. Here, it is difficult to imagine anyone but one of my top four choices capturing the title. The pertinent question is, of course, which one. In fact any of the four could win since all are eminently qualified to be a state champ, and, in truth, it's a bit of shame that only one will reach that summit.

James is already a two-time state qualifier - winning two bouts as a sophomore, but failing to place, and then last year losing only to state champion Salmon in the semi-finals and winning the other four bouts handily to finish third. This year he is undefeated with wins at Firestone, Brecksville, and North Canton and as far as I can tell not really been pushed. I saw him at Brecksville and he was quick and strong, and powerful whipping a very good Jim Burger 9-0 in the finals. An all-state football player he has marvelous talent.

Martin looked very strong at Medina. He was relentless in his semi-final bout with my Division III choice Chevalier finally winning in overtime and then crushed Maher in the finals. His takedown technique is so good that he is difficult to defense. He is a two-time state qualifier at 189#, but looks much sharper at 171#. Since James and Sletuoid exit from the same district, Martin will have to beat both to take the title.

Sletuoid is the only one I haven't seen this year, but this record speaks for itself. A first-time state qualifier at 160# last year he lost a 2-1 first round battle then won four consecutive consolation bouts to capture a third place. He has missed some competition, but when he's wrestled he's been unbeatable nailing Copeland, for

example, with a 17-7 loss. He was devastating at Alliance pounding everybody including a technical fall in the finals.

Now that Root seems firmly entrenched at 171#, he will be a force to be reckoned with. Root's only losses were qt Medina, and he apparently was not feeling well that day. Root was fifth last year at 160# after being upset in the quarter-finals. He cannot be counted out here and could easily win it all. However, he may be nursing an injury. I found it strange that he did not compete at the St. Ed's quad.

With Sletuoid and James at Perry only one unaccounted berth for Wright State exists. There would seem to be four potential contenders -- Roller, Urdzick, Kozma, and Schaefer -- and it should be very close. Since Sletuoid and James exit the same sectional they should be in opposite half brackets creating no advantage for anyone. Small twists of fate could loom large here. Urdzik is certainly well aware of such circumstances. Last year at the Mentor district he met Matt Fillo in a first round consolation bout. The bout ended 1-1 in regulation time and in the overtime Urdzik appeared to just about everyone but the referee to have the winning takedown. It was not to be and 30 seconds later Fillo won the bout. He then won two more consolation bouts to qualify, and at Wright State won three more bouts to finish second.

At Mentor it should be a four-way tussle for the three qualifying spots although an upset is clearly not out of the question. Kinley won the Ironman and finished a default sixth at Medina -- losing a close 3-2 bout to Maher and an equally tight 3-1 struggle to Chevalier. Only a junior he has had recent injuries, but if healthy should prosper at this district and could be in line for a low state place. Dobies and Barry are my choices for the other two spots with Porowski a very real possibility. Dobies, a , Benedictine transfer, is 14-1 with an impressive win at Wadsworth. His only loss was a first week 10-5 decision to Urdzik. Barry has won several small tourneys but has missed the last few weeks of action. He beat Porowski 17-7 at Berea.

Martin and Root head a brutally tough Centerville district. All five of their qualifiers should be outstanding. Heard and Noggle are returning state qualifiers with a wealth of experience and talent. Heard won two state bouts last year as a sophomore losing only to state champ Greenspan and Sletuoid. He lost a narrow 9-7 bout to Abrams at the SWOCA this year but came back to win the Fairfield. Noggle wrestles a low-stress schedule, but this former state qualifier continues to improve. He's undefeated this year and his 16-3 win over Padiat at Sycamore confirms his fitness. Abrams and Lammers are both excellent although neither can match up with Martin or Root. Kapustka, Freson and Padiat are other possibilities with Wheeler (Sidney) and Wells (Mason), a winner over Heard, waiting in the wings.

The Rogers District is crowded but not very strong. Whichever five qualify will struggle against competitors from the three other districts. I've listed seven possibilities although only Grover is in my top dozen and there are probably another three or four possibilities like Roseland (Pickerington). So while it will be a tight interesting competition at Rogers it is unlikely to be very meaningful at the state level.

189#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JAMES VANNI (GARFIELD HTS.)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2. Cox (Ashland) | 14. Duncan (West Carrollton) |
| 3. Alberry (Gahanna Lincoln) | 15. Delguyd (Mayfield) |
| 4. Balsberry (East Liverpool) | 16. McCaffrey (Glen Este) |
| 5. Willis (Warrensville Hts.) | 17. Smith (Princeton) |
| 6. Carney (Rogers) | 18. N. Porowski (North Ridgeville) |
| 7. Baker (Massillon Perry) | 19. Ware (Wapakoneta) |
| 8. Peed (Miamisburg) | 20. Good (Kent Roosevelt) |
| 9. VVatson (Defiance) | 21. Perry (Turpin) |
| 10. Kusmirek (Brecksville) | 22. Davis (Madison) |
| 11. Lenix (Whitmer) | 23. Rappach (Mason) |
| 12. Scislo (Brunswick) | 24. Reed (Westland) |
| 13. Matiyow (Lebanon) | 25. Mosser (Fremont Ross) |

It's amazing how life can complicate what seems like simple issues. Last spring when I heard that two time state champ Jeff Knupp was likely to drop to 189#, it seemed to make 189# a very forecastable weight class. Knupp would be an easy choice in Division I and Zerkle equally straightforward in Division II. Then in the Fall, when it became clear that Walsh was a Division II school, harsh reality set in. Now there was no obvious, or even semi-obvious, choice in Division I and suddenly there were two very viable choices in Division II. No question the state had hit once again on a way to lower, even more, my overall percentage.

Actually with both Knupp and Zerkle now both Division II competitors this weight class looks a little anemic. Only two returning state qualifiers are present and none that have state placement credentials. In other words this is a very wide open competition.

I am going with two-time state qualifier Vanni despite the fact that his only loss this year was to the #2 rate Clell Cox. Somehow that 5-3 score at the Wadsworth final is just not indicative of what is likely to happen in March. Beating a quality competitor twice is never easy and I think that next time Vanni will win. He can wrestle under pressure. Last year at Mentor he defeated Sveda 6-5 in the go-to-state bout that reversed an earlier defeat at the sectional level. Vanni then won two state bouts losing to state champ Salmon and Greenspan. This year he has been dominant excepting, of course, the loss to Cox.

Mentor also should send the undefeated Willis who missed state qualification in Division II last year. His big win this year was over state placer Corrigan in the finals at Kenston. The third spot should be wide-open. Delguyd was an impressive third at both Solon and Kenston and may have the inside track. Porowski should also contend with Davis, Zitnik (St. Edward), Szilagyi (St. Edward) and Kasnik (Midpark) as possibilities.

Cox missed much of last year, but when he did return he was excellent -winning his sectional title and then defeating three opponents before forfeiting his district title opportunity. He lost twice at Wright State garnering only a single escape point. This year he has built on last year's success winning at Wadsworth (over Vanni) and the Gorman over state Division III placer Hinton. Right behind him is the Columbus star Alberry who won 32 bouts last year and looks to easily top that in 1997. He had little trouble winning at Marion Harding or Hilliard and has possible finalist talent. Carney leads the Toledo delegation with Lenix close behind. Watch for Watson who seems to be improving rapidly and lost by a single point to Carney in December. Besides those listed Thomas (Mt. Vernon) and Cole (Dublin Coffman) are other possibilities.

It's an uncharacteristically weak group at Perry. State alternate Salsberry has moved down from 215# and the big sophomore should qualify this time. Last year he lost a 6-5 double overtime bout for the third and last qualifying spot in this district. Scisclo and Kusmirek are tough journeyman competitors who grind out a lot of victories, but Baker may have moved ahead of them. He looked very good at Medina. Good and Wepler (Marietta) are long shots.

It's also a weak group at Centerville. There are not really five state caliber wrestlers at this class so there is rampant opportunity. I've listed the best seven I could determine, but I'm sure that there are several others, not named, with equal ability. Peed would seem to be the best candidate, but the uncertainty is such that he is not guaranteed of qualifying.

215

PROJECTED CHAMPION: ED LYNCH (HOLY NAME)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2. Faunda (Fitch) | 14. Evans (Dublin Coffman) |
| 3. Graham (Westerville South) | 15. Stachowitz (Garfield Hts.) |
| 4. Wortman (Mason) | 16. Orozco (Whitmer) |
| 5. Black (Princeton) | 17. Limming (Gahana Lincoln) |
| 6. Hensley (Anderson) | 18. Radcliff (North Canton) |
| 7. Critzer (Miamisburg) | 19. Williams (Mansfield) |
| 8. Fraley/Orlando (Upper Arlington) | 20. Duckworth (Bedford) |
| 9. Fondran (Brecksville) | 21. Lenix (Toledo Central Catholic) |
| 10. McArthur (Mentor) | 22. Cronin (Moeller) |
| 11. Ciesinski (Sylvania Northview) | 23. Jackson (Warrensville Hts.) |
| 12. Gerber (New Philadelphia) | 24. Lehman (Oakhills) |
| 13. Gondek (St. Edward) | 25. Gates (Thomas Worthington) |

Defending state champion Ed Lynch moves up to 215# this year and will be a heavy favorite to win again. Last year a lot of things went just right for Lynch including an

amazing semi-final comeback that saw him erase an 8-2 deficit with a fall only nine seconds from the end of the contest. Then, of course, the most controversial call in a number of years that cemented his 3-2 win over Zach Thompson and yet take nothing away from Lynch. He did after all have a 26-1 record with 22 falls and he did a great job of staying close to the heavily favored Thompson until he got the key takedown.

This year he has been in some ways even more devastating with a bushel load of first period falls. At Solon he was absolutely dominating - ending with a technical fall win over Division II state placer Fafrak. However, the excellent Mathisen exposed a possible conditioning issue when he pushed Lynch into the third period and ended up with an 11-6 upset victory. I suspect that was a wake-up call for Lynch and the Holy Name coaching staff, and that Lynch will be properly prepared, once again, at tourney time. Not a heartening thought for the rest of this field.

I think the only contenders who might make it close with Lynch are Faunda and Graham. A cut down heavyweight Faunda will be a little bigger than Lynch, and he can score early and late. He took the title at Wadsworth winning his last three bouts against good competition by scores of 24-9, 23-8, and 23-8. He'll push Lynch hoping to score heavily at the end, and his solid takedown work might be effective. Fondran is probably second-best to Faunda at the Perry District, but he will not be anywhere near a threat to Lynch. He won two district bouts last year, but muffed his Brecksville title shot when he was pinned when ahead 7-0. Gerber or Radcliff are probably the best candidates for the third qualifying seat.

Lynch should have little trouble at Mentor. McArthur is probably second best, but he will not match up well with Lynch. McArthur won three district bouts last year at 189# - two of them over Auvil and Duckworth by 1-0 scores. Gondek, Stachowitz, and the aforementioned Duckworth are all possible qualifiers as well. Both Gondek and Stachowitz have had physical problems this year, so their readiness could be in question. Jackson is really a 189 pounder up a weight because of Willis while Auvil (Westlake) and Cooper (Strongsville) are other possibilities.

The Centerville district has the best all-around top-to-bottom depth at this class. The very athletic Wortman was only fourth at the SWOCA, but he had just returned from playoff football. He was an impressive second at Medina. State qualifier Black won at Fairfield but was second to Wortman at St. Xavier and second at the SWOCA. Twice a state qualifier he drew two-time champ Knupp in the first round in 1995 and state runner-up Tackett in the first round last year. Clearly he needs to work on his bracketing skills. State qualifier Critzer also returns and he was the victim in an overtime Medina semi-final that could have sent into the finals. State qualifier Hensley beat Critzer in the consolation finals at Centerville last year, but neither could capture a victory at Wright State. That's a powerful quartet with the fifth spot wide open.

As is often the case, the geographically diverse Rogers District is difficult to evaluate. Graham was unable to compete the last six weeks of 1996 so his tourney credentials are absent. However, based on his regular season efforts he is a threat for a low to

medium state place. Clearly is mammoth effort to take Sveda into overtime at Alliance has to be an enormous boost to his confidence. There is absolutely no question that if he can wrestle with Sveda he can go with anybody in the state. The question is whether that will be the apex of his season or whether he can build on it. Fraley has been exceptional at heavyweight this year but at 220# he'll not match up well with the Jones, Orskys, and Brown competitors here. He was thus certified at 215# and should be a factor here. The Northwest district contingent has substantial district experience but no state qualifications. Orozco, Lenix, and Ciesinski are all solid performers, but Ware may be a "sleeper" here. Limming is another cut down heavyweight with good possibilities here. Still, the five qualifiers will probably not garner more than one state place.

HVY.

PROJECTED CHAMPION: BOB JONES (WADSWORTH)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2. Orsky (St. Edward) | 15. Catanzaro (Elder) |
| 3. Brown (Patterson) | 16. Hawk (Elida) |
| 4. Dardzinski (Garfield Hts.) | 17. Swetter (Brunswick) |
| 5. Bailey (Princeton) | 18. Rayburn (Hilliard) |
| 6. Edwards (Toledo St. John) | 19. Duncan (Nest Carrollton) |
| 7. Kobus (Geneva) | 20. Deaton (Eastlake North) |
| 8. Smith (Stebbins) | 21. Cox (Libbey) |
| 9. Duncil (Fairfield) | 22. Kennedy (Cincinnati Northwest) |
| 10. Leeper (Scott) | 23. Davie (Perrysburg) |
| 11. Bilins (Dublin) | 24. Quay (Sycamore) |
| 12. Jones (Columbus Independence) | 25. Leskovan (Riverside) |
| 13. Smith (Alliance) | 26. Salvino (Massillon) |
| 14. McMickle (Shaker Hts.) | |

Its been nearly thirty years since we have had a repeat champion at Heavyweight in the large school division. The last wrestler to accomplish that feat was the great Greg Wojciechowski from Toledo Whitmer in 1967 and 1968. And he went on to a brilliant collegiate and free-style career. Dave Harrow won in 1971 but had the misfortune to meet Mark Totten in 1972 who was having a sensational season pinning 11 of his 12 tourney foes. Totten in 1973 fell prey to injuries and could not repeat either. Vaughn Broadnax, later an Ohio State star fullback, came close. In 1979 he had a huge early lead on Jeff Golz, but could not maintain the torrid third period pace and dropped a 10-9 decision. He then took the title in 1980. And, finally the closest of all was Keith Cameron who won in 1984, but then lost a titanic 11-10 thriller to Mike Sullivan in the 1985 finals. Now in 1997 Bob Jones has the opportunity to match Wojciechowski's feat if he can defeat an outstanding field at Heavyweight.

Last year, on the very bad advice of a learned and distinguished college coach, I backed away from Jones, my original choice, and went in a different direction. Had I not

done so I would have had a string of six straight correct forecasts at this weight class. As it is, my first or second choice has won the last eight years.

Jones is a sensational athlete. You could see that during his sophomore year at 215# where he moved with speed and ferocity. Then last season he missed the first half of the year with a knee injury and returned a little rusty and a little tentative. However by March he was in high gear and really had no close bouts either at Districts or State and pinned Orsky in the finals. An outstanding tight end he has already signed at Penn State so this may be his swan song to the sport. He is undefeated this year, and has pretty much had things his own way. In a normal year he would be a prohibitive favorite, but this is an inordinately strong field and he will not win unchallenged.

The Mentor District is dominated by two excellent heavyweights. Orsky was the losing finalist last year with a 31-8 record and tremendous improvement in the second half of the season. He, too, is undefeated with victories at the Ironman and Medina and wins over Division II champ Kelley and Brown (both in overtime). His bout with Dardzinski was inconclusive because of a freak disqualification. Dardzinski, my pick last year, has missed much of the season with injuries. However, he was 29-2 last year until consecutive district losses eliminated him. He will challenge any in this group. The rest of the Mentor District is very weak.

The Centerville District is strong. State qualifier Brown is very good, and with better conditioning would have beaten Orsky at Medina. He let an early lead evaporate because of fatigue. Other than that this University of Virginia signee matches up well with anyone and could easily win the title. Last year, though, Jones pinned him in the quarter finals. Bailey was a state semi-finalist last year before getting caught by Orsky in the semi-finals and eventually finishing fourth. He is currently 15-0 with 11 falls this year but has not faced quite the level of competition as some of the others. He beat Brown 3-1 in the district finals last year, but I'm not sure he can do it again. However, at 275#, he does have almost a 40 pound weight advantage over him. Smith wrestles a low-key schedule, but he is also excellent. At last year's district he lost in the semi-finals to Baily, 7-0, and I'm not sure whether he and Brown met last year. Catanzaro and Duncil are my choices for the last two berths and they'll be a tough draw for some district first-placer in the first round. Duncil was the Kenston champ while Catanzaro missed staste qualification by two points last year. Kennedy, Duncan and Quay may not be quite good enough to qualify with Strassell (Harrison) and Wilson (Winton Woods) other contenders.

Jones clearly stands out at Perry. State qualifier (Division II) Kobus and Smith are powerful performers, but neither should really challenge Jones. Smith, for example, dropped an 8-1 decision to him last year. Kobus did win a State bout last year but has already lost four times this year. Swetter and the mammoth Salvino are other possibilities, but I wouldn't be surprised to see unknown take a qualifying berth.

A recurrent theme has been confusing and disarray at Rogers and the last weight class is no exception. Two state qualifiers, Edwards and Leeper return, and it is Edwards

who has fashioned an outstanding 1996-1997 season. He is run roughshod over most competition winning the GMVWA, the CIT, and the St. Johns in impressive fashion. Included in this streak was an overtime win over defending Division II champ John Kelley. Leeper is well behind Edwards as witnessed by his 15-2 loss in the district finals. However, he is very big and dangerous and should qualify again. Bilins would appear to be the best in the Columbus area, while Hawk is returning after a long injury layoff. Besides those listed also watch for Pagnard (Tiffin Columbian), Dart (Clay), Householder (Findlay), and Meilstrup (Gahanna Lincoln).

DIVISION I

TEAMS

1. St. Edward -- As soon as it became common knowledge that Walsh would move to Division II, St. Edward became the immediate and overwhelming favorite to take the team title. After all they returned two state champs (one from Nevada) and three state runners-up plus a host of excellent new talent. Now, almost two-thirds into the season they remain the favorite, but, perhaps, by a diminishing amount. It will be a real blow if Kulczycki cannot compete, and although that reduces their margin of error they have enough team depth to cover it. However they need the three freshmen at the lowest weights to contribute and for people like Kinley, Gondek, and Fair to chip in. That the Mentor District is the weakest in history should help get some extra people to Wright State. A thought for next year -- nine of their first eleven starters return in 1997-98.
2. Pickerington -- This is a school that has become one of the finest public school programs in the state, and they keep getting better. With their four outstanding middleweights they have a solid foundation of points, and should St. Edward stumble badly somewhere along the line it could still be a dogfight. If they could get some help between 119# and 130# and should Brown or Dysart get hot at 145# it could really get interesting.
3. Massillon Perry -- Perry is another great long term public school program that has placed in the top ten for the past five years. Chandler and McBurney are my favorites at 160# and 103# respectively. They have good depth with Baker, M. Chandler, Gulley, Fitch, and Williamson, but it's questionable whether many of this quintet can survive the rigors of their district.
4. Nordonia -- They were the last public high school to win the big school title exactly twenty years ago. They have outstanding middleweights with the lacaboni twins, Billow, Lange, and Moccia. The problem is there isn't much help anywhere else, though, in theory Artino or Vilt might help. They won the title in 1997 scoring 58 1/2 points. They could equal that this year.
5. Akron Springfield -- This is a program clearly on the rise that has developed a steady stream of excellent performers. Their big gun Bo James is my favorite at 171 #, but now that Root is there it may be the toughest weight class in Division I. Hoover and Dies also look like placers, but they need the very capable Saley, Grvic, and Schwaberow to contribute. If everything went right they could finish 3rd.
6. Marion Harding -- A team that has two state champions should immediately score at the 50 point level. The question for Marion Harding is who scores in addition to Ratliff and Felty. Their best hopes are McCreary, the two Smiths, and Murphy, but those are pretty much low probability events.

7. Garfield Hts. --Basically, Garfield Hts. looks to score big with Vanni and Dardzinski to reach the Top Ten. After that it's a roll of the dice as to whether Dobies, Patyk, Tepley, or the Stachowitz boys can ease through the 'district to score at Wright State. If one of the two stars fail they're immediately doomed, but if that second quintet contains some state scorers they could move up quickly.
8. Wadsworth -- This is a great dual meet team that can also score at the state level. Jones is the superstar heavyweight, but they could get state help from either Kallai, McCreary, Paisz, Kaufman, or Jewell. It's a long list of possibilities some of which seem sure to payoff.
9. Oakhills -- This is a Southwest District team that packs some punch. Wilcox should be a finalist while state qualifiers Brennan and Roche have past, solid experience. The big question is who else can contribute, though five qualifiers at each weight class certainly provides more chances.
10. Harrison -- Wandsnider and Sellet are a great one-two punch worth, maybe, 40 points. In addition, they may have the team depth to take advantage of the new qualifying numbers. People like Kurtz, Burch, Wilson, and Strassei all could be helpers. The secret weapon, though, is Wagers who could push them into the top five category.
11. Fitch -- It's pretty much a two-man team, but Sletvold and Faunda are potential' finalists. After that only Zmith or Daisher can probably help - and, that is, perhaps, a stretch for both. . '
12. Fairfield - This is a team with no particular stars but a boatload of potential. I've felt for several years that Shanklin and Wahoff should become stars, and, maybe, this is the year it will happen. Lindberg and Roy both have state experience while Lanier, Padgett, and Quncil all could help. If they peak at the right time they'll zoom up half a dozen places.

