

## 2023 Ranger Report

### Kentucky High School State Wrestling Championship Preview

Another year another late night push to get this writeup completed and posted. Who knows how many more years of this I have in me, but for now I'll just focus on finishing. As I put this report together I have left out all of the statistical pages (as much as it hurts) because the numbers are just not as interesting with a 16 man bracket. Maybe down the road I can find some noteworthy stats to track and report on OR maybe we will be back in an arena with a 32 man bracket that really makes completing a bracket a job.

Speaking of venue and format change, it appears as though we got the great news that girls wrestling is sanctioned to begin in Kentucky next season. That is great to hear and had to happen given the crazy growth we have seen on the girls side the last few years. I have stated on multiple occasions that we have some girls that are absolute hammers, but I wasn't sure about the depth. This last weekend I learned that there are even more hammers than I realized. As the numbers grow and grow it won't take long at all before we have great depth and girls competing nationally on a regular basis. Along with this announcement I know many folks are hoping a combined boys/girls state championship can generate enough support to warrant holding it in a major arena. I really hope that can happen and allow us to create the awesome championship environment that our wrestlers deserve. I was just showing my daughter some of the awesome highlights from the Dungeon on Alex Green's social media pages. I know Mr. Angolia is open to feedback from the coaches, so hopefully if and when we get to an arena we can make some changes to get back that super exciting energy and feel from the 2000s.

If you haven't checked out the amazing State Championship video review that Alex has been doing, put this down (or swipe up) and go give them a look on facebook or youtube. In a word they are AMAZING! Capturing that history and sharing it with our younger generations is awesome and has helped to bring added notoriety to the many great champions of the past.

One last note on post season format. The semi-state tournament was a COVID side effect that we had to deal with. The KHSAA listened to the coaches to improve that process and honestly, the product on the mat is pretty awesome. There are two 16 man brackets with SO many high level matches and has really showcased some depth around the state over the last two seasons. But holding a 1-day, 16 man, 50 team event in a high school gym is horrible for the fans. Even the largest of high school gyms are extremely cramped with standing room only crowds and packed concession stands and restrooms. I can't imagine there is enough revenue in the system to hold these State First Round events in a larger arena, so my thought is let's get back to the 32 man bracket. It took me a number of years to get used to it (I hated it at first), but I have come to appreciate the opportunities it provides and the feel of such a big event. If we could get into a large venue with like 10 mats it could be such a great event to hold a 32 man boys bracket and a 16 man girls bracket at the same location. Could we possibly put 5,000 fans in the stands? 10,000? Hopefully we get a chance to see.

Now that we are effectively past COVID, it was great to see a wrestling season back to "normal". We have large events again and virtually no cancellations. Wrestlers back to 40+ matches during the season and great competition across the state. A couple concerning things I did hear about this season were our continued shortage of officials. That issue is compounded by the fact that we have a number of aging referees who are at the end of their tenure on the mat. So we have to do a better job of maintaing the young guys we have on the job and keep encouraging more to give it a try. One challenge for all the coaches

out there preparing for the big weekend. For every official you yell and scream at, find another one to give some praise to. Even better, see if you can give at least one more positive comment to the officials this weekend than negatives. If you can do that I think you will find it to be a much more enjoyable event. Another concerning things I've seen and heard the last few weeks are more unsportsmanlike conduct issues from wrestlers. I know this sport is extremely difficult and extremely emotional. But no matter what the outcome of a sporting event, don't let it affect who you are and how you react to the situation. Losing sucks. You spend hundreds and hundreds of hours training and in literally minutes it feels like it all goes down the drain. It feels terrible. But the one way to make it worse is to act out as a result of your emotions getting the better of you. Unfortunately, we too often model the wrong behavior from this perspective as coaches. Let's all be better.

It's really late and I'm really tired. My brain isn't working at optimal levels, so I don't have a lot more to say. I guess I will finish with this. GRC will be very crowded this weekend. It wil be hot. And many of us will not be happy with all of the results or calls on the mat. Let's try to exercise some patience and remember it's wrestling. Let's appreciate the opportunity we have to be involved with the greatest sport on the planet. Oh, and let's give Joe a little time to figure out this whole girls wrestling thing and see what the future may hold. I think he wants to see things get better, but it won't all happen at once. We need leaders to continue to create concensus within the wrestling community and bring that message to Joe and help him find ways to implement solutions to the issues we all see with wrestling in Kentucky.