DIVISION II

103#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: SHAWN ADKINS (COVENTRY)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2. Simmons (Lake Catholic) | 14. DiSalvo (Carroll) |
| 3. Toukonen (Claymont) | 15. Worley (Big Walnut) |
| 4. Hayes (Ravenna) | 16. Blankenship (Bucyrus) |
| 5. Shutty (Padua) | 17. Ongalibong (River Valley) |
| 6. Hickman (Alter) | 18. Faulkner (Clyde) |
| 7. Hodermarsky (Olmsted Falls) | 19. White (West Holmes) |
| 8. Brock (Taylor) | 20. Moore (Wauseon) |
| 9. Robbins (Olentangy) | 21. Rogers (Purcell) |
| 10. Taylor (Carrollton) | 22. Smith (Cambridge) |
| 11. Sibbio (Copley) | 23. Blair (Indian Lake) |
| 12. Mathews (Marion Franklin) | 24. Sustik (Buckeye Local) |
| 13. Dunfee (Ravenna Southeast) | 25. Rooney (Walsh Jesuit) |

Defending state champion Shawn Adkins is clearly the best 103-pounder in the state no matter what division is discussed. In most cases it's like watching a man wrestle a boy when he competes. Last year his two bouts with Holmes (in the district and state finals) were classic confrontations that will long be remembered. This year he had four falls at Wadsworth in a combined 3:26 and at the Dies had four falls and a ten point major decision against some of the toughest competitors in the state. The only way Adkins can lose is if he somehow mis-manages the tough cut he must make to wrestle at this class. Absent that or some other catastrophic misfortune he should win easily.

As we'll discuss at virtually every weight class in Division II, the Firestone District is absolutely loaded. Behind Adkins is last year's third place state finisher Ryan Simmons. Simmons was brilliant at Wright State coming from a fourth place district finish to win four hard fought bouts and losing only to Adkins, 8-2. This year he's won at the CIT and Kenston and his only loss was a 6-5 thriller to Division I Lenhard. Like Adkins weight management will be critical. Shutty twice had bouts to reach Wright State last year, but lost both and finished sixth -- one place from a state ticket. He has battled injuries this year but his only loss was by disqualification to Simmons at the CIT final. Hayes is a very big 1 03-pounder (is that an oxymoron?) who has wrestled a robust schedule which includes runner-up finishes at Solon and Medina. He was 12-1 last year, but didn't compete at tourney time when former state champ Holmes dropped to 103# to battle Adkins. He can dominate smaller 103's with his strength as he did in beating Lenhard 3-0 in a bout that had its share of controversial calls. This is an excellent quartet of all of whom should place. Right behind them is a second quartet of solid performers

who will battle for the fifth qualifying spot or hope to hit a big upset of one of the top group. The best of this group is, probably, Hodermarsky who has won at Mansfield Madison and was second at Kenston to Simmons. Sibbio and Dunfee are both solid performers with the former good in down tempo low scoring bouts and the latter a very strong 103-pounder. Dunfee lost to Shuttly 5-2 in last year's district. There is plenty talent even beyond this. The fast improving Brooks and Sell are poised to hop into the fray. It's a dynamite field -- nearly as deep as the likely state group.

Toukonen has been a 112# most of the year, but he will be a 103-pounder to reckon with. He defeated my Division I choice McBurney to win at Alliance, and he could be a finalist with the right pairings. He has previous state experience, and, again, the weight cut will be tough. However, based on his Medina results at 112# this is his best chance to do well. State qualifier Taylor is next best to Toukonen at this district, but, competitively, they're not close. Last year Toukonen pinned him at the district level. The remainder of the 103# field is weak with little to recommend it. I've listed three others -- White, Smith and Sustik -- but Moon (Hillsboro), Dettwiller (McClain) and Blackcloud (Dover) are other possibilities.

Hickman and Brock both won three district bouts last year, but fell short of state qualification. This season they should clearly dominate the Wilimngton District with Hickman, perhaps, a shade better. My only read on that is a Hickman sectional win last - year. DiSalvo is my favorite to capture the critical third spot with Rogers and Houghton probably falling just short. Hickman dominated DiSalvo at the Patriot Invitational 10-4 to provide some perspective on the separation between the top duo and the rest of the field. Volkerding (Carroll) and Houghton (North ridge) are other possibilities.

The assembled cast at Marion will not be particularly strong. Part of the reason is that the Northwest Division \I District is, overall, weaker than it has been for some time. While there are still many outstanding wrestlers emerging from that area the incredible depth we've seen in the past is absent. At 103#, most of the best performers should come from the Central District Sectionals with Mathews, Worley, Robbins, and Ongalibong at the forefront. My belief is that at best, one of whichever five qualify will have an opportunity for state placement.

112#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JIMMY HOLMES (RAVENNA)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2. Tompkins (Coventry) | 5. Creech (Milton Union) |
| 3. Tomaso (Chardon) | 6. Leng (Highland) |
| 4. Ball (Watkins Memorial) | 7. Ream (Springfield NW) |

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 8. Bigelow (Buckeye Local) | 18. Ray (Hamilton Ross) |
| 9. Costa (West Branch) | 19. Abbuhl (Claymont) |
| 10. Falk (Orrville) | 20. Albert (Carlisle) |
| 11. Daugherty (Walsh Jesuit) | 21. Ritter (Wauseon) |
| 12. Quick (Perkins) | 22. Streng (Marysville) |
| 13. Mihalko (Twinsburg) | 23. Carder (Maysville) |
| 14. Thompson (Bethel Tate) | 24. Hickman (Beaver Local) |
| 15. Jennings (Clyde) | 25. Kemble (Ravenna Southeast) |
| 16. Vaill (Norton) | 26. Horne (Hillsboro) |
| 17. Casheil/German (Vermillion) | 27. Kreisler (Van Wert) |

This is a very deep weight class -- incredibly so at the Firestone District -- but I think it's likely to come down to two old rivals battling for one last time for a state title. Two years ago Holmes and Tompkins met for the 103# state crown with Holmes working all his leg magic to win a 14-11 decision. Their paths diverged last year with Holmes staying at 103# and losing a whirlwind, controversial state final to Adkins in overtime while Tompkins at the murderous 112# class lost in the state semi-finals to eventual champ Sessley and fell to sixth.

They have not met since their state title bout so direct analysis is difficult. Comparative scores also give wildly fluctuating results. For example, Mark Jayne defeated Holmes, 13-6, while Tompkins defeated Jayne, 15-0. Other factors have to be involved for such a strange happenstance. Holmes missed the Solon tourney and was third at the Medina after his second round loss to Jayne. Since the holidays he has reverted to his usual crushing self including a dominating win at the Western Reserve. Tompkins also missed the early season, but won at Wadsworth (in a narrow 9-8 win over Falk), was third at Doylestown (losing to Leng) and then dominated at Firestone (smashing Leng in the finals). I've noticed that Tompkins consistently does better the second time he faces a wrestler and he'll meet Holmes at both the district and state level. Holmes has wrestled a Coventry opponent in both the district and state finals the last two years. I think it will happen again in 1997.

Last year the Division 11,112# weight class was one of the strongest and' deepest of all 42 contested, and that is again true this year. That is particularly evident at Firestone which has an incredible group of athletes competing for five state berths. Some sectionals have as many as six "state capable" wrestlers - meaning two won't even reach the district level. Ten of my top twenty-five choice compete at this district with at least three other quality wrestlers of note not even rated. Let's briefly review the crew here. State qualifier Tomaso reached the 103# state semi-finals last year before ending up sixth. He is currently 17-1 with his only loss at Kenston. He has big wins over Skoch, Pfaff, and Mihalko. Leng is a flashy wrestler who can either be very good or just mediocre. He defeated Fazio in winning at Doylestown, and was a strong second at Firestone -- defeating Vaill and Saley, but losing to Tompkins. State qualifier Costa returns at this same weight, but will be severely challenged to replicate his last year's effort. He has

not wrestled the rigorous schedule of the others but did take the Brunswick title. Falk is something of an enigma. He can wrestle with the very best on some days, but at other times he is only ordinary. He has lost by one point to Kemble and Tompkins, and has won two smaller tourneys. He has major upset potential. Daughtery has missed much of the year for Walsh, but was a Division I state qualifier out of Mentor last year. He was seventh at Alliance. Mihalko was second at Solon and Hudson, fourth and Kenston, and fifth at Western Reserve. He is a steady competitor who could outlast some of the field. Vaill has been either startlingly good (second at Medina) or rather ordinary (failed to place at Solon and fifth at Firestone). Which one will show up at Districts is yet to be determined. Kemble is a very rugged competitor who won at Smithville and was third at Firestone. That still leaves the excellent Caruso (University School), the oft-injured Miller (Lake Catholic), and Pfaff (Olmsted Falls) to be evaluated. Six of my top sixteen wrestlers compete at the Copley Sectional creating a real log jam early in the tourney process. Tomaso will get a real break coming out of the always easier Ashtabula Sectional; and should get a good pairing as champ.

No other district can match Firestone at this weight class, but there are some other outstanding individuals. For example, at Marion state qualifier Ball, who was out-scored 24-3 in his two state bouts last year returns, and he has made real progress since then. He was third at Alliance, and a semi-finalist and fifth at Medina. He is probably the best candidate for state placement at Marion. Quick is tall and unorthodox but a steady winner. He was first at Galion and Tiffin, and third at Toledo S1. John. The rest of the field is not particularly strong although Jennings - now at 112# -- won at Clyde and upset Quick at the SBC duals. Division III choice Opfer defeated them both handily, there. A long shot possibility might be Cooper (Bucyrus).

Bigelow is a first year varsity wrestler for Buckeye Local, but he looks like the class of the Steubenville District. At Medina he pinned Toukonen on his way to the semi-finals and ended up fourth -- losing to Holmes, 6-2, in the consolation finals. He was second to West Virginia state champ Stanley (by 7-4) at the Kiwanis and won easily at Buckeye Local. Abbuhl, Carder, and Hickman are the top candidates for the last two berths. Drawing away from Bigelow will be a plus here and Hickman should have that advantage.

It's a very strong cast of participants that will be found at Wilmington. Both Ream and Creech are multi-state qualifiers while Thompson went last year. Ream is not an overpowering wrestler but he was fourth at 103# two years ago and won two state bouts at 112# last year. He'll be a real danger to all but the very top boys. This year 14-2 with wins at London and Graham. Creech defeated Ream 7-1 at Graham to move ahead of him in these ratings. Creech and Thompson had a Jeff Kent state tourney (0 for 4), but have the best chance at qualifying with Ream. However, the freshman Ray is excellent and could push one of that group aside. He was first at Edgewood and second at Fairfield. Albert, Allen (Springfield

Shawnee) and Bowers (Indian Lake) are other strong possibilities. This will be one of the best weight classes at the Wilmington District.

119#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: BRAD BYERS (WALSH)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2. Legarth (Fairview Park) | 15. Marsh (Indian Creek) |
| 3. Spencer (Edison Local) | 16. Carpenter (Benjamin Logan) |
| 4. Cooper (Buckeye) | 17. Metcalfe (Padua) |
| 5. Hess (Graham) | 18. Coleman (Bellevue) |
| 6. Coe (Ravenna) | 19. O'Dell (Eaton) |
| 7. Davis (Utica) | 20. Trivisonno (Lake Catholic) |
| 8. Lewis (Norwood) | 21. McCoy (Wilmington) |
| 9. Cox/Walker (Olentangy) | 22. Dillon (Steubenville) |
| 10. Pusateri (Columbus DeSales) | 23. Hockaday (Watterson) |
| 11. Battles (Springboro) | 24. Bennett (Fairfield Union) |
| 12. Michalek (Twinsburg) | 25. Glover (Buckeye Local) |
| 13. Baker (West Holmes) | 26. Kellerman (Perry) |
| 14. Schirig (Perkins) | |

Again, we have the possibility of a district and state confrontation between the two best 119's in the state. Either, I believe, could win at any of the three school divisions. Legarth will be a four-time state qualifier and finished second last year at the very difficult 112# class. He dominated his competition all year until losing a 6-5 final to Sessley. He finished at 36-1. This year he has not been challenged and has made every bout look effortless. In any normal year he would be a lock for the crown. However, Byers has made a double move going from Hudson to Walsh and Division I to Division. Last year at Hudson he was the district runner-up at Mentor (after upsetting eventual state runner-up DiMichele in the semis and losing to eventual state champ Sharpley in the finals, 3-2). Then at Wright State he won two bouts but lost his placement bout to El-Hayek. Apparently after that he dedicated himself to doing whatever it took to win. He transferred to Walsh and began beating on Marchette to get better, and gave up golf (unbelievable) despite the fact that he was a state qualifier as a junior. It seems to be working. He won the Iron man, the California (PA), was second at Reno, and won at Alliance -- and did it with impressive style. An interesting gauge to his improvement is El-Hayek -- third last year in Division I. He defeated Byers 7-3 at Wright State last year, but lost to him at Alliance 21-6 in 4:14. Whew!

Not to be forgotten here is 119# state runner-up Luke Spencer. He was one of the best looking sophomores I saw all last year -- going all the way to the state finals before losing to the redoubtable Stough 14-7. This year at 125# he was third at Medina losing only to Burns. Other than that he remains undefeated. He

would have to beat both Byers and Legarth to win, and that is a formidable task. However, he's the only one in the field who has any probability of accomplishing it.

The Firestone District is again loaded with talented wrestlers. Legarth and Byers are clearly best, but there are a number of potential state placement contenders. State qualifier Cooper was second at Medina and first at Firestone. He never went six minutes at Firestone. Cooper qualified for Wright State in 1995, but had incredibly bad luck at the district level last year. He drew Tompkins in the first round, and after losing was eliminated when Tompkins lost to Huxel. What I like about him is his ability to win close bouts. He beat Hess, 5-3, and then pulled out a last second miracle to beat Coe. Coe should nail down the fourth qualifying ticket, but the last spot is wide open. White has come from nowhere to finish second at Firestone and fifth at Alliance. He has been a major surprise the last two weeks. Michalek and Metcalf are more conventional choices for Wright State with a long string of tournament credentials. Michalek, for example, was first at Hudson and Kenston, and second at Solon (pinned by Legarth) and Western Reserve (losing 7-6 to Coe). Trivisonno is a great looking sophomore who may be overmatched against the top boys, while Spitalieri (Hoban), Hopkins (Coventry), and Hahlen (West Branch) would qualify out of most districts. It will be a war at this district.

Spencer should dominate at Steubenville. Next best would seem to be Baker and state qualifier Marsh. Baker dominated at Smithville and beat Hughs to win and Tri-West. Marsh qualified at 112# after a 21-7 season, but lost early. This year he was impressive at Richmond Hts. shutting out Fisk in the finals. I find a big drop-off in quality after this trio and it would be surprising if someone like Dillon or Glover qualified.

There are four returning state qualifiers at Wilmington with Hess -- the defending champ -- clearly the best. Hess, a two-time qualifier, lost an overtime bout in the quarter-finals last year to the eventual champ Sessley, and was then quickly pinned by Joltin in the consolations. Hess is due, I believe, for a breakout season in 1997 based on his Medina work. He finished a strong third losing only to Cooper 5-3 and defeating state qualifiers Fairbanks, Icenhour, and Coe along with Caruso and Leng. Lewis was a district champ while compiling a 32-1 record, but lost early at Wright State. He is 14-1 this year, but wrestles a low profile schedule. Ryan Battles has come out of nowhere to loom very large at this district. He is currently 17-2 with 15 falls and two tournament titles. He pinned state qualifier McCoy at Eaton and has been uniformly excellent. He'll challenge Lewis for that second spot, but he is a solid step below Hess. Carpenter easily handled state qualifier Sharp at Graham and won that title with ease. O'Dell has remained steady and defeated McCoy at Eaton for third. What that means is that state qualifiers McCoy and Sharp (Milton-Union) are in terrible jeopardy of not qualifying again. That's true even though Sharp was sixth at 103# two years ago and McCoy won a state bout that same year. McCoy did win at Beaver Creek and

could easily jump past some of those ranked ahead of him. Puthoff (Purcell) and Smith (Monroe) wait in the wings.

It should be a real donnybrook at Marion. Davis impressed me a lot last year at Medina with his great mat wrestling. He defeated Wentz in the semis while taking a second and was adistrict champ. He got dumped 9-2, however, in the first round at Wright State and that was that. Two-time state qualifier Pusateri also returns along with state qualifiers Cox and Schirig. All three have had weight changes during the year, but have settled at 119#. I believe Cox might be the strongest of this trio and will mount a legitimate challenge to Davis. Schirig, on the other hand, has wrestled a very tough schedule and should be battle hardened for this challenge. They should all be competitive at the state meet.

There are three quality wrestlers who will apparently be missing at 119#. T. J. Huxel (Perry) who placed third and fourth the last two years suffered a serious injury and apparently will be unable to compete. He was an excellent wrestler defeating Tompkins, for example, twice last year. He would have been a challenge to anyone here. Two-time state qualifier Jeremy Johnson (Claymont) is, at last word, unlikely to participate, as well. He had never won a state bout in the past, but would have assuredly done so this year. And finally, another two-time state placer, Kevin Fabian has had a well-chronicled legal battle that evidently has ended his career at Oak Harbor. Rumors abound that he will appear elsewhere, but nothing has been confirmed.

125#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: RICHARD BURNS (HILLSBORO)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2. Hellickson (Olmsted Falls) | 15. Pilkington (Columbus DeSales) |
| 3. McClanahan (Coventry) | 16. Lutz (Purcell) |
| 4. Wright (Carlisle) | 17. Nicola (Lake Catholic) |
| 5. Skinner (Highland) | 18. Egger (Fairfield Union) |
| 6. Skarupa (Norwalk) | 19. Osborne (Wilmington) |
| 7. LaMotte (Buckeye Local) | 20. Kasler (Circleville) |
| 8. Mackesy (Indian Lakes) | 21. Gucciardo (Kenston) |
| 9. Murphy (Perry) | 22. Knous (St. Mary Memorial) |
| 10. Pendleton (Indian Creek) | 23. DePolo (Bellevue) |
| 11. Blackburn (Clyde) | 24. Lozier (Loveland) |
| 12. Little (Bellbrook) | 25. Hughes (Vincent Warren) |
| 13. Scott (Minerva) | 26. Borjas (Oak Harbor) |
| 14. Maehl (Olentangy) | |

My choices at the first three weight classes were seniors, but at 125# the sophomore Richard Burns has to be the favorite. He was fourth at 119# last year as a freshman losing only to Stough and Novario at Wright State and Spencer at the district level. This year he is even better. At Mentor it was payback time for Spencer and he dismantled him 18-5 with a combination of speed and power that was wonderful to watch. He then had the championship trophy in his hand until giving up a last second - takedown to Wentz and then losing in a scramble in overtime. He looks to be on the steep part of the learning curve -- getting better on an almost daily basis. Hillsboro has never had a state champion, but Burns should certainly rectify that -- and I'm guessing he'll do it this year.

These next two weight classes (125# and 130#) have neither the up-front quality or the depth that we saw at the first three classifications. Even at Firestone there is not quite the same level of competition, although it will still remain fierce, I believe that the district divides itself into two unequal parts - the top quartet of Hellickson, McClanahan, Skinner and Murphy and a second strata of about a half dozen other possibilities.

Hellickson, a two-time state qualifier, was fifth last year losing badly to Spencer and by 3 points to Burns. He started this year 135#, but has, smartly, worked his way down to 125#. He was third at Kenston and won at Mansfield Madison at 135#. McClanahan was a state qualifier two years ago, but dropped a first round district match last year and was eliminated. The first round of good tournaments is so dangerous because many competitors are coming off making weight, don't warm up properly, and are nervous. That's why every year several potential champions exit early. Anyway, McClanahan has come back this year with major titles at Firestone and Franklin Hts. and a fourth at Wadsworth. Skinner has wrestled almost exclusively at 130#, but certified at 125# where he has at least some chance of winning it all. He was third at Firestone - losing to Bartley -- and third at Medina -- losing only to Doyle. He was, I believe, at Akron Springfield last year, but he has really blazed ahead this year. Watch out for him. Murphy was a state qualifier last year as a sophomore and ended up sixth, losing to Burns, 10-9, and Hellickson, 8-0. He's a real pinner garnering 17 with a 22-4 record. This group would have been larger by one except for the fact that Steve Forsyth (Walsh) broke his foot at the Alliance.

Below this quartet are some excellent contenders. Scott lost an overtime battle to Coe for the fifth and last state qualifying spot last year. He certified at 119#, but my guess is that he'll chose to compete here. In any case, he has excellent credentials from a little-known area within this district. I've also rated Gucciardo and Nicola who are both strong, while Turle (Twinsburg), Downey (West Geauga) and Murty (Padua) are possibilities.

Burns will face some real challenges at his Steubenville District. LaMotte was a fourth place state finisher in Arizona, but has returned to Ohio looking for better weather. He was a semi-finalist at Mentor, the only time he has competed at

125#, before losing to Wentz and Spencer to finish fourth. Pendleton was an impressive winner at Richmond Hts. and won three district bouts last year, but lost to Burns and Johnson. That leaves Kasler, Smalley, and the sophomore Hughes needing to pull an upset to qualify. Hughes is probably improving the most rapidly of this trio and could be the biggest threat of the three.

There is also some real horsepower at Wilmington. Wright was a Division III state qualifier and used that as a foundation in beating a strong field at St. Xavier. Mackesy was a qualifier at 112# last year and lost close bouts to Fabian and Huxel. Those two spots seem relatively safe, but the "L" brigade -- Little, Lutz and Lozier - will battle for at least one of the state berths alone with Osborne. They're all good and it would be no surprise if Little and Lutz both qualify. Smith (Monroe), if he competes here and Tinstman (Eaton) are other thoughts.

I think Skarupa has the best hope for a low state place at Wright State of these competing at Marion. A two-time state qualifier, he continues to win on a very consistent basis. He was a district runner-up last year, but lost 10-6 to Hellickson and was eliminated. Blackburn has just returned to the Clyde line-up and opened up with a championship at home defeating Maehl in the finals. Clyde has had so many great wrestlers in recent years that he has been in the background, but is now about to step forward. The rest of the district is competitive at that level, but will likely struggle, big time, at Wright State.

130#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: SEAN DOYLE (BUCKEYE LOCAL)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2. Novario (Twinsburg) | 15. Jordan (Monroe) |
| 3. Bartley (Ravenna Southeast) | 16. Farley (Watkins Memorial) |
| 4. Springer (Milan Edison) | 17. Brant(Crestwood) |
| 5. Sanner (Chardon) | 18. Stoffregen (Eaton) |
| 6. Neiding (Vermillion) | 19. Ramey (Circleville) |
| 7. Schlaegel (Graham) | 20. Hastings (Claymont) |
| 8. McQuown (Canal Fulton NW) | 21. Fox (Columbus DeSales) |
| 9. Gunn (Olentangy) | 22. Copp (Milton Union) |
| 10. Stacy (Indian Creek) | 23. Wotring (Wauseon) |
| 11. Rhee (University School) | 24. Floyd (Ross) |
| 12. Vedra (Rossford) | 25. Kline (Ravenna) |
| 13. Clemens (Carroll) | 26. Clemons (Hillsboro) |
| 14. Kinzer (Washington CH) | 27. Borovsky (Bexley) |

Most of the weight classes in Division II either have a tremendously successful superstar at the top of the listing or an enormous quantity of highly credentialed performers -- some have both. It's probably fair to say that at 130# we have

neither of those situations. This is a very winnable weight, and as such may well propel a relative unknown to the very top placement positions. The Northeast District has won this title four consecutive years -- the longest streak in Division II, and shows the great state wide diversity in the Division II competition.

My choice here is the sturdy senior from Buckeye Local, Sean Doyle. He is a two-time state qualifier with four years of solid varsity experience. Last year he fought through the district brackets with a serious injury - and defaulted in the finals to try and preserve as much mobility as possible. As it turned out he was unable to perform at his usual level and lost in the first round. This year he is healthy and undefeated including a big win at Medina where his workmanlike 5-1 win in the finals was his closest bout.

Four returning state qualifiers will compete at Firestone for the opportunity to compete against Doyle. Novario has a rugged cut to reach 130#, but it beats going against Ty Morgan. Novario is the only wrestler in the field to reach the state

semi-finals which led to a third place finish last year at 119#. This year primarily at 135# he won at Western Reserve, was second at Kenston, and third at Solon and Hudson. Once he settles in at 130# he'll be difficult to beat. Sanner was sixth last year at this weight, and his only two losses this year were at Kenston to Santiago (12-9) and Hellickson (3-1). He'll emerge from the easiest district and should get a good pairing. McQuown and Bartley have only one state win between them, but should do better this year. Of this quartet, Bartley might be the real surprise. He looked very strong at Firestone and pinned Rawlings in the quad. Rhee certified at 125#, but I think he'll chose to remain at 130# once he surveys the opposition. He lost 11-4 to Doyle at Medina, but ended up a strong fourth. Along with Caruso and Norton he makes for a nice senior threesome at U.S.

Springer has been a dominant figure in the Northwest District for the last three years, and yet still hasn't won a state bout. He should get a great pairing this year based on a projected district title. He has already won the SBC Duals, Edison, Bellevue and Marion Harding this year, and could be a finalist. Neiding is tough and can pull the big upset -- like upending state runner-up Gerak -- while grabbing a fifth at Medina. The rest of the field is pretty well split between Northwest and Central division competitors with Gunn and Farley having strong potential.

Doyle should have it pretty much his own way at Steubenville. The two most likely to grab the other state berths know each other well. They were in the consolation finals last year battling for the last berth which Stacy won 3-1 in overtime. Kinzer is a go-for-broke wrestler who likes the high scoring bout and may be frustrated with a slow-paced bout. Both boys will have to fight off Ramey, Hastings and Clemons, all of whom have won at the district level. Lane (Vincent Warren) and Hasson (Beaver Local) are other hopefuls.

State qualifier Schlaegel heads a somewhat confusing field at Wllmington. There have been a number of weight changes and changes in fortune over the past six weeks, with GMWJA champ Clemens and Jordan moving up on my lists. Still, Copp, Stoffregen, or the freshman Floyd could move up rather easily in this densely packed competition. Schlaegel, however, would seem to be the only one with realistic placement chances.

135#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: TY MORGAN (GRAHAM)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2. Gabriel (Maysville) | 15. Horrison (Lima Bath) |
| 3. Santiago (Canfield) | 16. German (Vermillion) |
| 4. T. Smith (Teays Valley) | 17. Foster (Canton South) |
| 5. Gammie (Milan Edison) | 18. Hilliard (Minerva) |
| 6. Rawlings (Walsh) | 19. Peters (Claymont) |
| 7. Mauro (Carroll) | 20. Smith (Bellevue) |
| 8. Sommer (Crestwood) | 21. Hochstetler (Dover) |
| 9. Carter (North ridge) | 22. Weinhamer (Clyde) |
| 10. Avery (Milton Union) | 23. Carbaugh (Avon lake) |
| 11. Delong (South Point) | 24. Sargent (Monroe) |
| 12. Glover (Bethel Tate) | 25. Thomas. (Meigs) |
| 13. Gibbs (Fairview Park) | 26. Forsyth (Benjamin Logan) |
| 14. Meade (Olentangy) | |

Ty Morgan is a prodigy of the first order. He took the 135# title last year as a freshman defeating a strong and varied field with an outstanding display of wrestling. This year he has been devastating -- crushing everyone in Ohio - and defeating two-time Illinois State champion Billy Maldonado in an epic 6-5 battle. A Cadet National runner-up, there can't be many sophomores better than this one. He is working to become the third Graham wrestler to take four state titles following in the wake of the Jordan brothers, and while Gabriel and Santiago are exceptional, it would be an upset of the first order should he not capture his second title. My dream match-up was Morgan versus Marchette, but it is not to be -- at least at the high school level. It's fun just to speculate on the direction such a bout, would proceed.

Gabriel and Santiago are both state championship type wrestlers. Gabriel came into last year's state meet with a district title and a 34-1 record. After two solid wins he battled Tartt for a shot at Morgan. In what turned out to be an epic struggle the two competitors ended 14-14 in regulation time, but Tartt maneuvered for the winning takedown in overtime. Gabriel, to his credit, bounced

back to win two bouts for a solid third place. This year he is undefeated including his second consecutive Tiffin title.

Santiago, only a junior, first came to my attention when he wrestled well as a freshman at the Solon Tourney, then last year at 130# he got engaged in a three-way battle with the seniors Bristow and DeShon. At the district level, Santiago was second losing to DeShon in the finals. Then at Wright State he reached the semi-finals and wrestled eventual state champ Bristow to a standstill. In a bout that had more than its share of controversial calls, Bristow won 4-3. Santiago came back for third. This year he won at Solon and Kenston, but was third at Firestone losing to Division I contender Drake.

Morgan should be transcendent at Willmington -- although it is a solid field. State qualifier Mauro and Glover are tough, but will have to battle Carter and Avery for the last two spots. With four worthy contenders and Morgan here you might see a bit of an exodus to greener pastures. Carter may have certified at 130#, while Mauro has been at 140#. Mauro, though, probably has his best chance for state placement at 135#, since he will be away from Morgan. As a rough yardstick, Santiago defeated him 10-3 last year.

Gabriel should have little trouble at Steubenville. DeLong won two district bouts last year, but wrestles a schedule which is totally invisible to me. The freshman Elliott Peters has made rapid strides and could grab the third qualifying spot. Already his brothers Scott, Matt, Brett, Chett, Kurtt and Rhett have reached the state tournament and should Elliott qualify, it would set a new record for brothers -- seven -- eclipsing the mark set by the DiSabato family. Hochstetler, who Peters defeated 8-4 earlier, is also good along with Thomas.

Rather surprisingly there are no returning state qualifiers competing at Marion. Troy Smith seems nominally the best after an exceptional year which saw him defeat the excellent Seth Hughes at the Medina semis and finish second to Morgan. He has also won at Grandview Hts., Teays Valley, Logan Elm, and Hamilton Township in a very busy schedule. Last year he lost his go-to-state bout 7-6 after reaching the semi-finals. Gammie has been very tough winning at Edison, Bellevue and Marion Harding. He has been something of a "late bloomer," but it seems worth the delay. Beyond those listed Moore (Rossford), Jernigan (Wauseon) and Maynard (Hamilton Twp.) also deserve consideration.

The Firestone District has several question marks. Santiago should be best, but the real mystery is Rawlings. He missed the early weeks of the year only to return for Southeast Quad where he was pinned three times. Then came a "did not place" in Pennsylvania, followed by a brilliant third at Reno and a solid second at Alliance. I think he's for real, and that means danger for the rest of the field. Sommer, Gibbs, and Foster all could reach Wright State, but it will be tough. If Hilliard wrestles here (instead of 140#), he could also qualify. I've looked

for some surprises beyond those listed, but they're so well hidden I couldn't find them.

140#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: SONNY MARCHETTE (WALSH)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2. Marder (Twinsburg) | 15. Sass (Padua) |
| 3. Pastva (Ravenna Southeast) | 16. Berry (Springboro) |
| 4. Cummins (Indian Lake) | 17. Edwards (Ravenna) |
| 5. Dixon ONest Holmes) | 18. LeBeau (Miami Trace) |
| 6. Lensman (Graham) | 19. Emrich (Buckeye Valley) |
| 7. Birden (Steubenville) | 20. Almester (Rossford) |
| 8. Estrada (Wauseon) | 21. Larsen (Canton South) |
| 9. Berry (Kenston) | 22. M. White (Sheridan) |
| 10. Walton (Marysville) | 23. Waits (Loveland) |
| 11. Hector (Vermillion) | 24. Veliz (Edison) |
| 12. Gilmore (Galion) | 25. Benedum (Coventry) |
| 13. J. Ray (Hamilton Ross) | 26. Noel (Kings) |
| 14. Bryant (New Lexington) | |

Sonny Marchette entered his high school years with the crushing pressure that everyone immediately anticipated that he would win four state titles. That didn't quite happen, but he came very close. As a freshman he lost only two bouts, both to three-time champ Eddie Jayne, the latter one in the state finals. He never lost to an Ohio wrestler again. In his sophomore year, a devastating knee injury prevented him from winning an almost sure state title, and last year he brushed aside a good field winning a technical fall in the finals. This year he will win again and, if healthy, with total domination. His four bouts with Easton (PA) star, Jamar Billman, were all classics and though Billman won three of four, they were all close. What makes Marchette so good? It's a combination of speed and power, blended with an absolute fury to dominate the other wrestler. Marchette is never satisfied to rest for even a split second as he attacks with every fiber of his being. Look at tapes of the Billman bouts and you'll see that it is always Marchette who attacks and attacks. He is the first of the four brilliant Walsh wrestlers (maybe we should also include Byers), the best quartet of seniors I have ever seen on one team.

The state runner-up may also come from the Firestone District, if only because the second and third place qualifiers will be away from Marchette at Wright State. A good candidate is Marder who has had an exceptional four-year career at Twinsburg.

Last year Marder was a district runner-up and won two bouts at the state level. He bottled up Morgan for much of their bout, but lost 4-1. This year he has been exceptional at both 145# and 140#. He was champ at Solon, Hudson and Western Reserve losing his only bout to my 145-pound second pick Dan Anderson at Kenston. State qualifier Pastva will also look to get the second or third spot and be away from Marchette. He has been a consistently high placer for two years. Berry was a state qualifier as a freshmen 140-pounder at Newbury. Now at Kenston, he has come back from injuries to win at Avon Lake and grab high places at Kenston and the Western Reserve. It will be a rare event if he qualifies only as a freshmen and senior. The fifth spot is wide open with a number of journeymen wrestlers in the hunt. Besides those listed, look for Vanni (Highland), Mendez (Salem) and Tomsik (Fairview Park).

Cummins and Lensman are both return qualifiers out of the Wilmington District, but neither won a bout at Wright State. Lensman was fourth at Medina and looked invincible at Licking Hts., pinning Woodland in the finals. Both he and Cummins should grab a low place. There's something of a drop-off after this duo with Ray and Berry a half-step behind the top pair. However, I really like Ray -- and though he certified at 135# -- I expect to see him here at 140#. Noel comes from a little-known wrestling school, but won two district bouts last year. Cross (Eaton) and Dornan (Springfield Shawnee) also have placement opportunities.

There have been some real surprises in that wide geographical area that makes up the Marion District. Even so, despite having five qualifiers, it is possible no one here will place. I've rated state qualifier Estrada best at this district. He has already won at Oak Harbor and Rogers, and has the talent to dominate. He may be significantly better than his current eighth place rating. Walton had two shots to qualify last year, but dropped 7-6 and 6-1 decisions to finish sixth. He's the best in the Columbus area and should safely qualify in 1997. Hector nipped Gilmore 4-3 early in the season and also won at Oak Harbor. He, too, should qualify. Gilmore has me stumped. As a freshman at Willard last year, he reached the district finals before losing to state runner-up Ramos. He lost early at States, but all of the Northwest District was filling me in about his considerable talents. This year it hasn't happened. He lost early to Hector, badly to Dixon (16-1), and often at Marion Harding, finishing fifth. Perhaps it's a nagging injury, debilitating flu, or moving up three weight classes. Whatever, don't be surprised to see him bounce back at the district level and qualify once again. Besides those listed, pay attention to the recently returned Uhl (Perkins), Copas (Marion Franklin) and Winthrop (Bellevue). That makes it a crowded district even if it may be an under-achieving one.

Dixon has moved way up my innumerable lists during what has been a very productive year for him. It makes up for what had to be a bit of a disappointing junior year where he went into the districts as a sectional champ with a 26-5 record. Losses to a pair of the eventual qualifiers left him home for the States. This year he won at Smithville and the Gorman, while dominating during West

Holmes extensive dual meet season. He has, at least in my mind, moved ahead of state qualifier Birden who was sixth last year winning three state bouts. This year he has remained unbeaten, but has not wrestled many strong opponents up to now. I've also listed Bryant, White and LeBeau, but Gatewood (Maysville) and Arrington (Washington Court House) are in roughly that same category. Apparently Glasure (Buckeye Local), who was a state sixth in Arizona last year, will not compete.

145#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JACOB PLEGER (WATKINS MEMORIAL)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2. Anderson (Chardon) | 15. Pak (Buckeye) |
| 3. Lucas (Beaver Local) | 16. C. White (Sheridan) |
| 4. Mason (Ravenna Southeast) | 17. Porter (St. Clairsville) |
| 5. Fullerton (Graham) | 18. Young (Ravenna) |
| 6. DeMarco (Padua) | 19. Trombley (Alter) |
| 7. Moore (Springfield Shawnee) | 20. Johnson (Clermont Northeast) |
| 8. Johnson (Norwalk) | 21. Crosby (Teays Valley) |
| 9. Naso (Highland) | 22. Gordon (Dover) |
| 10. Meinking (Purcell) | 23. Grove (Claymont) |
| 11. Schneider (Wauseon) | 24. Biel (Coventry) |
| 12. Plikerd (Benjamin Logan) | 25. Taylor (Swanton) |
| 13. Boyer (Fairfield Union) | 26. Yearly (Wilmington) |
| 14. Porter (Marlington) | 27. Brunetti (Lake Catholic) |

As you might expect with Morgan and Marchette immediately below and Heskett next, the 145# weight class suddenly became a very popular location. It is one of the most crowded classes at all four of the districts and should result in spirited competition. It will also provide at least a half dozen participants with a legitimate chance at a coveted state title.

My choice by the narrowest of margins is Jake Pleger, the fine 145-pounder from Watkins Memorial. Last year he was a district runner-up at Marion and then won one state bout -- losing to eventual champ Workman in the first round and to DeFranco in overtime. This year he has won at Medina, Hamilton Twp., Watterson, Licking Hts. and Alliance while compiling a perfect record. He beat Fullerton by 8, Mason by 6 and Naso by 10 over this time span.

For much of the year I had leaned toward Dan Anderson, but changed my mind only because of the accumulation of some scoring factoids. Anderson was fifth two years ago as a sophomore, but failed to qualify last season -- done in by a pair of 3-2 losses. This year he remains undefeated, including a Kenston title that included wins over Ricciardi and Marder.

There are at least two other possible champs at Firestone. Mason has suddenly blossomed into a full-fledged star with a huge win at Firestone (defeating Hoover in the finals) and runner-up at Alliance -- losing 17-11 to Pleger. DeMarco, the state qualifier from Padua, has also moved down to 145# after winning titles at Avon Lake, Brecksville and the CrT. He had two wins at the state level last year.

The rest of the Firestone is probably a notch below the top trio. There are at least a half dozen with about equal accomplishments who should mix it up. Pak has looked great to me, but he has not yet developed consistent results. Naso and Porter are both rugged customers, while Young has the talent to string together some big wins. It should be great fun -- for the spectators.

Pleger stands head and shoulders above the rest of another full field at Marion. State qualifier Johnson is probably next best after wins at Edison and Fremont St. Joseph. DeLamatre also won a state berth last year, but -- as something of a measuring stick -- lost to Sass 10-4 at Bellevue. I've listed four other contenders, but could have included Vedra (Rossford), Sharp (Bellevue), Sony (London) and Wimmers (Marysville).

Lucas stands pretty much alone at Steubenville. He took the district title at this weight class last year and came to Wright State with a 35-1 record. A tough first-round match-up with Wobser spiraled into an ugly loss and quick elimination. He was sixth at Medina -- twice losing to St. Ed's Ryan Fair. Chris White was a district semi-finalist last year losing first to Lucas (9-3) and then to Cornish. They have toughened their schedule this year, and White should be second best here. Porter, Gordon, and Grove should head the charge for the third spot. Except for Lucas, this district is unlikely to have much impact at the state level.

The Wilmington District is loaded -- so much so that I wouldn't be surprised if several reconsidered the 152# option. However, with three excellent wrestlers there, neither alternative may seem real palatable. At any rate, there are four returning state qualifiers for three spots -- plus some good back-up people as well. Moore qualified at 130# last year and won two state bouts. He is quicker and slicker than the powerful Fullerton who qualified two years ago, but stumbled last year. Both have had substantial tourney success in 1997. Meinking was a district runner-up at 140#, but was bounced by DeMarco in the first round. Meinking this year has been second at Sycamore and fifth at the SWOCA, and may be vulnerable. Pork Plikerd, what a fabulous name, was the district runner-up at 145#, but lost a first round 1-0 heartbreaker to Cornish. At least one of this quartet won't make it and there are a half dozen other possibilities, too. I think the three that do go should do well at Wright State after being tempered in the competitive fires here.

152#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JOE HESKETT (WALSH)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 2. M. Becks (Lake Catholic) | 15. Cruxton (Kenston) |
| 3. Wallace (Franklin) | 16. Coe (Clyde) |
| 4. A. Wobser (Milan Edison) | 17. Fahnestock (Bellefontaine) |
| 5. Flanagan (Watterson) | 18. Hoppel (Beaver Local) |
| 6. DeMarco (Graham) | 19. Brown (Benjamin Logan) |
| 7. Samu (Howland) | 20. Akers (Claymont) |
| 8. Meyers (Eaton) | 21. Andrews (Marysville) |
| 9. Glancy (Vincent Warren) | 22. Archer (Maysville) |
| 10. Hanzel (Normandy) | 23. Deluca (Norwalk) |
| 11. Beard (Olmsted Falls) | 24. Holbrook/Palmer (Washington
CH) |
| 12. Davis (Norton) | 25. Moore (Wauseon) |
| 13. Sveda (Revere) | 26. McFarland (River View) |
| 14. Freitag (Bellevue) | |

Ohio has produced few wrestlers as good or as classy as Joe Heskett. It will certainly be a day of mixed feeling as we proudly watch him go off to Iowa State to be coached by an Ohio contemporary of mine, Bobby Douglas. Heskett has left some unforgettable memories. The first dramatic Walsh-St. Ed dual where Heskett dominated Zak after having lost to him earlier stands out, as does his first state title with the dramatic second period fall over the undefeated Jeff Bucher. And how about last year when he pinned every foe at the sectional, district and state level as he established a streak of 22 straight falls -- amazing considering the powerhouse schedule of Walsh wrestles. Heskett has won everything, but done so with quiet grace and a smile for "grandma." He'll be a great college wrestler - a Lee Kemp who pins-but in Ohio his high school record will be what is most recalled.