Looking forward to a great weekend of state championship wrestling! See you all in Winchester in like 30 hrs...

## 106 lbs.

### **Favorite: Roman Valera (10, Central Hardin)**

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 2. George Dennis (9, Harrison Co)           | 9. Clayton Badida (9, Conner)      |
| 3. Brayden Blevins (9, Simon Kenton)        | 10. Breylen Clifford (9, Union Co) |
| 4. Madden Brown (9, Oldham Co)              | 11. Zac Scott (7, Johnson Central) |
| 5. Christian Delos Santos (10, John Hardin) | 12. Trae White (9, Henry Clay)     |
| 6. Henry Koller (9, South Oldham)           |                                    |
| 7. Jake Ramsey (9, Apollo)                  |                                    |
| 8. Dakota Phillips (12, Boyle Co)           |                                    |

### **Returning placers: None**

**Early round matches to watch:** Round 1: #7 Ramsey v. #8 Phillips. Quarters: #4 Brown v. #5 Delos Santos, #1 Valera v. #6 Koller

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Clayton Badida - was a top 4-5 guy all season with only a couple losses, but seemed to get a little banged up late in the year. With a couple losses at region/semi-state and forfeiting to 6th last weekend, his ranking has fallen a bit to #9. BUT he has plenty of wins over top 8 guys, so don't be surprised if he finishes on the podium.

**Team title race implications:** We are not expecting any huge team points for the contenders here, but UC and JC both have kids in the bracket. Sneaking one of those guys onto the podium could be significant as the weekend plays out.

As usual, 106 is filled with a bunch of young, new faces to the high school wrestling scene. The class of 2026 is shaping up to be REALLY good in Kentucky and it shows at this weight. Coming into the year I thought Ren Birk was the runaway favorite at 106 and up through the holidays he looked the part. But apparently too many Christmas cookies made the weight cut impossible so he made the move up to 113. At the All Star Classic Roman Valera let us all know that he wasn't backing down in the chase for a title competing very well with Birk. At 42-2, with his only losses coming to two of the top 113 pounders (Orth and Roberts), Valera comes to GRC as the favorite to win the bracket. But by no means is it a one horse race. George Dennis is 39-0 on the season and has shown dominance through most of the year. The one exception was the highly controversial OT battle with Brayden Blevins in the semis at SS 2 that was decided on a stall call. Ugh. Hope we don't see any more of that this weekend. Either way, I expect some highly competitive matches between those three to decide the champ at 106.

## 113 lbs.

**Favorite: Landon Evans (10, Ryle)**

- |                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2. JaRi Campbell (12, Christian Co) | 9. Aiden Marquis (12, Conner)       |
| 3. Utah Heady (9, Union Co)         | 10. Carson Webster (10, Grant Co)   |
| 4. Mason Orth (12, Campbell Co)     | 11. Blaine Kimery (9, South Oldham) |
| 5. Ren Birk (10, Great Crossing)    | 12. Kayden York (9, South Warren)   |
| 6. Kaygen Roberts (8, Boyle Co)     |                                     |
| 7. Ryan Smith (9, Johnson Central)  |                                     |
| 8. Mat Wasson (9, Harrison Co)      |                                     |

**Returning placers:** JaRi Campbell 2nd @ 113, Mason Orth 4th @ 113, Ryan Smith 4th @ 106

**Early round matches to watch:** Quarters: #2 Campbell v. #7 Smith, #4 Orth v. #5 Birk

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Ok, I don't do this very often AT ALL, but I am this time. I am going with two guys that I am close with. One of #10 Mat Wasson (family) or #14 Carson Webster will make the podium. Total homer picks, but couple of really good, tough kids who work hard.

**Team title race implications:** While three of the top five teams have kids in the mix here, UC comes in with the most big point potential. But don't count out the GC or JC guys. Their teams need them to be pushing for the top half of the podium and possibly pulling out a big win either on the front or back side to advance one or two steps higher and possibly jumping over a wrestler from a team around them in the standings.