In a twist of fate, both Becks brothers are at weight classes headed by defending state champs. The positive for Mark is that he'll be away from Heskett at the state level, and has tremendous finalist chances. Actually, at 152#, Becks comes close to matching Heskett in athleticism, but not yet in strength or savvy. Becks remains undefeated winning at Kenston and the CIT having only one relatively close bout - with Shanklin. I don't think anyone will beat him next year. I wonder if his brother, national runner-up Charlie Becks, will convince him to go to Harvard.

There are six other solid performers at Firestone seeking the three remaining berths. Samu was a bout away from the Division I state tourney last year, but I rarely see Howland results, so it's difficult to know where he stands in this field. Hanzel was an impressive second at Brecksville while Davis, Sveda and Beard all seem about equivalent to me. Cruxton might be slightly behind this group, but then again he did finish ahead of Beard at Kenston. Melaragno (Edgewood) is another possibility, but wrestles a far weaker schedule than the others.

Wallace won three one-point bouts at Wright State last year to finish fourth. it was really amazing how he took charge to win -- on the other hand his two losses were both falls in under 90 seconds. This year he has had some very impressive wins. He TF'ed Buol to win at Franklin and he beat two-time Division I state qualifier T.J. Davis 10-8 in overtime to take the GMVWA. He also won at Madeira. State qualifier Meyers returns, but I believe DeMarco may have passed him. Meyers did win at Edgewood, but was slaughtered by Davis at Xenia. Below this trio are a number of former district qualifiers led by Fahnestock, Brown and Smith (Urbana). Apparently, state qualifier Jim Patrick (Tipp city) will not compete this year. He would have been a factor here or at 160#.

There's not a lot of experience at Steubenville. State qualifier Glancy does return to head the field and he did win a state bout last year. I like Hoppel and Akers next best, and they have both had excellent seasons in 1996-97. Akers, in particular, seems to have made good progress. Who will challenge this top trio is not clear, although I have rated McFarland, Archer and either Palmer or Holbrook. Others, less well known, may also be lurking on the outskirts of this weight class. Last year Archer won three district bouts -- losing only to Lucas and Taylor -- and this year is 15-1 with two tourney titles.

The only state experience at Marion rests with Eric Wobser. He had a difficult draw, but after defeating Lucas in the first round he gave eventual state champion Workman a huge scare before succumbing 7-8. Pleger then eliminated him handily in the consolation round. Wobser has won the SBC Duals this year along with the title at Edison (over Andrews). He was second at both Bellevue and Marion Harding losing close bouts to quality competitors in each instance. Flanagan is probably next best with a solid record -- primarily at 160#. He gave Pleger his best battle of the year in a 7-6 nail biter at Watterson. After that the cupboard is relatively bare - and with three more qualifying spots to be filled. It will be open season at Marion with a lot of journeymen wrestlers having a real opportunity to gain state experience.

160#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: KRAIG SHAMBLIN (RAVENNA SOUTHEAST)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Mitchell (Walsh) | 9. Cox (Lima Bath) |
| 3. Long (Clyde) | 10. Crossen (Tallmadge) |
| 4. Hieber (GaHon) | 11. Norton (University Schools) |
| 5. Brightman (Northridge) | 12. Curry (Purcell) |
| 6. Doan (Blanchester) | 13. Osborne (Franklin) |
| 7. Miller (Teays Valley) | 14. Poland (Claymont) |
| 8. Chapman (Highland) | 15. Fritch (West Branch) |

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 16. Zales (Padua) | 22. Schrickel (Carrollton) |
| 17. Roe (Buckeye Local) | 23. Evans/Weimer (Hillsboro) |
| 18. Rooney (Columbus DeSales) | 24. Terbay (Carroll) |
| 19. Craft (Licking Valley) | 25. Knull (Graham) |
| 20. O'Donaghue (Bay) | 26. Lindsey (Steubenville) |
| 21. Spurlock (Bellevue) | 27. Dies (Copley) |

Tristram Shady, one of the great characters in English literature, faces a dilemma early in the famous Sterne novel of the same name. He is determined to write down all that happens to him, but he finds that it takes all afternoon to record what occurs in the morning, and then he has no time to record his thoughts and actions of the afternoon. Writing this document presents a similar problem. I work all morning on a portion of the report, and then new information floods in after lunch, and I go back to re-write it once again. It sometimes seems as if I'll never finish.

One weight class where there has been enormous changes is at 160#. For example, a major event is the appearance of state runner-up Chad Long in a Clyde line up after missing the entire season with injuries. Of course, all he did was accept a forfeit, but it did certify him to compete at 160#.

This is one of the most difficult weight classes in the selection process. I've gone with rugged Kraig Shamblin - but if he wins the title, he'll need to win at least a couple of close bouts. Last year, competing at 145#, he copped a sixth place finish on the strength of two wins. This year he is much better -- winning big at Firestone and finishing third at Firestone losing to Division I pick Chandler. His 3-1 loss to Heskett was also impressive at 160# as he used his power to keep the score close and give himself a chance to win. When he is "on," he can be totally overpowering.

State qualifier Mitchell could be his biggest threat. Mitchell proved again Wilcox (Calvary, CA) that he can go with anyone -- but maybe not for six minutes. At peak condition, he and Shamblin are even and either could win, but I'm not sure Mitchell is at that level yet. Still, Mitchell was fourth at this class in Division I last year, and he certainly could win it all here. Crossen lost in the first round at districts last Year, but contrived to win three of his four consolation bouts (including two narrowly) to get the fifth and last qualifying spot. He followed the same strategy at Wright State -- losing in the first round and then winning three of four consolation bouts (including one over Becks who had beaten him at districts) to get a fourth place trophy. It sure surprised me and I wonder if it can happen again. Instead I look for Chapman and possibly state qualifier Norton to surpass him. Crossen did not place at Firestone. Zales was Crossen's victim in the fifth place district bout, and he returns for another try. O'Donaghue could compete either here or at 152#, so it's not clear where we'll see him. Both Dies and Spear (Perry) could "make waves" here.

If Long is indeed back and can reach last year's level he is certainly a title contender. You may recall he also missed much of the early part of his junior year, but then reeled off 28 straight wins before losing to four-time champ John McGhee in the state finals. He is clearly a superior athlete, but the question is whether he'll be ready for "full go" by tourney time. The sensational sophomore Hieber is going to win some state titles and it may start here. He has won at Galion, Marion Harding and the Gorman in spectacular style. He has not yet wrestled some of the top rated boys in either Division I or II and I await such bouts with real interest. Nevertheless, Hieber is for real -- and if 1997 is not the year, one of the next two certainly will be. Miller and state qualifier Cox should also qualify with both having state placement chances. Cox, while outscored at Wright State 41-14 in his two bouts last year, had the "honor" of being McGhee's first round opponent. Spurlock is another surprise. He has been a lightweight for years at Bellevue and began the year at 135#. Suddenly he is at 160# and doing well. It's something to look for. Likely missing at this class will be junior state qualifier Zeb Miller (Oak Harbor). Injured some months ago, he apparently will not compete. He missed state placement last year by a point.

There are a number of excellent 160's at Wilmington. Leading the way is state qualifier Brightman who won at the GMVWA in handsome fashion. State qualifier Doan is close behind and performing well this year. Osborne, who has not been effective lately, may be on the bubble with both Terbay and Curry having strong seasons. Terbay, while he did not meet Osborne, did finish ahead of him at the GMVWA. This should be an outstandingly good competition with the winners having a real chance at the state level. Casteel (Loveland) and Lane (Milton Union) will put a struggle at this district.

There is very little at Steubenville. While I've listed some possibilities, this is not going to be a group that will inspire fear by the rest of the state. Nobody in this group made the first column, which is a sure sign of either less-than-spectacular wrestling or poor research. By March we'll see what it is.

171#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JOSH DIDION (BELLEVUE)
TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2. B. Becks (Lake Catholic) | 11. Chase (Bellbrook) |
| 3. Preston (Columbus DeSales) | 12. Talbot (New Lexington) |
| 4. LeMar (Indian lakes) | 13. Eastes (Wilmington) |
| 5. DeLong (South Point) | 14. Haren (Louisville) |
| 6. Burger (Fairview Park) | 15. Dusseau (Oak Harbor) |
| 7. Floyd (Hamilton Ross) | 16. Perkins (Kenton Ridge) |
| 8. Hegedish (Twinsburg) | 17. Weeks (Olmsted Falls) |
| 9. Williams (Marion Franklin) | 18. Ash-Crisler (Olentangy) |
| 10. Akers (Claymont) | 19. Dolezal (Carroll) |

20. Muniz (West Branch)
21. Dahnke (Perkins)
22. Hedges (Logan Elm)

23. White (Fairfield Union)
24. Shepherd (Fairless)
25. Dozier (Beaver Local)

It's not often a state champion fails to win either his sectional or district title, but when it does it's usually because the two best in the state are meeting at those lower levels. Eventually, the runner-up turns it around in the finals or finds that his nemesis somehow failed to keep their last appointment. The latter is what happened with Deluca and Didion last year, as Deluca stumbled in the semi-finals while Didion roared on to the title. It should be noted that those two losses were the only two Didion suffered throughout the year. This year he has things all his own way out in the Northwest District, but there will be some reasonable competition awaiting him at the state level. However, Didion seems well up to the task with three tournament victories already this year. His dad took only one title - it looks like he'll double that.

There are possible finalists at each of the districts, but I think Becks has the best chance at unseating Didion. He just missed the state 160# final losing to long 14-11 in semi-final action, and ended up sliding down to sixth place. He, too, is undefeated this year with titles at Kenston and the CIT, and was not really challenged at either event. Burger was a state qualifier last year, but lost early to Delong who "decked" him in the second period. Burger won his second Solon Tourney this year and was second at Brecksville to the powerful Bo James. Hegedish has shown rapid improvement -- he was third at both Solon and Kenston, but won at Hudson and Western Reserve. Burger shut him out 8-0 at Solon, but it's likely to be much closer next time. Haren certified at 160#, but he may like his chances better here. He placed fifth at 171# at Alliance -- the highest placement by a Division II participant. The last spot is up for grabs.

Preston, the All-State football player, has begun to move into high gear the last few weeks. He won the CIT at 189#, and was undefeated at the St. Ed's Quad at the same weight. His second place finish behind only Knupp at 189# should have done two things -- convinced him of how good he is and indicated how wise it would be to return to 171 #. He has finalist potential at that class -- especially since he would be away from Didion. Williams was a Division I state qualifier last year, but I haven't seen any of his scores recently. He spent much of the early part of the season at 189# where he was very successful. Assuming he's at 171#, he'll challenge both Didion and Preston. There is a good mix of skills among the remainder of this field with Dusseau having the best shot at the last two berths.

Unlike 160#, the field at Steubenville is strong. Delong is now a senior and has good placement potential. He won one state bout last year. Akers would probably be next best, but Talbot, down from 189# last year, is solid. He lost to Spruell in overtime for the last spot at 189# last year in an 8-6 thriller. There is a clear

delineation between this group and the rest of the field. It will be an upset of some reasonable proportion if someone other than this top trio qualifies.

There are at least five state caliber wrestlers at Wilmington. LeMar and Floyd both made it to Wright State last year, but they ended up losing all three of the contests at that level. It didn't help that Floyd drew the eventual champion Didion in the first round. Currently Floyd is 15-1 with all but two victories coming by fall. His only loss was a 1-0 squeaker in the Fairfield final to Division I state qualifier Kerwin Heard. LeMar pinned in winning the Monarch Classic at Marysville, and has not lost this year. Eastes and Chase are nearly as good, both just missing state qualification last year. Watch out for Perkins. He may be far better than this, but I just didn't know wear to fit him in. He beat LeMar in overtime early in the season.

189#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JEFF KNUPP (WALSH)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2. Zerkle (Graham) | 14. Tyrell (Galion) |
| 3. Corrigan (Twinsburg) | 15. Hampton (Ravenna) |
| 4. Donehue(Dover) | 16. Burton (Bellbrook) |
| 5. Spruell (Hillsboro) | 17. Pertner (Rossford) |
| 6. O'Brien (Kenston) | 18. Preseren (Lake Catholic) |
| 7. Kuhns (Bellevue) | 19. Harshbarger (Milton Union) |
| 8. Wensink (Perkins) | 20. Berry (Coshocton) |
| 9. McEvoy (Wilmington) | 21. Verhoff (Big Walnut) |
| 10. Nezbeth (West Branch) | 22. Porter (Sheridan) |
| 11. Wythe (Bexley) | 23. Doty (Upper Sandusky) |
| 12. Williams (Edgewood) | 24 Henson (Marion Franklin) |
| 13. Bloomquist (Olmsted Falls) | 25 Hart (Springfield Shawnee) |

In nearly every one of these annual reports, at least one potential confrontation is more or less informally designated as the "Bout of the Year". It's usually a dream match-up of undefeated stars or a defending state champ being challenged by a powerful newcomer -- and often it's wrestlers from different parts of the state who have never met. It's a bout that wrestling aficionados throughout the state are clamoring to witness. Past examples might include the Sonny Marchette vs. Eddie Jayne ballyhoo or the Moxley vs. Keenan match up. Without resorting to excessive hyperbole it might be fair to say that at 189# we may have the "Match of the Decade." Everybody that I've chatted with is excited about this match-up, and there is speculation of every sort about its outcome. Jeff Knupp and Avery Zerkle are nationally recognized as two of the best big men in the United States, and perhaps, the finest Ohio has produced since the Rex Holman/Mike Buddie

era. I'm not sure that we've ever had a state title decided by wrestlers who have already captured three state titles between them.

Jeff Knupp has had a marvelous career at Walsh. On a team that has had so many brilliant wrestlers over the past four years, it's sometimes easy to forget how outstanding he has been. He is the only big man in memory (perhaps, ever) who has placed four straight years in the large school classification. He has won two consecutive state titles at 215# and now has a 78 bout winning streak -- truly amazing considering the degree of difficulty associated with Walsh's schedule. His knee surgery temporarily delayed resumption of the streak, but at Alliance he seemed as good as new. Knupp wins with outstanding technique and superior intelligence, and the ability to recognize quickly situations and adapt to them more rapidly than his opponent. His indomitable will to win means he won't relinquish his state crown or his winning streak without an all out war.

Avery Zerkle may not have reached the state placement level as soon as Knupp, but once there he has blazed with nearly the same intensity. A state qualifier as a sophomore he was 34-1 last year and defeated an outstanding field (including Fickell and Funk) to take his first state title. Zerkle is a tall, rangy, athletic looking competitor who has been even better this year -- not having been challenged all year. He now has gone almost two years with a single loss primarily because of extraordinary takedown success that flows from exceptional quickness and aggressiveness.

The final outcome? Well, I'm amazed at the number of people who have begun to lean toward Zerkle. Knupp's recent knee problem, the fact that Walsh almost never wrestles in this area, and Zerkle's rapid progress have all been seen as factors that favor his eventual victory. Clearly, I don't see it that way. Zerkle is very good, but Knupp will win because he'll match him on his feet and, I believe, dominate him on the mat. He'll wear Zerkle down and score heavily at the end. One can only hope that the gods of pairing (possibly with human guidance) make sure that this bout occurs in the state finals. Somehow a pair of defending state champs deserve a pairings configuration that puts them in separate half-brackets. It is interesting to note that Knupp signed with Penn State while Zerkle will attend Lock Haven -- both, for the geographically challenged, in Pennsylvania.

Despite the impression left by the long preamble the rest of the field is not irrelevant. The Firestone District is strong and should the pairing gods turn evil the second and third finishers have the opportunity to be finalists. The best of the varied group is Corrigan who during the second half of last year made a quantum jump in effectiveness. He ended up beating eventual state runner-up McFarland in overtime for the district title and the after a semi-final loss to Didion captured a fourth place medal. He has three major tourney titles along with a second at Kenston (losing to Willis), but the big junior doesn't quite seem "to have it all together" yet. I think there is a higher gear that he hasn't hit so far this year. He'll

need to get there to place again. O'Brien and Nezbeth both had tough luck at last year's district -- O'Brien with an injury and Nezbeth failing to reach Wright State by a single point. O'Brien lost to Corrigan, 6-5, at the Western Reserve. I've got Bloomfield penciled in for the fifth spot, but the sophomore Hampton is a real threat as are Preseren and, perhaps, Storm (Fairview Park).

Two returning state qualifiers dominate at Steubenville. Donehue has already reached States three times with last year being the charm as he gained a fifth place award. This year he was unchallenged in his own area and was as strong fourth at Alliance. Spruell was outstanding at Medina reaching the finals with four wins -- none closer than 12-5. However, he was no match for Zerkle who was ahead by 13 points when he got the fall. Both, however, have good placement potential.

Zerkle, of course, is untouchable at Wilmington with McEvoy and Williams well behind him in the hunt for the last two qualifying berths. Burton, Harshbarger, and Hart are other potential players in what promises to be a spirited battle for the two other state opportunities. Interestingly both Williams and Hart are just sophomores indicating future strength in the upper weight classes. McEvoy might be one to specially watch after his 12-3 win over the excellent Matiyow (Lebanon) at Beavercreek.

As always seems to be the case there is substantial uncertainty about how events will unfold at Marion. About the only sure conclusion is that the best any of the group can hope for is a low state place. Kuhns, the big junior grabbed a fifth spot at Marion last year at this weight, but quickly lost twice at Wright State. This year he won at Bellevue and Oak Harbor and dropped a 6-5 decision to O'Brien at Avon Lake. Wensink and Nickle both certified at 189# for Perkins, but Wensink has wrestled every bout at 189# so I will rate them as they have competed all year. And for Wensink it's been quite a year with a title at Galion and runner-up finishes at the SBG Duals, Toledo St. John, and Tiffin. Wythe, Tyrell, and Pertner have the inside track for the last three spots with Verhoff, Doty, and Henson able competition.

215#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: VIKTER SVEDA (WALSH) TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2. Mathisen (Avon Lake) | 10. Williams (St. Marys Memorial) |
| 3. Fafrak (Twinsburg) | 11. Boyuk (Indian Creek) |
| 4. Kania (Oak Harbor) | 12. Nickle (Perkins) |
| 5. Weilbacher (Columbus DeSales) | 13. Shumate (Galion) |
| 6. Carreon (Edison Local) | 14. Mohner (NDCI) |
| 7. R. Allen (Springfield Shawnee) | 15. Mackeever (Bucyrus) |
| 8. Priestas (Milan Edison) | 16. Wofford (Conneaut) |
| 9. Schuckman (Purcell) | 17. Knaack (Bay) |

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 18. Culver (Sheridan) | 23. Lazarus (Canal Fulton NW) |
| 19. Sechrest (Bellaire) | 24. Boyd (Northridge) |
| 20. Deluca (Bellevue) | 25. Winters (Vincent Warren) |
| 21. Ashburn (Perry) | 26. Budd (Philo) |
| 22. Uhl (Graham) | 27. Jones (Chaminade-Julienne) |

The symbology surrounding a warrior is a powerful one that has taken root in virtually every civilized society since the dawn of time. The belief that subordination of the individual spirit and the family to the needs of battle has emerged time and again down through the ages. Nowhere was this more clearly delineated than by the Spartans in the fifth century before Christ. Only physically perfect boys were allowed to live and at seven were taken from their families to be trained and toughened in military school that lasted until the age of 20. The next ten years they lived in barracks and at the end of that time became a full citizen. Even after that they dined each night in cadres of fifteen on black soup that appalled the other Greeks. The system was designed to produce men whose physical powers; training, and discipline made them the best in the world. They created, at least in part, the mystique of the warrior.

Such a philosophy lives today and we observe it in many phases of life -- and wrestling is not exempt. Look at the Banach brothers or the Brands twins and you realize that Iowa has created an image of toughness and mental discipline that succeeds. Vikter Sveda fits the mold of that wrestling warrior whose goal is simply being the best. On a team of great champions he has, in two short years, joined that elite group by outworking everyone else. And on the mat that work and discipline are channeled into a focused effort to excel.

By the onset of the state tourney process last year Sveda had improved such that he and Sean Salmon looked to be superior to an excellent field of 171-pounders. At the murderous Garfield Sectional Sveda beat Greenspan by five points and Vanni by 12 in the last two rounds. Then after two quick district falls he met Greenspan again. In one of the most intense and riveting bouts of the year Greenspan with a heroic effort broke an 8-8 tie by pinning Vanni with eight seconds remaining. Both boys were totally spent, and Sveda could not come back 60 minutes later to beat Vanni losing 6-5. Redoubling his effort Sveda earned a place on the United States junior team that competed in Russia. This year he was undefeated and unchallenged going into Alliance where he extended his pin streak to 21 before the excellent Faunda went the distance losing 10-5. Then Graham wrestling the match of his life forced an overtime but Sveda quickly got the winning takedown. The #1 ranked 215-pounder in the country remains undefeated and the favorite at this weight class.

One of the most eagerly anticipated bouts during the tourneys will be the Sveda-Mathisen match-up -- which is likely to take place at both the district and state level. Mathisen is also very good. He is a two-time state qualifier who has stepped up to 215# with a vengeance. Totally undefeated he opened a lot of

eyes when he shocked defending Division I state champ Ed Lynch in the Brunswick Final 11-6. Just two weeks earlier Bill Barger and I had watched Lynch tear up a good Solon field with such raw power that he seemed almost unbeatable. Mathisen showed what strategy and execution could do, but beating Sveda will not be easy. Fafrak was fourth at this weight last year ~nd has won three major tourneys losing only at Solon to Lynch. He'll have serious trouble with the top duo, but should continue to do well against everyone else. There is a big fall-off after this with Mohner and Wofford, perhaps, next best. However Knaack, Ashburn, Lazarus, Ritzman (Norton) and Zakrajsek (Highland) have a perfect opportunity to qualify as well. While the spectators will be anticipating a Lynch/Mathisen confrontation, there'll be terrific competition by the rest of the field.

Every district seems strong and deep at this weight class, but none more so than at Marion. While I don't perceive a Sveda or Mathisen challenge in the group there are' at least ten solid participants. I think Kania may be the best of this group has .he . continues to perform at a constantly rising level. Weilbacher beat Mohner 19-11 at the GIT an took third at Alliance beating Faunda 5-4. Both should place. Now it gets very complicated. Priestas who failed to get out of his sectional last year has had a hot hand beating Nickle, for example, 18-1. Watch for him. That leaves state qualifiers Williams, Mackeever, and Shumate unaccounted for, but each has a perceived flaw. The first wrestles a less-than-robust schedule. The middle one continues to wrestle on the edge of defeat, and the last has been injured for virtually the entire year. Nickle is an odd case winning at both Tiffin and Toledo St. Johns in fine style, and then having an off day at the SBG Duals (losing to Priestas 18-1 and Kania 9-5). Watch for him to bounce back. That leaves DeLuca, Hite (Big Walnut), Bidlack (Paulding) and Gerdeman (Napoleon) with little hope of qualification.

There are also more good wrestlers than available state spots at Steubenville. District champ Carreon also won at Medina this year taking two nail biting overtime bouts. Fafrak beat him by eight points last year, but it will be a lot closer this year. Boyuk and Culver are also returning state qualifiers while Sechrest is very strong. Boyuk pinned Jackson to win at Richmond Hts. and he will be a threat to all but the top pair. Besides those listed Villwock (Claymont), Rollince West Holmes) and Queen (Circleville) deserve mention.

Allen and Schuckman stand out at Wilmington. In one of those quirks of fate Allen beat Schuckman by five in the district quarter-final but stayed at home as Schuckman still qualified and he didn't. Allen is currently at 22-1 including a big win over state qualifier Williams. Allen is also the Junior Ohio State Karate champion which again shows the value of cross-discipline defensive training. Schuckman ended up fifth at Wright State beating among others, Shumate and Mackeever. This year he won the SWOCA. His only loss was to Weilbacher at the CIT. The remaining spot is wide open.

HVY.

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JOHN KELLEY (COLUMBUS DESALES)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2. Jones (South Point) | 14. Hallett (Coventry) |
| 3. Wolford (Licking Valley) | 15. Anderson (Clyde) |
| 4. Young (Springfield Shawnee) | 16. Williams (Purcell) |
| 5. Benner (Van Wert) | 17. Fabian (Oak Harbor) |
| 6. Deaton (Franklin) | 18. Poulin/Kutscher (Lake Catholic) |
| 7. Foreman (New Lexington) | 19. Heskett (St. Clairsville) |
| 8. Nicholson (Louisville) | 20. Welch (Eaton) |
| 9. Orefice (Normandy) | 21. Grant (Bellevue) |
| 10. Caramell (Bay) | 22. Cook (Wilmington) |
| 11. Brown (Ashtabula Harbor) | 23. Webb (Hamilton Twp.) |
| 12. Sours (West Holmes) | 24. Sotirovich (Girard) |
| 13. Poe (Bellaire) | 25. Ehasz (Firelands) |

I had a streak of five straight winners at heavyweight until I got mixed up with John Kelley in the field of forecasting. Three years ago he was a fabulous freshman heavyweight who collected over 40 victories and a fifth place state finish. His sophomore year I chose him to take the title, but it came to a bad end with Kelley finishing fifth again. Then last year he put together a perfect record, but I had this brainstorm that Pence would be too quick for him so I chose against Kelley -- which apparently aggravated him since he had already beaten Pence once -- and Kelley took the title pummeling Pence 7-0 in the finals. This year not wanting to tempt fate by aggravating Kelley again I've gone back to Plan A and anticipate his winning a second state title. This despite the fact that he has lost three times (all to Division I opponents by one point). Kelley is 270# of power who gives up very few points to the opposition. With a great defense his scoring takes on added significance setting up opponent's mistakes as they try to catch up. This year when it comes to crunch time (no pun intended) Kelley has the size, strength, and experience to win.

Kelley's only close bout at Wright State was to the equally mountainous Jones who is already a two-time state qualifier. After his one-point quarter final loss to Kelley, Jones ended up a strong fourth with four victories. Again, South Point wrestles a totally transparent schedule for me, and since they send me nothing I have only the vague idea that Jones continues to perform well this year. State qualifier Foreman will also exit Steubenville with Jones and he placed a solid fifth at Medina losing to Busdeker and Turner. The third spot will be a real battle. Sours is much better this year, but district fourth place finisher also returns as does Heskett. Pairings will play a major role here but the bottom three are good enough that the top pair is not invulnerable.

Wolford is a very aggressive heavyweight who should earn the advantage of being away from Kelley at the state meet. Last year Wolford has four district falls losing only to Kelly in 55 seconds. He then won two bouts at the state meet to get sixth. This year he has already won four tourneys losing only to Division I, Shawn Jones. State qualifier Benner missed placement by one bout last year. He has been an active and successful performer in the Northwest with titles at, for example, Marion Harding. Anderson, Grant, and Fabian should lead the charge for the last two spots with Webb and Oehlers (Wauseon) also contenders. As many as three from this district could place.

The Firestone District is uncharacteristically weak at this class with no returning state places and only one former state qualifier. I believe the top quintet of Nicholson, Orefice, Caramell, Brown and Hallett are all very closely matched and their battles could swing more on the vagaries of chance than anything else. Nicholson failed to reach the district level last year -- but his runner-up finish to Jones at Wadsworth and the only other Division II heavy besides Kelley to place at Alliance suggests he may be marginally the best. State qualifier Brown is also good, but does not wrestle a challenging schedule.

There are two returning state qualifiers at Wilmington with Young the favorite after pinning Deaton in last year's district finals. Both have placement position, but Deaton has to draw the right kind of opponents to be successful. Williams, Welch and Cook are all good and Deaton, in particular, may face very stiff competition. Davis (Monroe), and Kave (Urbana) also could play a role here.

DIVISION II

TEAMS

1. Walsh Jesuit -- In the last seven years Walsh has captured five state titles and two runner-up trophies in Division I, and have won four team titles in a row. They join the Division II ranks just as that classification has peaked to create a fabulous competition. Walsh has one of their greatest teams, but they have struggled to get them all in the line-up together. As it is, their fine 125-pounder Steve Forsyth will be out for the remainder of the year. Still they have a sensational quartet of superstars in Knupp, Heskett, Marchette, and Sveda to team with the newly outstanding Byers and Mitchell. That could be six state champs. Add in Rawlings and Daugherty and it's quite a team. Only eight Division II teams have scored over 100 points (Coventry four times, Chanel twice, Highland and DeSales) with the 1978 Coventry team holding the team record of 158 1/2 points (when there were only 13 weight classes). Walsh already holds the Division I mark and have a solid chance of capturing this one as well.
2. St. Paris Graham -- This team will score enough points to win in any normal year. The fabulous sophomores Morgan and Zerkle are defending state champs while Hess, Schlaegel, Lensman, and Fullerton have previous state experience. Factor in the excellent transfer DeMarco and the sophomore Knull and 100 points is not out of reach.
3. Twinsburg -- Last year's state runner-ups still have plenty of firepower. Corrigan, Marder, Novario, and Fafrak are returning qualifiers (three of whom placed) while Michalek, Mihalko, Hegedish, and Brooks are all solid. The key is getting enough people through that brutal Firestone District.
4. Lake Catholic -- There are three potential state finalists on this team in the Becks brothers and Simmons. The real issue is where will the rest of the scoring come from. Trivisonno, Nicola, Brunetti, Savelli, Preseren, and Poulin are all very good, but it will be difficult just to get to Wright State.
5. Coventry -- Another team with three potentially big point scores in Adkins, Tompkins, and McClanahan searching for others who can contribute. Again, like Lake Catholic they have a number of solid performers like Hopkins, Biel, Benedum, and Hallett, who will need to be in top form to have any chance of getting through Firestone.
6. Ravenna Southeast -- This is a team with four potential state scorers including a potential finalist in Shamblin. Bartley has looked very consistent, but Pastva and Mason are slightly suspect despite some

- excellent performances. If Kemble and Dunfee can help they could go as high as third.
7. Columbus DeSales -- Most of their points will come at the end of the lineup with defending state champion Kelley, Weilbacher, and Preston. After that their hopes will be pinned on Pusateri, Pilkington, Fox, and Rooney. Only Pusateri has any reasonable expectation of state scoring.
 8. Ravenna - This is a team that has the potential to explode into the top three with just the right chemistry. Holmes is terrific and Hayes and Coe join him to create a formidable opening threesome. After that, though, there are a lot of question marks. Edwards, Young, Hampton, Priebe, and Kline look more like district wrestlers than state point scorers.
 9. Chardon -- This is pretty much a three person team, but they can score at a high level. Anderson, Sanner, and Tomaso are all past state place winners who should do very well this year. After that, however, there is no real hope of additional points.
 10. Milan Edison -- This is another team with fine middle weights in Springer, Gammie, DeLamatre, Wobser, and Veliz. Even allowing for the inevitable skrinkage there should be 30 to 40 points there. If Priestas stays hot they could move forward several places.
 11. Buckev Local-- Doyle is the linchpin of this team, but they should get some quantity as well through that relatively easy district. The best candidates are Bigelow, LaMotte, and perhaps, Roe.
 12. Fairview Park -- Coach Clay Burkhart always has at least a couple of outstanding performers and Legarth and Burger are this year's duo. However, where they'll get additional support is still problematical.

DIVISION III

103#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: KIT ALLEGA (INDEPENDENCE)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2. Jessie (Hopewell-Loudon) | 15. Adler (Beachwood) |
| 3. Lorenz (Grandview Hts.) | 16. Schultz (Brookville) |
| 4. Fazio (Manchester) | 17. Day (Preble Shawnee) |
| 5. Druschel (Delta) | 18. Kuchta (Streetsboro) |
| 6. Sibrel (Lakota) | 19. Koch (Bellaire St. John) |
| 7. Gondol (Jackson-Milton) | 20. S. Smith (Cory-Rawson) |
| 8. Finneran (Sandusky St. Mary) | 21. Copas (Licking Hts.) |
| 9. Clum (Galion Northmor) | 22. Davis (Chagrin Falls) |
| 10. McDivitt (Cardinal) | 23. Hochwalt (Oakwood) |
| 11. Pressler (Margaretta) | 24. Ware/Curnes (Martins Ferry) |
| 12. Bright (Dixie) | 25. Clemans (Lima Central Catholic) |
| 13. Williams (Norwalk St. Paul) | 26. Hopkins (Deer Park) |
| 14. Evans/McDowell (Jonathan Alder) | |

This is a weight class where, I suspect, the unexpected will rule. There are a lot of wrestlers that are relatively even in ability such that the pairings, stylistic qualities, refereeing breaks and just, plain luck will play an important role. In addition, I anticipate some exciting, high-scoring bouts that should make for satisfied spectators. Last year in the final three championship rounds six of the seven bouts were decided by three or fewer points - three (including the final) in overtime. Its also interesting to note that in the last six years we've had winners from five different districts (Northeast, Northwest, Central, Eastern, and Southwest), showing the diversity of talent around the state.

My choice is the junior from nearby (to me) Independence High School, Kitt Allega. Last year he finished third at Wright State losing only in the semi-finals to Boyd. This year he has bounced between 103# and 112# winning at Massillon Perry and finishing second at Brecksville and Woodridge. Two of his losses were at the Ironman, where he finished a strong fourth, losing only to Division I stars Mason Lenhard and Neil Slaby (on criteria). He is a big aggressive 103-pounder who knows how to win.

At Elyria Catholic, Allega should be a clear favorite, but there'll be some tough competition. I was very impressed with Fazio at Medina and he has put together placements in every tourney entered. Gondol missed state qualification by one bout losing in the district semi-finals to Allega, 6-3. He has not wrestled a schedule with nearly the degree of difficulty that Allega has, but he has been very effective in his appearances. He was an impressive third at Hudson, for example. McDivitt is my favorite for the last spot, but Adler is good, and Kuchta and Davis are capable of an

upset. Also look for Tardiff (Woodridge), VerMerris (Hawken) and especially Tompkins (Mogadore).

Jessie has had a sensational freshman season at Hopewell-Loudon (he's already 27-0) after long and extensive experience in youth wrestling. He has won tournaments at Gibsonburg, Hopewell-Loudon, the "A:" Classic, and Van Buren, and looking at his four final round scores gives a glimpse of his domination (17-2, 19-2, 17-2 and 7-2). Only at Van Buren against Sibrel was there any type of battle at all. The downside to this, of course, is that he may not be as prepared for the knock-down, drag-out battles sure to come in the tourney process. Druschel has had a great year with a big win at Perrysburg and a runner-up finish at GMVWA. A sturdy senior he has placement potential, but may not be the best 103-pounder on the team. I would have rated Stultz second here, but for a variety of reasons he may end up at 119#. Sibrel is an experienced steady hand, but lacks the firepower of Jessie and Druschel, and may be in jeopardy from the fast improving Finneran -- undefeated at 103#. I was impressed with his pin over the tough McKinney of Sandusky to win the Panther Classic. The fifth spot will be a donnybrook with Pressler and Williams the top contenders. Pressler has a 4-3 win over Williams at Oak Harbor and won the MVP as well, while Williams was first at Edison and runner-up at Bishop Ready. Smith, Clemans, and Bacon (Cardinal Stritch) could also play a role here.

The Steubenville District should be dominated by Columbus area wrestlers. Lorenz was fifth at Medina making it to the semi-finals and defeating Fazio for his medal. Clum has won at Bucyrus and the Gorman and has placement potential. I was very impressed with his big win over McGuire. State qualifier Evans wrestled early for Jonathan Adler and apparently will be back competing soon. The McDowell twins may still replace him and they, too, have state potential-- while Copas, Koch, and Ware should battle for the last spot.

State qualifier Bright should head the Xenia District though Schultz has come on strongly in recent days. Bright won a bout at the state level last year, but may be overmatched against some of the top talent here. He was a strong second to Boggs at Edgewood. Schultz was third at GMVWA and Brookville has had a history of good light weights. Hochwalt and Hopkins both have district experience, but I think Day may have passed them. Hochwalt won two district bouts last year, but lost to Bright 18-3. He was champ this year at Oakwood and Springfield Catholic while Day reigned at Franklin.

112#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JERED OPFER (SANDUSKY ST. MARY)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2. Carrizales (Delta) | 5. Tipple (Grandview Hts.) |
| 3. Boyd (Lima Central Catholic) | 6. Davis (Loudonville) |
| 4. Haimerl (Bishop Ready) | 7. Simok (Northwood) |

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 8. Mast (Cardinal) | 17. Hada (Painesville Harvey) |
| 9. Kruse (Miami East) | 18. Schmidt (Malvern) |
| 10. Donahue (Bellaire St. John) | 19. Cuevas (Woodmore) |
| 11. Stutz (Hillsdale) | 20. Perry (Brookville) |
| 12. Traxler (Hopewell-Loudon) | 21. Roth (Martins Ferry) |
| 13. Gebura (Black River) | 22. DiEgidio (Aurora) |
| 14. Jordon (Independence) | 23. Felchner (North College Hill) |
| 15. Long (Carey) | 24. Lee (Oakwood) |
| 16. Witham (Sandy Valley) | 25. Hundley (Dixie) |

Last year three freshmen came out of the Northwest District and pretty much dominated the 103# weight class. All three made the state semi-finals and Opfer and Boyd were finalists. As it turned out Opfer, my choice last year, defeated Carrizales 9-7 in overtime and Boyd 8-6 in overtime to take the title - reversing the district placement where Boyd won and Carrizales (who had defeated Opfer) finished second. It was a great competition, and, yes, they're all back at 112# ready to do it again.

Even though he took the title I'm not sure Opfer showed his peak form the last two weeks of the season. The fact that he still won gives some indication of his resiliency and resourcefulness. He is currently undefeated (he was 47-2 last year) with impressive wins at the Panther Classic and Fremont St. Joseph. He clearly has a good shot at the state record for most wins in a career at his present pace. He split with Carrizales last year and defeated Boyd.

Boyd, too, is undefeated with big wins at the GMVWA, OCC, "A" Classic, and Northwood tourneys. He is physically a very tough wrestler who seems able to win both low and high scoring bouts with equal ease. He beat Carrizales and lost to Opfer last year.

Carrizales won at Perrysburg, but, perhaps, his most impressive bout was his only loss. It occurred when, at 119#, he dropped an 8-6 bout to the very, very good Wilcox. I'm not sure Carrizales has realized how good he is but that should be a clear marker as to excellent progress.

One thing this trio cannot afford is to get so concerned about each other that they forget about the other seven state qualifiers who will compete at this weight class. For example, Haimerl, who was fifth, last year heads the Steubenville delegation. Haimerl is an outstanding wrestler who lost a tight 5-3 bout to Boyd in the CIT final. He is way ahead of state qualifier Tipple and Donahue who will also exit from this district. Actually, Tipple may be closing the gap with Haimerl, but I don't think it close yet. Donahue will have to fend off the challenges of Witham and Schmidt with Roth and Hobgood (Jonathon Alder) also in the hunt. Both Allen (Crooksville) and Simcoe (Northridge) are long-shots, but stranger things have happened.

I mentioned the three "amigos" at Fostoria with Opfer, Carrizales, and Boyd ready to mix it up again. Below this is a second trio of solid performers, perhaps, a step behind

the top threesome. Heading that second group is state qualifier Simok who beat the excellent Division I wrestler Barrett in the finals at both Northwood and Sylvania Southview. He also won at Fremont Ross and has been impressive all year. Last year, however, Opfer tech failed him in the Sectional Final and pinned him at Districts, while Boyd handled him 6-1. Traxler and Long join Simok in this second group and both are rated highly. Unfortunately with five qualifying, one of them won't make it. There's lots of depth here, but people like Cuevas, Lowery (Kansas Lakota), and Cohen (Arcadia) have little chance. .

There's good talent at Elyria Catholic, but with a field this crowded they'll be scrambling for even a low place. Davis, a state qualifier at 103# last year, can be super when he's got it all together. He was a district finalist last year including a big 6-3 win over Allega. Tipple, however, put him out in the first round at States. This year he won impressively at Hillside (over Stutz), Waynedale, and particularly at the Gorman defeating Seibert 9-2. On a hot weekend he could hope for a middle to high place. Mast was a state qualifier two years ago and pulled a huge upset defeating Jude Schmidt in overtime, but did not compete in the tournament process last year. This year at 112# and 119# he has a 14-2 record and should be second best behind Davis here. After this duo it is wide open. Stutz and Gebura are experienced hands, but the freshmen Hada and DiEgidio are both wrestlers to watch. Hada has lost but once while DiEgidio missed much of the season but has real talent. Dimagard (Richmond Hts.) and Jordan may also be factors.

State qualifier Donahue returns at this same weight, and continues to be successful in his local area winning at Bellaire St. John and Shadyside and losing only to Toukonen at Barnesville. He gave Allega a solid bout last year in the first round at states. The rest of the district is not particularly strong and whichever two qualify will have problems at the state level.

119#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: SCOTT BURNETT (ELYRIA CATHOLIC)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2. Schmidt (Sandusky Mary) | 14. Ranker (Seneca East) |
| 3. Geiger (Westfall) | 15. Heffernan (Painesville Harvey) |
| 4. Bein (Batavia) | 16. Hallis (CVCA) |
| 5. McKinnon (Wellsville) | 17. Ballinger (North Union) |
| 6. Hughes (Black River) | 18. Sefsick (Cadiz) |
| 7. Stover (Brookville) | 19. Strange (Dixie) |
| 8. Fink /Formanek (Aurora) | 20. Wyse (Evergreen) |
| 9. Fairbanks (Woodmore) | 21. Gilchrist (Mogadore) |
| 10. N. Coffman (Grandview Hts.) | 22. Teegarden (Ayersville) |
| 11. Stultz (Delta) | 23. Lang (Waterford) |
| 12. Lejeune (Fremont St. Joseph) | 24. Tomaino (Jackson-Milton) |
| 13. Anderson (Bellaire St. John) | 25. Griffith (West Liberty Salem) |

26. G.-Smith (Cory)

27. Johnson (Triad)

This is an exceptionally strong and deep weight class, but I propose that there will be little suspense as to whom the eventual champ will be. Despite the fact that I count eleven returning state qualifiers only one really counts. Scott Burnett was 37-0 last year as he took the 112# title with the help of one-point decisions in both the quarter- and semi-finals. This year he seems light years better and has crafted yet another undefeated season including tourney wins at the CIT, Tiffin, and Avon Lake. He is not unbeatable -- Schmidt, Geiger, and Bein could all pull the upset -- but it will take a perfectly wrestled six minutes to unthroned him.

Burnett should have a relatively easy district schedule, but it will be a dogfight below him. State qualifier Hughes can be devastating at times and is an exceptional pinner. He lost to Carrizales 9-7 in overtime in last year's state quarter-finals, after winning the district title. This year he was champion at Hillsdale, Waynedale, Buckeye and Black River, and should be Burnett's biggest challenge. Fink and Formanek are both excellent 119's for Aurora, but one will have to compete at the brutal 125# class at tourney. Fink, only a freshman, pulled the biggest upset of the year when he defeated my Division I choice Roger Merrell, 7-4 at Mapleton. I guess that should be fair warning to Burnett that if Merrell could "go down," so, in theory, could he. Fink has wrestled primarily at 125# where he won at Aurora and Mapleton, was second in Florida, and fifth at Hudson. That could leave state qualifier Hallis -- just back from injury -- and the excellent Heffernan battling for the last spot along with a "boatload" of others. I particularly like Heffernan, but he has apparently had injury problems, as well. Besides those listed Kelling (West Salem Northwest), Krokos (Columbia Station), and Morgan (Independence) are possibilities.

I'm sure three-time state qualifier and two-time state placer Schmidt was not convinced by my first paragraph. His 5-4 loss to Burnett in the quarter-final 'certainly didn't establish dominance, especially the way he smashed four opponents to finish third. He, like Opfer, has had an outstanding regular season including victories over tough competition. He knows Burnett and that will probably make for a low scoring battle where each boy's margin of error is reduced. Despite two returning state qualifiers -- Ranker and Fairbanks -- the field at Forstoria is not particularly strong. It's a wide open competition that will feature, in addition to those listed, A. Smith (Hopewell-Loudon), Evans (Monroeville), and Eicher (Archbold).

In contrast to the first two weight classes there are two outstanding threats at Xenia. Bein was a district champ at this class last year and finished fourth after reaching the semi-finals. He lost a close 6-5 decision to the redoubtable Forward and a 'narrow 3-1 bout to Wentz. He also pinned Wrobel and Davis. He is currently undefeated and more impressively handed Wilcox his first non-state tournament loss at the SWOCA with a 4-3 decision. He is the second major challenger to Burnett. State qualifier Stover is probably not quite at this same level, but he was fourth in the State two years ago. He was third at GMVWA losing a 10-7 bout to Carrizales. The third spot is wide open although it will not be a real factor at Wright State. Strange, Griffith, and Johnson are

possibilities as are Tokarsky (Summit Country Day), Mendenhall (Versailles) and Freeze (Mechanicsburg).

Geiger and McKinnon should be a titanic final at Steubenville. Geiger was fourth at 112# last year losing to Schmidt 13-9. He will become a three-time state qualifier as a junior and looking for his second 40 win season. He was very impressive in winning the Medina, and he showed himself to be much better than last year. He is a big looking 119#. McKinnon, like Geiger, was also a district champ at Steubenville winning with very little trouble. After a first round fall, however, he lost twice at Wright State and was eliminated. He has missed much of this year, but he will return fresh and strong. Coffman also qualified for the State last year, and then didn't wrestle so he could go to Buffalo or someplace. Maybe, there was a good reason for all this, but if you can't find room in your schedule for the state meet maybe you shouldn't compete in the districts. Making the state tourney is a desperately sought goal for many and to see it casually discarded has to be heartbreaking. Actually Coffman is a solid competitor who should qualify again. Grandview Hts. has a solid team top to bottom and the first three -Lorenz, Tipple, and Coffman -- could build real momentum for them.

125#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: GREG ZOLOTY (INDEPENDENCE)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2. Wentz (Streetsboro) | 15. Honaker (Jonathan Alder) |
| 3. Wrobel (Chanel) | 16. Lathan (Madeira) |
| 4. Johns (Lima Central Catholic) | 17. Dembinski (Bishop Ready) |
| 5. Davis (Elmwood) | 18. Vergote (Delta) |
| 6. Ward (Martins Ferry) | 19. Reina (Indian Hills) |
| 7. Cecil (Elyria Catholic) | 20. Gleckler (Evergreen) |
| 8. Firebaugh (West Salem NW) | 21. Jefferis (Barnesville) |
| 9. Turnbaugh (Ontario) | 22. Brink (Liberty Center) |
| 10. Abbott (Beallsville) | 23. Gase (Fostoria St. Wendelin) |
| 11. Murray (Chagrin Falls) | 24. Sams (Painesville Harvey) |
| 12. Weidenhamer (Ayersville) | 25. Eckstein (Oakwood) |
| 13. Hackney (Wellsville) | 26. Walters (Preble Shawnee) |
| 14. Dues (Versailles) | 27. Pratt (Shadyside) |

The up-top quality level at this weight class is extremely high. It could easily be argued that any of this top trio could be state champion not only in Division III, but in Division I and II should they have happened to compete there. All of this threesome is undefeated and between them have won major tourneys like the Ironman, Solon, Hudson, North Canton, Wadsworth, and Medina to pick just the major ones. The original issue, then, was to somehow reach a conclusion as to which of the three would take the title.

The complicating factor (as if the original task wasn't difficult enough) is the potential entry of state runner-up Clark Forward into this field. Forward had a sensational freshman year in 1996 and has been even better at 130# this year. He has certified at 125# and must eventually choose where he will compete during the tournament process. I've always felt that you drop to a lower weight class for three possible reasons -- you feel and perform better at the lower weight, it enhances your prospect of being personally successful, or it improves your team's ability to perform at its maximum potential. If none of these criteria can be met, then weight reduction would seem to be counter-productive. For that reason I've rated Forward at 130#.

Strangely enough, the three top contenders will all compete at Elyria Catholic and what a competition that will be. Let's look at each individually as a means of discerning the potential champion.

Zoloty has had his share of bad luck the last two years. As a sophomore he was a state semi-finalist at 112# (losing only to eventual champ Tucker), and ripped through the consolations for third. Then after a sensational season last year he was injured the week of sectionals and was unable to compete. He was, at a minimum, a co-favorite with Burnett at that time. This year after beating Kulczycki at the Ironman, 10-9, in a match that wasn't as close as the score suggests (Zoloty has a 7-2 lead) he once again missed about a month with injuries. Since his return he has looked exceptional.

Wentz was also a state qualifier his sophomore year -- at Akron St. Vincent -and ended up sixth at 119# -- losing to Lamson, Stough, and Felty, Then last year at Streetsboro he copped a third at Wright State losing only a 5-3 bout to eventual champ Creech. This year he has won at Aurora, Hudson, and Medina defeating, among others, my Division II choice Burns. Short and very strong he has developed a wide range of moves making him more effective than in the past.

Wrobel has been a four year varsity starter who qualified for Wright State last year, but lost a 14-12 overtime bout in his placement bout. He has improved the most of this group with powerful wins at Solon, North Canton, and Wadsworth. He must have worked hard all summer because his physique has dramatically improved. He now has the arms of a blacksmith.

If that isn't enough, state qualifier Cecil and state alternate Firebaugh will also be at Elyria Catholic -- and both could qualify easily at any other district. Cecil defeated Firebaugh last year 4-3 and Wentz eliminated him in the go-to-state bout. Cecil was fifth at the CIT, second at Tiffin, and third at Avon Lake. Firebaugh has won several small tourneys and been a high finisher at two others.

This quintet, I believe, will convince several other strong performers like Kerr (Mapleton) and Shipman (Cardinal) to move to 130#. But that still leaves the excellent Murray (presently 16-2) and Sams at this weight with Calvin (Manchester) and Graf (Garrettsville) also competing. Another possibility is either Formanek or Fink depending on how the 119# weight class is decided at Aurora. Winning the district title here would

be an enormous plus because it should put the other two top contenders in the opposite half of the draw.

Assuming Forward is at 130#, the top challenger to the three Northeast District boys is state qualifier Johns. He finished last year with 34 wins but a narrow first round loss to Geiger eliminated him early from state competition. This year he won the GMVWA on a final round fall and did precisely the same at Northwood while his win at the "A" Classic at 130# was by criteria over the freshman Frisch. He is the best at Fostoria.

State qualifiers Davis and Coleman are behind Johns. Davis was sixth last year, but has not been quite what I expected so far this year. Firebaugh, for example, defeated him at Hopewell-Loudon, but last year Davis came on strong at tourney time and we might anticipate that again. Coleman has spent a lot of time at 130#, but I think he'll end up here. After this trio there are a lot of good journeymen wrestlers who should have some district success, but, if they get that far, will struggle at the state level.

State qualifiers Ward and Abbott both had 28 wins last year and should pace the Steubenville District. Ward has already won at Barnesville and Bellaire St. John but lost to Alex Cooper at the Meadowbrook Duals. Abbott was champion at Shadyside and the PVC, but lost to Ward last year in the districts. A real contender could be Hackney who won at both St. Clairsville (over the very tough Bentley) and Cameron. He could be either here or at 130#, but will be a factor at either location.

The Xenia District looks to be very weak. One exception might be Dues who lost a 6-5 overtime bout to Johns at the GMVWA, but then failed to place. Reina and Lathan also have district experience at this weight class, but the rest of the state is way ahead at this weight class.

130#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: CLARK FORWARD (ARCHBOLD)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 2. Meyer (Reading) | 14. Orsini (Steubenville Cent. Catholic) |
| 3. Kern/Zientek (Liberty Center) | 15. Case (Sherwood Fairview) |
| 4. Gerak (Streetsboro) | 16. Vogel (CVCA) |
| 5. Coljohn (Independence) | 17. Drayer (Mogadore) |
| 6. Eichorn (Miami East) | 18. Youngen (Garaway) |
| 7. Firem (Chanel) | 19. Wytko (Jackson-Milton) |
| 8. Frisch (Hopewell-Loudon) | 20. Smith (Crestview) |
| 9. Jones (Martins Ferry) | 21. Wright (Painesville Harvey) |
| 10. Talmage (Grandview Hts.) | 22. T. Gleckler (Evergreen) |
| 11. Shipman (Cardinal) | 23. Crews (Tusky Valley) |
| 12. Noonan (Delphos St. John) | 24. Grilliot (Versailles) |
| 13. Busbey (Lincolnview) | 25. McDaniel (Preble Shawnee) |

26. Wampler/Johnson (Jonathan Alder)

27. Wasserman (Kansas Lakota)

One of the benefits that accrues to me because of this report is the opportunity to talk to a lot of coaches -- to learn from their experience, expertise, and perspective. But one of the things that must be kept in my mind is that not everything discussed with them has equal reliability. For example, in January 1996 I chatted with Archbold coach, Chuck Forward, about wrestling in Northwestern Ohio. One of my questions then (as it is again today) was where his son Clark would compete. The answer was 'Well, Clark is just a baby and I don't want him to make the tough cut to 112# in his freshman year. Anyway, all we're really looking to accomplish is to get him some district experience and, maybe, have an outside shot at Wright State. We don't want to put him in a position where he can't be competitive.' Hmm! This for one of the finest freshman in the state -- a wrestler who finished with a 35-1 record and lost a state title on a very controversial sudden death decision in overtime.

This year Forward has been dominant at 130#, and despite some very strong competition has to be viewed as a solid favorite at this class. However, it must be remembered that, including Forward, there are three returning state runners-up at this class (Forward, Meyer, and Gerak) and possibly, as we'll shortly discuss, a returning state champion in Kern. In addition the total count of returning state qualifiers is now at thirteen the highest of any of the 42 weight classes this year. My records don't show Forward having a close or even competitive bout this year whether he is at 125# or 130#. Whether he will be able to maintain that feat with the assembled field here will be interesting.

As if there are not enough complications at this weight it is also the class where defending state champion Jeremy Kern has certified. A two-time state place winner Kern had a marvelous state tourney bringing Liberty Center its first ever state title in a tremendous, tense overtime bout. This year he has had recurring shoulder problems that are likely to absent him from state competition. Even if he is able to compete it would require a mammoth effort to compete with folks like Forward, Meyer, or Coljohn. At the same time, state qualifier Zientek has also certified at 130# for Liberty Center. I have rated them as a tandem, but with the anticipation that Zientek is the most likely to participate. By the way Zientek is excellent in his own right winning big at 135# in the "A" Classic.

State qualifiers Noonan and Busbey also return at Fostoria with the latter boy winning a state bout. Both will need to be sharper than they have been to qualify again. The sensational freshman Frisch defeated them both at Van Buren while Noonan was only fourth at the "A" Classic. That's not to say they haven't had some wins with Busbey champion at Stryker and Lincolnview. The one to watch though is Frisch. He's wrestled a very competitive schedule that's included four tournament victories. He and Jessie (at 103#) are a fabulous one-two freshman punch for Hopewell-Loudon.

Case lost a 7-5 overtime bout for the fifth and last qualifying spot last year and he will be an important factor, as well. . Smith moved over to Crestview from South Central where

last year he won two district bouts. Along with Wasserman and Spanfellner (Sandusky St. Mary) he'll be looking to qualify via a lower district place.

At Elyria Catholic, it's very unclear how the top three boys will match up. Gerak was something of a surprise state runner-up at 112# last year, and is now up three weight classes. He lost early at Medina and failed to place, but won at Hudson and Aurora. Coljohn didn't have a close bout in cruising to the District 125# title last year, and was a state semi-finalist before finishing fifth. This year he was third at Brecksville and failed to place at the Ironman -- both at 135# -- but did win at Hawken. Firem was a 10-4 loser to Coljohn in last year's district finals, and suffered an early state loss. Like Wrobel, he's gotten much better with a title at North Canton and 3rds at Troy and Solon. Below this top trio are the excellent Shipman -- up from 125# - district semi-finalist Drayer and the fast improving Vogel. Vogel was second at Firestone in a bit of surprise. Kerr, Wright, and perhaps Anderson (Elyria Catholic) are real long-shots.

State qualifiers Talmage, Jones, and Orsini head the Steubenville District which, while strong, may not match up well with other parts of the state. Talmage and Jones were both district runners-up who lost early while Orsini fared no better coming out of the third qualifying spot. Talmage was semi-finalist at 135# at Medina, but a huge loss to state champ Morgan sent him tail-spinning back to sixth place. Jones is one of the fine light and middle weights at Martins Ferry whose only loss was to Damien Foster in overtime. Youngen just missed state qualification last year, and may have moved past Orsini.

Meyer and Eichorn are light years ahead of anyone else at Xenia. Meyer is 15-1 with 13 falls this year with his only loss to Division I state runner-up Wandsnider, 7-2. Last year he entered the States with a 27-1 record and won three close bouts before losing a two overtime criteria decision when Kern rode him out. Eichorn, also a state qualifier, lost to Meyer by two at the districts and to Coljohn by criteria in the state quarterfinals. He beat Talmage by nine at that level. McDaniel, Grilliot, and Neer (Triad) are possibilities for the last spot.

135#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JEFF BLANTON (SANDUSKY ST. MARY)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2. Stratos (Mogadore) | 10. Gearheart (Miami East) |
| 3. Zientek* (Liberty Center) | 11. Kaminski (Cardinal) |
| 4. Padgelek (Martins Ferry) | 12. Cassady (Ontario) |
| 5. Bushman (Delta) | 13. Hatten (Hillside) |
| 6. Hassey (New Albany) | 14. Grime (Archbold) |
| 7. Erwin (Springfield NE) | 15. Sands (Hawken) |
| 8. Marcin (Aurora) | 16. Timen (Beachwood) |
| 9. Sachs (Kansas Lakota) | 17. Asterino (West Liberty Salem) |

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 18. Cuevas (Woodmore) | 23. Morgan (Liberty Union) |
| 19. J. Sedgmer (Cadiz) | 24. Whaley (West Jefferson) |
| 20. Davis (Chesapeake) | 25. Krendl (Delphos St. John) |
| 21. Wylie (Grandview Hts.) | 26. Dejesus (Clearview) |
| 22. Godbey (Lockland) | 27. Wulber/Rismiller (Versailles) |
- * If Kern wrestles at 130#.

After looking at four well-stocked, powerful weight classes the field at 135# is not nearly at that high level. There is no one or two dominant wrestlers at 135# but, instead, a relatively wide assortment of potential contenders. Whenever I see a weight class with such characteristics I keep hoping that somehow it will all coalesce into some kind of meaningful pattern. That has not yet happened, at least for me, so I'm still struggling to understand the underlying dynamics of this particular situation.

By a narrow margin I'm choosing the experienced senior, Jeff Blanton, at this weight class. He and Schmidt were freshman stars three years ago, and both have gone on to great careers at St. Marys. While neither has won a state title both have come close and I believe it may be Blanton's turn now. He was third last year, losing to Anderson, and has compiled an excellent record in 1997. It appears likely that there'll be a lot of close bouts at 135#, and senior savvy will be crucial. Primarily wrestling at 140# he has won at St. Marys, St. Josephs, and both the Northwestern and SBC Duals -- with his comeback win over Conway, perhaps, the highlight of his year.

I've pushed Bushman ahead of two returning state qualifiers at Fostoria based on a sensational sophomore season. He won the mammoth GMVN A with a fall in the finals and impressive earlier victory over Division I state qualifier Taulbee, and was a strong third at Perrysburg losing only a one-point bout to Beard. Sachs qualified both his freshman and sophomore seasons, but missed out last year. Three years ago you could envision him as state champ, but somehow it just hasn't happened. Others have moved forward at a faster pace. State qualifier Cassidy is also good and should have an opportunity for a possible low place. Grime has shown rapid improvement and should place at the district level while Cuevas, who certified at 125#, will have three weight class options to choose from. Both Krendl and teammate Gable have certified here, but the way I've lined it up both have an opportunity to qualify. Gable, though, might choose to drop since he inflicted Blanton's only loss at 140#, 9-8. Kleman (Lima Central Catholic), Sawmiller (Spencerville), Roush (Mohawk), Shawley (Tinora), and Hagemyer (North Baltimore) are other hopefuls. If Zientek were to compete here, he and Bushman would be the co-favorites to take the district title.

The Elyria Catholic District has a solid contingent of participants. Stratos has qualified at this class the last two years -- placing fifth and sixth respectively. A very strong wrestler he contests a lot of close, low-scoring bouts. My guess is that 135# may be a tough cut for him, but it does maximize his chance for a state title. State qualifiers Marcin and Hatten return, but I believe Kaminski has moved ahead of the latter boy, and could well challenge Marcin, as well. He is 18-0, but, in fairness, probably does not wrestle a schedule as tough as Marcin's. Sands, not as well known as the others, has a

13-3 record, and upset Marcin 6-2. There will be plenty of other competition for Hatten's fourth spot with Time'n, DeJesus, and Kostyack (Independence) in the hunt. Walker (Rootsown) took Marcin into overtime early in the season and has good upset potential.

Gearheart is a returning state qualifier who may have to struggle to qualify. Erwin is flat out excellent -- he just missed state qualification in Division II last year, and his only loss is to Ty Morgan by a respectable 13-5 count. Asterino defeated Gearheart earlier in the year in overtime and is fast improving. Godbey and Asterino both have had recent successes with the former battling Meyer in a 23-17 loss and the latter winning at West Liberty Salem. Don't overlook the trio that qualifies at this district when they get to Wright State.

There are a lot of unknown variables at Steubenville. One certainty, however, is the return of district champion Padgelek who is the anchor for the excellent Martins Ferry team. Once-beaten this year at 140#, he has finalist potential at Wright State. Last year he won two state bouts, but lost to the champ and third-place finisher, by a total of three points. Hassey could be a major threat. A Division II state qualifier at 119# last year, he transferred to New Albany which wrestles a low profile schedule. He has been at 145#, but certified here, and this is the best opportunity.state-wide. After that it is a wide-open competition with a wide assortment of wrestlers and styles competing for the last two berths. Sedgmer won two district bouts last year while the high scoring Davis is always a threat. Morgan and Whaley have had two close bouts while Wylie has shown much improvement. Jefferis (Barnesville) is another hopeful as is Bair (Indian Valley).

140#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: ANTHONY RALPH (CHANEL)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2. Wallace (Valley View) | 15. Gable (Dephos St. John) |
| 3. An. Tracy (Ayersville) | 16. Pajestka (Cuyahoga Hts.) |
| 4. Roberts (Chagrin Falls) | 17. Thomas (North Union) |
| 5. Scroggy (Sandusky St. Mary) | 18. Hoff (Liberty Center) |
| 6. Woods (Elyria Catholic) | 19. McPherson (Reading) |
| 7. Timmons (Kansas Lakota) | 20. Weaver (Martins Ferry) |
| 8. Steffel (Tinora) | 21. Fletcher (Mohawk) |
| 9. Mauser (Aurora) | 22. Scott (Malvern) |
| 10. Glaze (Marion Pleasant) | 23. Carpec (Brookfield) |
| 11. Allen (Miami East) | 24. Hoffer (Mechanicsburg) |
| 12. Woodland (Grandview Hts.) | 25. Wheelock (Cardinal) |
| 13. Glover (Batavia) | 26. Polk (Milbury Lake) |
| 14. L. Sedgmer (Cadiz) | 27. Barga (Versailles) |

For the last seven years the Northwest and Northeast Districts have alternated winning the title at this weight class -- with the Northwest winning in all the even years.

So there could be a logic flow that leads to a choice from the Northeast District in 1997. And while it might appear that I followed that reasoning in choosing Anthony Ralph that whole exercise is pretty much irrelevant because he is one of the finest Division /II wrestlers in 1997 and would be an easy choice no matter what part of the state he lived in. An early signee with Kent State, Ralph has had a long and successful career at Chane I. As a freshman he vaulted from a district third place finish to the state finals on the strength of three narrow wins, before succumbing to the powerful Mescan. Then as a sophomore and hampered by injuries he got stuck in absolutely dynamite sectional finishing fourth and then failed at the district. Last year was make-up time and Ralph cruised to a state title at 130# with only a close semi-final bout with Perry causing any nervousness at all. This year he has been sensational at 140# winning at Solon, North Canton, and Troy. It's my view that the battle will be for second place.

The district at Elyria Catholic is solid, but there is certainly the opportunity for a long-shot to make headway. I believe Roberts certified at 135#, but has wrestled mainly at 140#. In fact, his only loss was in the finals at Richmond Hts. at 135#. He lost to Stratos last year by a single point 6-5, and this year his 17-1 record is impressive. Like Roberts, both Woods and Mauser are underclassmen with great youth wrestling backgrounds and improving high school performances. Woods lost a controversial 3-2 decision to state runner-up Janson at the CIT and finished a strong third. He was also first at the Tiffin and second at Avon Lake. He has picked up some real positive momentum recently. Mauser, a transfer from Orange, has been outstanding for Aurora with titles at Aurora and Mapleton and a third at South Florida. Pajestka will be right there if any of the top quartet falter even slightly. He missed .state qualification by one takedown last year. He won four bouts at Medina, but two losses to Roy Anderson kept him from placing. Besides those listed Jameyson (Wellington), Walton (Hawken), and Chernett (Beachwood) are solid performers.

There are three returning state qualifiers at Xenia but Wallace is by far the best. He qualified in Division /I last year, and will be much more of a factor here in 1997. He is undefeated in his area and was a very strong third at Medina losing only to Division I state champ Keaton Anderson (badly) and pinning state qualifier Lensman for third. His quickness makes him a particularly tough opponent. Allen and Glover were second and third at the 140# district level, but drew a blank in three state bouts the closest of which was 9-2. They are likely to qualify again, but may not have improved enough to have a significant impact on the outcome at Wright State. McPherson has the ability to supplant one of this top trio after an excellent season for Reading while Hoffer, Barga, Hummel (Brookville) and Keller (North College Hill) are long-shot possibilities.

State qualifier Glaze leads a relatively weak Steubenville District. He took titles at Bucyrus and West Jefferson and has placement potential. Woodland, whose older brother was state runner-up at 140#, may not yet be at the same level, but he is a strong performer. He gave Wallace a good 9-6 battle in the first round at Medina, and

won at Hamilton Twp. Sedgmer, like his lighter brother, has had a fine year at Cadiz, but Thomas and Scott will challenge him. Also look for at least one surprise here with, perhaps, a Kaiser (Barnesville), Cahill (Madison Plains), or Thomas (Westfall) authoring it.

As always it's a crowded field at Fostoria. Ayersville always seems to have a rugged, physical squad and this year's edition is led by the Tracy brothers the elder of whom, Andy, is now a junior. He racked up 32 wins last year along with a district third place for state qualification. This year he defeated Grime and Hoff to take the "A" Classic, and also triumphed at a couple of smaller tourneys. He'll be challenged by the fast improving Scroggy who has come out of nowhere to be a real placement threat. His only loss was at 152 pounds and he has matched up well with tough competition like Sachs. State qualifiers Timmons and Steffel are both excellent with the former now seemingly on a hot streak after winning at Van Buren and Clyde while the latter has been uniformly good all year. Steffel has dominated a slightly weaker level of competition, and may not be as battle-hardened as some of the other top boys, Gable could be either here or at 135# and will probably be "on the bubble" at either location. Still he has very strong upset potential and will be a dangerous opponent. The young Hoff is also tough and could qualify while Fletcher and Polk need a little magic to make it.

145#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: BUTCH INGRAM (STREETSBORO)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2. Corder (Cadiz) | 14. Masters (Triad) |
| 3. Wondolowski (Chanel) | 15. Niederkohr (Carey) |
| 4. Baum (Sandusky St. Mary) | 16. Coleman (Crooksville) |
| 5. Quaintance (Kansas Lakota) | 17. Drum (Amanda Clearcreek) |
| 6. Patzakis (Richmond Hts.) | 18. Sabo (Mariemont) |
| 7. Young (Cardinal) | 19. Mull (Galion Northmor) |
| 8. Scharver (Sandy Valley) | 20. Davis (Chesapeake) |
| 9. Peterson (Garrettsville Garfield) | 21. Esposito (Chagrin Falls) |
| 10. Lutton (Delta) | 22. Young (Mechanicsburg) |
| 11. Perry (Batavia) | 23. Isenhardt (Waynedale) |
| 12. Wauford (Northwood) | 24. Landis (Crestview) |
| 13. Blankemeyer (Columbus Grove) | 25. Schierloh (Lockland) |

This is a weight class that for the most is very tightly bunched and where the difference between tenth and twentieth is very small. I think they'll be a lot of "churning" at this class, and by that I mean where placement in sectionals may be totally different at the district level for the same boys. It's the kind of weight class where on a hot weekend somebody below my top ten could end up taking the title. Incidentally, in the last nine years in Division III that has happened only twice. That's right, of the last 119 weight

classes contested in Division III only twice has someone outside of my Top Ten taken home a championship trophy. .

My top choice is the powerful senior, Butch Inghram, who was fifth last year at 140#. An outstanding wrestler, he had a knack for losing close bouts early in his career but he has become a consistent performer. He was a champion at Hudson and Aurora and a very fine second at Medina -- defeating Plowman, Edwards, and Gamby to reach the finals. There he gave the state champion Nakamura the only close bout he has had this year losing 4-3. It had all the earmarks of a excellently conceived game plan that was well executed.

The Elyria Catholic District is very strong. Wondolowski started the season slowly, but has accelerated the tempo recently. In order he was fifth at Solon, third at North Canton, fourth at Wadsworth, and first at Troy. He was one bout from state qualification last year. Patzakis, a Brush transfer, has returned to Richmond Hts. and made an immediate impact, finishing second at Richmond Hts., losing only to the excellent French. Young has been impressive all year and the win over Scharver at Jackson-Milton was a good indication of progress. That's four solid qualifying opportunities, but it ignores state qualifier Petersen who made it through last year. He will have to be in top form to replicate that performance. He was only third at Aurora and Jackson-Milton. Esposito also has a chance while Isenhardt could also go. The latter boy won the Doylestown Invitational and then returned home with his family only to find that their house had burned down. .

State qualifier Corder lost a heartbreaking 1-0 first round overtime bout at Wright State and never got a second chance. This year he should be far more effective based on wins at Buckeye Local and St. Clairsville. He'll have the added advantage of a rather weak district field which should make securing his second state appearance relatively easy. About the only challenge should come from Scharver who Corder pinned in 74 seconds in last year's sectional final. Nonetheless, he looks to be second best, and wrestled although not scheduled against a lot of high-grade competition. The last two spots are wide open and you can expect a real free for-all behind the top pair.

It is also an unusually weak field at Fostoria. Generally there are three or four returning state qualifiers at this district, but only fifth place district finisher and state qualifier Brock Quaintance returns. Last year he scared eventual state champ Conor Whelan in the first round in a 17-13 bout, and then fell 8-7 in the first round of consolations. It's unusual to score 20 points in two bouts at the state level and lose both times. Actually, I believe Ronnie Baum has moved past Quaintance and may be the best this district has to offer. He has wrestled a rigorous schedule with tremendous success winning at the Panther and Fremont St. Joe tourneys and defeating Timmons handily in the dual meet. I believe his only loss was a 2-pointer to Division II DeLamatre. He lost a 12-9 decision for the fifth and last qualifying spot at 152# last year. He should place. The rest of the field will depend on having the "hot hand" to qualify. It Delta has a lot of team success it could provide Lutton with real momentum. The rest of those rated are all about equivalent and, perhaps, a little ahead of yet another group of six. .

Perry may be the best at Xenia, but he is really a 140-pounder displaced by state qualifier Glover. Masters also certified at 140#, but when he surveys the field there with three returning state qualifiers I think he'll move up to the far easier 145# class. Last year he won four district bouts only to miss out with a fourth place finish. Sabo and Schierloh also had multi-district wins while Young is a Triad transfer who has had a good season. You'll want to draw into this group of qualifiers in the first round.

152#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: TONY COOKE (ONTARIO)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2. Miller (Hicksville) | 15. Seifert (Eastwood) |
| 3. Dick (Reading) | 16. Marsh (Richmond Hts.) |
| 4. Clark (Union Local) | 17. Turner (Covington) |
| 5. Cook (Aurora) | 18. Schmidtgoessling (Lockland) |
| 6. Tilton (Brookville) | 19. Grinch (Shadyside) |
| 7. Bragg (Wood ridge) | 20. Schultz (Kansas Lakota) |
| 8. Charles (Wellington) | 21. Morrison (Chagrin Falls) |
| 9. Arnette (Wellsville) | 22. Hoylman (West Liberty Salem) |
| 10. Sedivec (Elyria Catholic) | 23. Meisner (Mohawk) |
| 11. Sterling (Delphos St. John) | 24. Wigfield (Tusky Valley) |
| 12. Lejeune (Fremont St. Joseph) | 25. Evans (Elmwood) |
| 13. Hallam (Newark Catholic) | 26. Friscone (Columbia Station) |
| 14. Milby (Worthington Christian) | |

Quantum electrodynamics predicts (correctly it seems) that even a perfect vacuum continuously spawns particles and waves that spontaneously pop into and out of existence on an almost unimaginably short time scale. Under certain circumstances, such as near a black hole, these virtual particles that spontaneously pop out of a vacuum may suddenly be endowed with a real existence -- in essence matter appearing from nowhere. Now I'm not saying that the 152# weight class is a perfect vacuum, but I sure would like to see a couple of state championship candidates suddenly pop into existence here.

This is probably the weakest weight class in Division III with few returning wrestlers with state experience, and little in the way of new, towering participants. Nonetheless, it should provide a lot of close, high-scoring bouts since many of these wrestlers are evenly matched and most seem to be involved in a lot of double digit matches. The most logical choice would seem to be Tony Cooke who has quietly compiled an outstanding record the past two years. He is a returning district champ who entered Wright State with a 35-1 mark, and after a tense 7-6 loss to the eventual state champion in the quarter-finals, went on to post a fifth place finish. This year he has already won at West Liberty Salem and Marion Harding and was second (to Auker) at the Gorman.

Ontario always seems to develop a couple of fine wrestlers each year and I think Cooke is the best of this season's crop.

Cooke may receive some of his fiercest competition from state placer Miller. He won three bouts at States last year for a sixth place finish. He was particularly impressive in outscoring Ganzhorn in his state placement bout. He won again this year at Stryker and was third at Sylvania Southview losing an overtime bout to Dusseau -competing then at 160#. He will be away from Cooke at States and could easily be a finalist.

The rest of the Fostoria District is unfathomable. I wasted 75 minutes setting up a matrix showing how the various contenders did against each other and ended up with what looked like a random scatter diagram. So armed with too many facts that fit no pattern I rated Lejeune, Seifert, Schultz, Sterling, Meisner, and Evans using what might be called the "best guess" methodology. Certainly, M. Miller (Hopewell-Loudon), Dangler (Woodmore), Froehlich (Coldwater), Ehram (Delta), or Shawley (Tinora) could just as easily be included. Part of the problem is that the Lake Sectional has virtually no contenders while the others have four or five. The district competition should be fascinating from the first round on.

Dick and Tilton are both excellent out of the Xenia District. The former is 16-1 with 11 falls and a strong second place showing at the tough Division I dominated SWOCA tourney. Reading has developed a fine team and Dick has become one of its important cogs. He was the district champ at 145# last year, and won one state bout. Tilton has also had a great year. He was second at Fairfield to Sellet (the same wrestler who beat Dick at the SWOCA but lost by five compared to two for Dick), and was third at GMWVA losing only to two-time Division I state qualifier, T. T. Davis. Tilton was fourth at last year's district (one spot from qualifying) which included an 8-4 loss to Dick. There is a huge quality fall-off after this duo.

The Steubenville is particularly weak at this weight class. Clark is a returning state qualifier, but after winning at Bellaire St. John he was third at Barnesville. Arnette is a possible challenger after dropping from 160# where he reached the district quarter-finals. He has won at St. Clairsville and Cameron this year, and is a solid choice to reach Wright State. The remainder is still kind of fuzzy and out of focus, but besides those listed watch for Crosier (Barnesville), Garrott (Sandy Valley) and Alexander (Grandview Hts.).

The Elyria Catholic District should be interesting. Cook has always seemed right on the edge of stardom, but has never quite hopped over that line. He had three falls at the district level last year (including one over Bragg in overtime), but ended up having to battle the eventual state champ in his go-to-state consolation bout. He was second at Aurora (losing to my 145# pick Inghram), second at South Florida (to the promising Lange), and first at Mapleton. He has strong placement potential. Bragg is, obviously, very close with Cook, but does not wrestle quite as strong a schedule. He had impressive wins at Norwayne and Wood ridge, and it will be interesting to see the outcome if he and Cook "lock horns" again. Charles won three bouts at Medina

including a stunning defeat of the #1 seed in the first round. He also won at Black River and Buckeye and will be a factor here. Sedivec has always been a bit of a mystery, but a runner-up finish at both CIT and Columbia Station are worthy of notice. He was fifth at Tiffin and third at Avon Lake in a year that has seen him both up and down. Marsh is another of the good middleweights at Richmond Hts. It is heartening to see the rapid rejuvenation of that once great program, and it's amazing to ponder that such a small school produced 30 individual state champs. Nussbaum (Smithville) has an outside shot as do McKean (Black River), Frame (Waterloo), and DiDonna (VASJ).

160#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: BEN BADEN (ARCHBOLD)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Robinson (Manchester) | 15. Moyer (Sandy Valley) |
| 3. Rowlands (Bishop Ready) | 16. Penson (Richmond Hts.) |
| 4. Selsby (Oakwood) | 17. DiEgido (Aurora) |
| 5. Cordes (Liberty Center) | 18. Wilson (Barnesville) |
| 6. Smith (Brookville) | 19. Wade (Loudenville) |
| 7. Byerly (Grandview Hts.) | 20. Dempsey (Delphos St. John) |
| 8. Tracy (Ayersville) | 21. McGill (West Liberty Salem) |
| 9. Sintobin (Delta) | 22. McFarland (Union Local) |
| 10. Miller (Caldwell) | 23. Moulton (Waterloo) |
| 11. B. Bryant (Cadiz) | 24. Endicott (Elmwood) |
| 12. Auerbach (Beachwood) | 25. Wright (Hawken) |
| 13. Musselman (Batavia) | 26. Kincaid (Waynesville) |
| 14. Wasiniak (Norwalk St. Paul) | 27. Studenak (Evergreen) |

What are the odds of an underclassman who finishes as a state runner up winning a state title the next year? Or ever winning one? A more or less cursory examination would seem to indicate that the answer to the latter question is right around 50% or, perhaps, a little bit less. But it seems to improve at the higher weights possibly because fewer underclassman make the finals except as juniors. At any rate Baden will increase that sample this year and my belief is that he will end up on the side of those who do win. Last year Baden and Jerico Speelman had an ongoing battle in which the fourth meeting decided the state title. Speelman won them all starting with a 16-1 technical fall and eventually winning the last couple by 6-3 and 11-6 tallies. This year Baden should take that last step into the throne room against a moderately tough field. He has already won the "A" Classic at 160# as he reduces down from 171#. It probably is not the easiest cut, but the reward should be substantial.

Robinson will be a solid test for Baden. He was runner-up at Firestone and won at Hoban and Doylestown, but was unable to place at the brutally tough 160# division at Medina. A returning state qualifier Robinson, now a junior, seems clearly the best at Elyria Catholic. Auerbach is a bit of a mystery man to me, but he defeated Penson, 3-1,

and won at Aurora. He fell one bout short of state qualification last year. Penson is also good with DiEgido, the Hudson runner-up, and Wade other good qualification options. Wright, who as I understand learned most his wrestling skills from his younger brother Mike, also has outside shot at Wright State as do Moulton, Goble (Black River) and Buchanan (Kirkland).

Baden faces a representative field at Fostoria. State qualifier is up three weight classes, but has remained very successful. He lost by five to Baden at the "A" Classic and was third (at 171#) at Hudson. Tracy is up from 145# where he lost the fifth place battle last year for the final berth by a heartbreaking 11-9 score. This year he was fourth at the "A" Classic trailing three returning state qualifiers and losing to two of them by relatively narrow margins (7-5 and 9-6). He has done well in the GMC and will be a factor here. Sintobin and Wasiniak are my choices for the last pair of Wright State tickets, but it is no sure thing. Dempsey and Endicott can score and Studenka (Evergreen) is another possibility.

It seems much more clear-cut at Xenia. State qualifiers Selsby and Smith have low state place potential and should qualify easily. Musselman was a solid fourth at the tough 160-pound class at the SWOCA -- losing twice to Wagers. He seems a solid choice for the third spot. This trio should do well at Wright State. Smith was sixth at this weight class while Selsby won a state bout. However there is still a significant gap between them and Baden -- who beat Smith 12-0 last year. Beside McGill and Kincaid, Wagner (Springfield Catholic Central) has qualification chances.

The Steubenv111e District looks to be in disarray with a number of inconsistent results "muddying the waters". Rowland was a state qualifier at 125# last year, and should he return to Wright State that six weight class jump, I believe, would be unprecedented (Bart Friedenburt will probably check this out). The largest jump in one year for a state qualifier both years that I remember is Eddie Potokar's five weight jump two decades ago. At any rate Rowlands will be a dangerous foe. He is a lightning quick 160-pounder while apparently having enough muscle to pin better than half his opponents. He'll be interesting to watch. State qualifiers Bryant, Miller and Byerly return, but they will have to be in top form to qualify. All three will be challenged by Moyer, Wilson, McFarland, Wickham (Tusky Valley), and Eichorn (Galion Northmor). It will be a crowded field where a single mis-step could eliminate a good wrestler in the first round. Wilson, for example, has an upset win over Bryant and Moyer has had a great season. Eldridge (Chesapeake) will be a dark horse here in a weight class teeming with good wrestlers.

171#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: ERIC CHEVALIER (BELPRE)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| 2. Welch (Mapleton) | 4. Ankney (Ayersville) |
| 3. Davlin (Sandusky St. Mary) | 5. Studer (Mohawk) |

6. Smith (Columbus Academy)
7. Roskovich (Bridgeport)
8. Morgan (Columbia Station)
9. Overstreet (Black River)
10. Sutter (Grandview Hts.)
11. Bauer (Rootstown)
12. Magro (Indian Hills)
13. Kelly (Richmond Hts.)
14. Miller (Hawken)
15. Smith (Delta)
16. Boswell (Batavia)
17. Cramer (Monroe Central)
18. Stevenson (Delphos S1. John)
19. Br. Bryant (Cadiz)
20. Godbey (Lockland)
21. Thacker (Kansas Lakota)
22. Howard (Woodmore)
23. Hopkins (Doylestown)
24. Reichert (Versailles)
25. Tank (Genoa)

One of the more compelling bouts that I witnessed this year was the 171# semi-final at Medina between two very fine wrestlers -- Jarrod Martin and Eric Chevalier. With the score tied at one in the third period, Martin relentlessly attacked using all his considerable takedown skills, and time and again he was turned away empty by Chevalier's raw power and athleticism. Twice I thought Martin was about to score, but it was not to be -- at least in regulation. Then in the overtime that trend continued but the pace began to tell on Chevalier and despite some valiant counter-attacks he eventually could withstand Martin no longer. A wonderful bout that dramatically illustrated how even a slight edge in conditioning can be leveraged into a winning advantage.

My guess is that Chevalier will be in better shape in March, but, at the same time, there is no one of Martin's quality here either. Chevalier is what Keith Jackson calls "a big old horse" on ABC football. He is already a three-time state qualifier and has finished third the last two years. There is a certain weird parallelism for both those finishes. In 1995 he lost early to Jerico Speelman and then came back to beat him for third. Last year he lost early to Jeremiah Speelman, and then came back to beat him for third. Fortunately, both Speelmans have graduated, but Chevalier has got to avoid that early-round loss that has often plagued him.

Much of Chevalier's roughest competition will come from the Northwest District. Davlin, Ankney and Studer are all experienced competitors with solid skills. Davlin, who just captured his 100th career victory, was a state qualifier as a sophomore, but last year, at 160#, lost a first round district thriller and never got back in. This year he has competed between 171# and 215#, but will likely wind up here. He won the Panther Classic at 189# and took the Fremont St. Joseph at 171#. His experience wrestling bigger stronger boys should help him against Chevalier. Ankney didn't compete at the district level last year, but has moved rapidly forward in 1997. He nipped Studer at the "A" Classic and was a big winner at Stryker. State qualifier Studer was also a placer at Medina, and like Chevalier, lost in the semi-finals. He was second at the "A" Classic and at Hopewell-Loudon -- losing the latter to Yost at 189#. He had a big 8-2 win over Roskovich for his only Wright State victory last year. These three all exit from different sectionals so the pairings should be good.

Below this trio are twice that number of potential qualifiers. It would seem to be a very fluid situation with none of that number having any kind of significant edge over the

other. It should be noted that none of this group has come close to challenging the top group. Studer, for example, pinned Thacker and won technical falls over Stevenson and Conrad. Since four of the six came from the same sectional as Davlin, one will not even make it to the district level. That could give people like Philipps (North Baltimore) or Gulch (Milbury Lake) some hope.

Welch has had a sensational year for Mapleton. A state qualifier at 152# last year, he has won four tournaments at 171# including the Gorman, Bucyrus, Mapleton, Tri-West, and Black River. He has been a finding way against any type of opponent and has to be the favorite for the district title. State qualifiers Overstreet and Morgan have both lost to Welch, but retain low state placement potential. Bauer was the titlist at Smithville and missed state qualification last year by one bout -- losing to Welch 8-2, in the consolation semi-finals. Miller suffered that same fate at 160# last year losing a ticket to Wright State by that identical score. He won at Cardinal.. but dropped a 11-9 final to Kelly at Hawken. These six all are state caliber wrestlers. Behind them are Hopkins, Lance (Norwayne), Bryant (Painesville Harvey), and Saunders (Cardinal). It should be an extraordinarily crowded field at Elyria Catholic.

There are, on the other hand, no returning state qualifiers at Xenia, and indeed, few recognizable names. Magro won at Madeira with a quick fall over Boswell and was a strong third at Edgewood losing an overtime battle in the semi-finals. He also defeated Delta's Jeff Smith while finishing seventh at the GMWVA. Godbey has certified at 160#, but when he reviews the district power at that weight I think he'll move to this more congenial class. I struggled coming up with names here so you can anticipate some surprises at the district level.

It's going to be very interesting at Steubenville. Chevalier should win, but expect him to be challenged at least one time. State qualifier Andy Smith has competed all year at 171#, but did keep his options open and certified at 160#. I think he'll choose this less crowded weight class as the vehicle for his second state tourney bid. Last year he was one of those sectional champs who lost in the first round to a fourth place finisher. He was carried into the consolation round where he won four times to finish third -- including a heart-stopping 12-10 overtime win in his go-to-state contest. He is rated #1 in the Columbus area this year. Roskovich could easily be a district finalist. He pinned Sutter earlier in the year and narrowly beat Bryant at Buckeye Local. He'll need to slow the early pace to stay close with Chevalier. Sutter, Cramer, and Bryant are the best shots for the last state berth with the pairings being critical. Payton (Madison Plains) could also be a factor.

189#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: JOHN HINTON (GALION NORTHMOR)

TOP CONTENDERS

2. Bostleman (Archbold)

3. Engel (Reading)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 4. Haar (Eastwood) | 15. Goldsbury (Ready) |
| 5. Christian (CVCA) | 16. Everhart (Mohawk) |
| 6. Kusmits (Manchester) | 17. Antill (Caldwell) |
| 7. VanSickle (Liberty Center) | 18. Glass (Newbury) |
| 8. Troiano (Grandview Hts.) | 19. Roach (Riverdale) |
| 9. Habbyshaw (Aurora) | 20. Hedges (Deer Park) |
| 10. Yost (Fostoria St. Wendelin) | 21. Tumblison (West Jefferson) |
| 11. Schumacher (Monroe Central) | 22. Polasko (Independence) |
| 12. Dew (Sandusky St. Mary) | 23. Harrison/Mann (Valley View) |
| 13. Myers (Wellington) | 24. Steyer (Calvert) |
| 14. Rogers (Waynedale) | 25. Apking (Preble Shawnee) |

In some sports there seems to be a regular process by which competitors become champions. Sports that feature judging like figure skating, gymnastics, and diving are ones where contestants more or less pay their dues and then work into an orderly progression to the top. When a champion moves on the person who has been finishing second seems almost automatically to move up to the top spot. It doesn't work that way in wrestling. Although I suspect John Hinton wishes it did.

Hinton was fourth last year at 189# finishing behind three seniors. If this were a hereditary monarchy he'd be next in line, and while that may eventually prove to be true it isn't going to be easy. Last year Hinton had three falls on his way to a district title and entered the fray at Wright State with a 34-1 mark. In a titanic semi-final battle with eventual champ Chapman, Hinton was ridden out in the second overtime period and eventually finished fourth. This year he has wrestled a very demanding schedule finishing fourth at Medina and second at the Gorman to go along with two other tourney titles. I don't think Hinton was at his best at Medina losing in the second round, but I was impressed by five straight consolation wins against tough competition including two in overtime. Mark him up as the favorite at 189#.

Much of Hinton's competition will come from the Northwest District. Bostleman got the last qualifying spot at 171# last year, but lost a tough 14-9 struggle to Chevalier in the first round. Now a junior he has made a quantum jump forward and has title hopes. He was in complete control at the "A" Classic while defeating a representative field. Haar is at about the same level. A state qualifier at 189# last year he lost to Hinton in the quarter-finals 10-4. This year he's taken titles at Sylvania Southview, Waite and Northwood, but has not wrestled many highly rated contenders. I'm not sure what to expect from VanSickle. Early in the year he pinned Bostleman and defeated Dean Taylor, but Bostleman got his revenge with a 9-5 win at the "A" Classic and VanSickle was only sixth at Hudson. Clearly we're dealing with a dangerous opponent who can score points and gain falls, but who can also be handled if given appropriate attention and respect. Last year he finished sixth at the district and did not qualify for Wright State.

Behind this top trio lurks another dangerous trio of competitors. Yost lost two one-point district bouts last year -- including one to VanSickle - and did not qualify. This season he

pinned the powerful Studer to win at Hopewell-Loudon, and lost only a 3-2 bout to Davlin at the Northwest Duals. Dew is another one of those Sandusky St. Mary's wrestlers (like Baum and Scroggy) who have made enormous progress in the last year. He'll be a small 189-pounder, but has solid qualification chances. Everhart could well return to 215# by tourney time where he lost an overtime bout to reach Wright State. His qualification chances might be slightly better at 215#, but at Wright State his chances of placing go up at 189#. Well, decisions like that are why high school coaches bring down the big bucks.

There are five other possibilities in this crowded field. I've rated Roach and Steyer, but Dell (Spencerville), Sham hart (Huron) and Kirian (Arcadia) are long-shot contenders. Each has manufactured at least 'one important placement, but they'll need some excellent fortune to qualify.

Two-time state qualifier Engle is a powerhouse out of Xenia. He had placement potential last year as a sophomore, but wasn't allowed to wrestle because of a disputed skin rash. This year he pinned in the SWOCA finals and crushed the field at Reading. His only close battle was to Division I Perry at Sycamore which Engle won by a point. He is currently 18-0 with 14 falls. No one else here can touch him or will be a factor at the state level.

Hinton should meet moderate opposition at his district in Steubenville. Troiano is a returning state qualifier but he won only one bout at Medina. Many in this field have district experience, but have not had scintillating seasons so far in 1997. Schumacher and Antill (coming off a serious car accident) come from small schools who have produced excellent wrestlers at this class. Baker (Bridgeport) is another option beyond those rated.

There have been some unusual results coming out of the Northeast District. The aptly name Christian put on a powerful display in winning at Firestone including a fall in the final. His bout with Alan Charity in the second round was probably the feel good pairing of the year. He also won at CVCA and Cardinal in overpowering style, but somewhere he has three losses. I'm having trouble gauging where he should fall in the rating, but it would seem to be very high. Last year his district action was limited to one bout as he lost to eventual state qualifier Morgan 4-3 and didn't get back in. Kusmits is also very good. He won two bouts at Mentor before losing to the mighty Zerkle and falling in overtime to my top choice Hinton. At Firestone Kusmits wrestled a far tougher schedule than Christian to reach the finals including wins over Scislo and Good and a 15-0 technical fall over state qualifier Rogers. He did win titles at Hoban and Doylestown. Last year he failed to get out of his sectional losing his crucial bout to Christian.

Habbyshaw has made a lot of progress this year after missing state qualification .by one bout last year. He won at Aurora and South Florida and was a strong third at Hudson. Myers has been very strong for Wellington, and provides a possible fourth qualifier. That would leave the only returning state qualifier, Steve Rogers, out of luck. Yet, right now Rogers is in real trouble. He has struggled all year and people like Glass and Polasko are also breathing down his neck, Other contenders could be Schreiber (Cuyahoga

Hts.), Householder (Hillsdale), Matuska (Gilmour), and Lytle (Loudonville) -the latter almost certainly a distant relative of mine.

215#

PROJECTED CHAMPION: BOBBY SCHLATTER (DELTA)

TOP CONTENDERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Wonderly (Hicksville) | 15. Wilhelmy (West Salem NW) |
| 3. Bauer (Grandview Hts.) | 16. Beccara (Woodmore) |
| 4. Smider (Jackson-Milton) | 17. Hadlock (Black River) |
| 5. Collins (Waynesville) | 18. Weyer (North College Hill) |
| 6. Leonard (Hamler Patrick Henry) | 19. Basford (Shenendoah) |
| 7. Wolf (Reading) | 20. Benecke (Archbold) |
| 8. Snyder (Grand Valley) | 21. Bolon (Martins Ferry) |
| 9. Russo (Chanel) | 22. Wesson (West Liberty Salem) |
| 10. Wymer (Malvern) | 23. Dishong (Nelsonville York) |
| 11. Chappell (Streetsboro) | 24. Drysdale (Gilmour) |
| 12. Daring (Carey) | 25. Stewart (Batavia) |
| 13. Hershberger (Garaway) | 26. McGee (Monroeville) |
| 14. Orr (Bluffton) | 27. Rizzo (Marion Pleasant) |

There are just some performers that as soon as you see them you realize that they've been given an inordinately large portion of strength, coordination, and balance. This immediate insight seems particularly acute when dealing with big men -- perhaps, because it stands in sharp contrast to the normal run of men that size. It was so easy to know immediately that a Luke Fickell or a Mike Buddie were destined to be superstars - not only in wrestling but in football or baseball as well. And so it is with Bobby Schlatter - you knew right away that he was going to win some state titles. He was sixth as a sophomore at 215# with 37 wins. Last year he finished 35-1 and cruised to the title winning his first three bouts quickly and then wrestling a conservative final bout for the title. If memory serves his only loss was for an illegal slam. This year he's won everything including a stint at heavyweight where he won the Perrysburg title. Like Schroeder last year, the only thing that can stop him is an injury.

This will also be Wonderly's third state qualification at 215#, and he knows Schlatter well enough to keep it close. They could meet three times this year at the sectional, district, and state finals. Wonderly missed state placement by one bout as a sophomore (a loss to Schlatter) and last year took third. He had four falls at the "A" Classic and won handily at Stryker and Sylvania Southview. Something of an unknown quantity is Kasey Leonard, who transferred from Findlay, and immediately began winning a lot of one-sided bouts. He is apparently anxious to get a shot at Schlatter. The rest of the district is a workmanlike group which might also contain the aforementioned Everhart.

The Xenia District will provide three first-rate representatives at 215#. State qualifier Collins returns after a district third last year which included three falls. He had a tough draw at States and lost his only bout. He has wrestled at both 215# and heavyweight with his only loss in the heavyweight finals at West Jefferson. Wolf was a state qualifier at this class two years ago getting knocked out by Wonderly in an early round. Last year he dropped to 189# and missed qualification by a point. This year he was first at Reading, but third at Sycamore and sixth at the SWOCA (in a very tough field). Weyer was a district semi-finalist last year, who has fashioned a 10-2 mark so far in 1997 including a final round fall at Summit Country Day. Stewart and, particularly, Wesson are other contenders.

State qualifiers Bauer and Wymer head a relatively thin Steubenville District. Bauer was sixth last year and should improve upon that this season. He is undefeated outside of Medina where he placed a solid fourth. One of the problems for Bauer is that to be the champion you'll have to beat both Wonderly and Schlatter because they exit the same district. That will be a daunting task. I don't believe anyone but the top duo have much of a chance of placing at the state level so the fun will be in the getting there. Besides those listed look for Rusch (Berne Union) and Bender (Caldwell).

There is at least a hint of mystery at Elyria Catholic along with some placement potential wrestlers. Smider was listed, apparently in error, as a senior last year in both the district and state programs, but he is wrestling again -- and very effectively. He went "two and out" at Wright State but that's unlikely to happen again -- if he reaches the States. Last year he won the two critical consolation bouts to reach Wright State with double overtime criteria wins. You can't cut it much closer than that. He has already won three tourneys this year. Russo is a placement wrestler who, up to now, rarely is a finalist. He was third at Troy and North Canton and sixth at Solon. He is, however, a dangerous pinner who has wrestled much tougher competition than most of the field. Snyder and Chappell look to be next in line but Wilhelmy and Hadlock (a great name for a wrestler) have split two bouts this year and are very viable qualification candidates. Drysdale and DeGraff (Painesville Henry) must also be watched. The mystery deals with the return of Mick Otero. As a sophomore Otero was a district qualifier at 171#. Then he had a brilliant All-State season as a running back for Independence and did not wrestle his junior season. Unfortunately, he missed his entire senior football season with a knee injury effectively dooming Independence's title hopes. After a long rehabilitation he has just returned to take a forfeit win at 215#. He is a brilliant athlete but a two year layoff and a serious injury are usually not a potent wrestling combination. Nonetheless, his athleticism can only be ignored at your own risk.

HVY.

PROJECTED CHAMPION: DEAN TAYLOR (DELTA)
TOP CONTENDERS

2. Turner (Kirtland)
3. McGill (West Liberty Salem)

4. Busdeker (Woodmore)
5. Stryker (West Jefferson)

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| 6. Pence (Greenview) | 17. Wilson (Bellaire St. John) |
| 7. McDonald (St. Thomas Aquinas) | 18. Dawson (Wellington) |
| 8. Blandin (Milbury Lake) | 19. Breniser (Madison Plains) |
| 9. Connor (Berkshire) | 20. Krill (Edgerton) |
| 10. Campana (Steubenville Cent. Cath.) | 21. Dick (Berne Union) |
| 11. Yost (Norwayne) | 22. Doty (Bluffton) |
| 12. Vavrek (Cuyahoga Hts.) | 23. Groves (Barnesville) |
| 13. Mazur (Margaretta) | 24. Rose (Streetsboro) |
| 14. Clepper (Batavia) | 25. Reichert (Versailles) |
| 15. Davis (Carey) | 26. Krisha (New London) |
| 16. Thomas (Black River) | 27. Kiba (Smithville) |

One of the fascinations with the heavyweight classification, I believe, is the fact that spectators see a wider assortment of body sizes than at other classes. Differences are not only immediately apparent, but they are magnified by the size of the contestants -- which varies far more than at any other classification. This was even more marked in the days before the 275# limit was established for all heavyweights. You could then go to the state meet and see, for the first time, a 6'8" 390-pound Vernon Broadnax or a 350-pound liT-Bone" Steele and the entire arena would be fixated on their bout. A crowd is most often driven to a frenzied pitch when they get personally involved in a heavyweight battle between a 200-pounder and a huge 275-pound behemoth. It's been so apparently from the days of David and Goliath and it's likely that this old, but always exciting, drama may well be played out in Division III.

The choice here has rather annoyingly fastened itself in a part of my mind such that daily it comes forth to gnaw at my normal good nature. I spent half a automobile trip to Pittsburgh trying to make up my mind, but it just hasn't become clear. I see three possibilities.

First, is Dean Taylor who as a buttery 21 a-pound freshman ended up as state heavyweight runner-up to fearsome Corey Estell. Taylor has tremendous youth experience and an indomitable will to win. He's in great shape and has some neat little shots that will score. When you see him walk on the mat to face some hairy-chested Adonis it's hard to believe that he's the favorite -- but it's generally true. Last year Taylor won the Fostoria District with a 9- 5 win over Busdeker. Then at Wright State facing one of the weakest fields in memory there was an unbalanced draw which really benefited Taylor, as well. Finally, he wrestled solid defensive bouts - winning three until Armageddon arrived in the form of Estell. This year Taylor has primarily competed at 189#. He won the GMVWA and Perrysburg, but has also struggled with consistency and speed at the lower weight. Apparently he will compete at heavyweight.

Turner on the other hand is a classic athlete. At 6'5" and 250 solidly distributed pounds he has the look of a winner. Last year as a sophomore he qualified for Wright State at 215# and went 2-2 losing to Schlatter and Wonderly. This year he was third at Medina -- splitting two bouts with the excellent Tony Brown. I'm not sure that he'll be able to penetrate Taylor's clever defenses and score against him.

McGill was sixth last year at heavyweight including a 3-1 overtime loss to Taylor. A solid, blocky 247# he upset Busdeker at West Liberty Salem 3-1 this year. McGill was an overtime loser at the GMVWA finals to Edwards, but did well against a representative field.

Taylor's only real challenger at Fostoria is likely to be Busdeker -- who, as mentioned, he defeated last year. However, when you're giving up to 65 pounds like Taylor all of your opponents are dangerous. Busdeker, as runner-up, got into the tough half of last year's state draw and lost to Estell (14-9), his closest bout, and Cameron. Blandin is probably third best and has excellent size. Mazur and Davis are my favorites for the last two spots but Krill, Doty, and Krishna could also play a role in the final outcome.

McGill will likely be joined by a pair of 275-pounders at Xenia. State qualifier Pence and Clepper were both victimized by McGill last year, but they are dangerous at both the district and state level. Clepper was fifth at the SWOCA (losing to Strassell twice), and won at Oakwood, Batavia, and Madiera. Pence's most impressive win was a final round fall at Bellbrook over the excellent Gene Smith.

There are no returning state qualifiers at the relatively weak Steubenville District. However, Cory Stryker has medium to high placement potential based on an excellent 1996-97 season. He won at North Union and was second to Jones at Bishop Ready. Campana and Wilson are top probability items for two other spots but the last one is really wide.

As at most of the upper weight classes there has been in the Northeast District a lot of contradictory scores at heavyweight -- perhaps a carry over from last year. Turner seems a clear favorite, although at heavyweight surprises happen frequently. McDonald has been impressive since dropping to Division III while Connor has lots of experience. Last year he was a district semi-finalist, but then lost twice -- the second time to Yost in the go-to-state bout. This year he defeated Yost while winning at Cardinal and also triumphed at Jackson Milton, but was third at West Geauga. Yost has won a number of smaller tourneys and this state qualifier is now near 270 pounds. Vavrek placed at Medina beating some good people. Like Connor, he was a district semi-finalist last year before losing two bouts on Saturday afternoon. State qualifier Thomas will need to pick up the pace, but has the ability to do so. He and Yost were third and fourth in their Sectional, but made it to Wright State. This year Thomas has lost at least four times.

Division III

TEAMS

1. Delta -- This is the only team that could run away with the title, but my guess is that Sandusky St. Mary will battle them tooth and nail to the wire. In fact, my super-secret and always accurate team formula shows Delta behind by a few points. It is interesting that Delta's 1989 state title team scored 96 pQints and 1996 champs recorded 95% -- and, honest injun', my formula pegs them at 96 this year. Taylor and Schlatter will score huge quantities at the last two weights, while Carrizales, Bushman, Druschel and Sintobin can contribute earlier. Lutton, Smith and Vergote could possibly help, but they'd be better off with Stutz at 103# rather than 119#. An excellent with a chance to be the second Division III team to breach the 1 DO-point barrier. (The record is 119 points by Bishop Ready in 1982 with 119 points -- amazing in that they only awarded four places in 13 weight classes.)
2. Sandusky St. Mary -- If Coach Roth can get everyone at the right weight and maximize individual productivity, St. Mary's has more firepower than Delta. State champ Opfer and state placers Blanton and Schmidt lead the way, and Davlin has had a great year to help out. What's crucial is that Scroggy, Baum and Dew who have improved dramatically continue to produce. If Finneran can qualify at 103# he, too, can score at the state level. Watch out, Delta.
3. Archbold -- A team built around three potential finalists -- Forward, Baden and Bostleman -- that has other potential resources, too. Wyse, Grime, Eicher and Benecke are all possibilities and a couple of extra state scorers would make it a three-way battle for the top spot.
4. Chanel-- They always have a great tournament team and this year is no exception. State champion Ralph is the leader with Wrobel close behind. They'll need points from Firem, Wondolowski and Russo to take them any further.
5. Independence -- This is a team that could move a number of places either way. Zoloty and Allega should be finalists and Coljohn placed last year. There are a lot of long-shot possibilities like Polakso and Kostyack, but the hidden resource could be Otero.
6. Streetsboro -- The powerful threesome of Inghram, Wentz and Gerak should be worth around 60 points -- if all goes well. Then the upper weights will have to "kick in" with Rose, Chappell, or Rutherford. Maybe Kuchta could also be a helper.
7. Reading -- A team that has been on an upward spiral that could peak this year. State runner up Meyer and Engel are the main cogs, but there is a solid chance

of help from Wolf, Dick and McPherson. Dick, in particular, can become a high volume scorer. A relatively easy district should provide good first round state pairings.

8. Grandview Hts. -- An excellent dual meet team that has proven they can get wrestlers to the State tournament - but they have not convinced me that they can score there. They return six state qualifiers and have added the excellent Lorenz as well. Once they get the "hang" of winning state bouts, they could easily be in the top five.
9. Liberty Center -- If Kern is healthy, this team could reach the top four or five. Kern is the defending state champion, while Zientek and Cordes have previous state experience. Put in the excellent Van Sickle and hope for points from Brink and Hoff, and who knows what will happen.
10. Elvria Catholic -- This is a team that still starts no seniors and should be a powerhouse next year. Burnett, the defending state champ, is the keystone; but Woods is really progressing, while Cecil, Sedivec and Anderson know how to win. This is a prelude for the big push next year.
11. Aversville -- A team that may have trouble getting enough wrestlers to Wright State. Ankney and the Tracy brothers are very good, but Weidenhamer and Teegarden may not be quite good enough.