Another weight where early in the season I thought we had a solid favorite with JaRi Campbell the returning state runner-up back to take a step up on the podium. But with a number of head-to-head match-ups between the three guys at the top. Campbell and Heady have split matches throughout the year. Evans beat Campbell at the Dragon. Heady beat Evans with some iffy calls that took it out of the kids hands (I've heard that from a lot of folks). Either way, these guys have battled and will come into the tournament familiar with each other and prepared with adjustments. From what I have seen, Landon Evans has looked great over the last few weeks and is my pick to navigate through the bracket. But to add some excitement, this weight has a number of landmines that are more than dangerous enough to totally blow up the bracket. Mason Orth is a senior who has been right there with the top guys and placed high at this weight last year. Also don't count out either Ren Birk, who was the favorite at 106 before moving up, or Ryan Smith, who has been here and placed high before. It could get interesting as well with Birk and Smith if they create or ride some team momentum.

## 120 lbs.

### **Favorite: Jayden Raney (9, Union Co)**

- |  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 2. TJ Meyer (10, Walton Verona)            | 9. Trent Cano (12, Great Crossing) |
| 3. Amari Hardin (12, John Hardin)          | 10. Payton Durbin (11, Meade Co)   |
| 4. Anthony Condi (10, Frederick Douglas)   | 11. Colton Motta (9, South Oldham) |
| 5. Ethan Davis (10, Grant Co)              | 12. Ethan Masters (9, Boyle Co)    |
| 6. Jonah McCloskey (10, Simon Kenton)      |                                    |
| 7. Logan Brown (10, Caldwell Co)           |                                    |
| 8. Nico Plumeri (12, Trinity (Louisville)) |                                    |

**Returning placers:** Jayden Raney 1st @ 106, TJ Meyer 2nd @ 120, Jonah McCloskey 3rd @ 106, Amari Hardin 4th @ 120, Trent Cano 5th @ 106, Anthony Condi 6th @ 113, Ethan Davis 7th @ 113, Logan Brown 8th @ 106

**Early round matches to watch:** Round 1: #8 Plumeri v. #9 Cano. Quarters: #4 Condi v. #5 Davis

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Trent Cano - one of the 8 returning state placers at this weight, he has lost extremely close matches with McCloskey (x4), Condi, and Davis and sits at #9. He could jump start the Great Crossing momentum early in the day with a huge first round match against Plumeri (Trinity).

**Team title race implications:** Expectation is for Jayden Raney to pin through the event. So not much to talk about there. So the big team title talk here is between GC and Trinity. And wouldn't you know it. They hit first round. Keep your eye on bout 16 as a match to set the tone in the battle for a team trophy early in the day. I predict the winner of that match places and the loser comes up just short and that could mean a 9-11 point swing in team points.

Returning state champ Jayden Raney is the clear favorite here with wins over virtually everyone in the bracket. Ranked #9 in the country at 113 (Matscouts rankings are the best), he is one of the best 120s in the country as well. TJ Meyer made the finals at this weight last year losing a close battle with Whorton and has been fairly dominant against non-Raney Kentucky competition this year and has prior year wins over Hardin who is the clear #3. Amari Hardin comes into the State Final Round pretty hot at 64-1 (SS loss to Raney, man that's a lot of matches!), but this is a weight with 8 returning state placers so this bracket will have battles throughout. One item of note, especially given how deep this bracket is, the separation of ranked kids is almost perfectly seeded.

## 126 lbs.

### **Favorite: Jordyn Raney (9, Union Co)**

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 2. James Morris (9, Johnson Central)     | 9. Charles Smith (10, Central)      |
| 3. Rowdy Benner (11, Great Crossing)     | 10. Brock Gross (11, Larue Co)      |
| 4. Jayven Williams (9, Paducah Tilghman) | 11. Maalik Washington (11, Conner)  |
| 5. Micah Thompson (9, Boyle Co)          | 12. Colin Teutsch (12, Caldwell Co) |
| 6. Seth Page (10, Ryle)                  |                                     |
| 7. Christopher Ferraro (11, Campbell Co) |                                     |
| 8. Leydon Nelson (12, Harrison Co)       |                                     |

**Returning placers:** Jordyn Raney 1st @ 113, JD Morris 3rd @ 113, Colin Teutsch 6th @ 120, Micah Thompson 6th @ 106, Brock Gross 7th @ 106

**Early round matches to watch:** Quarters: #3 Benner v. #5 Thompson

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Colin Teutsch - had a couple tough weeks at region and SS losing so many close, close matches. He was hanging out in the top 5 prior to that. Coming in #19, I could see him running off a few wins this weekend to make the podium.

**Team title race implications:** Again, Raney and pins. But also interesting to notice that 1-4 at this weight are projected in the top 4 of the team race. If someone happens to fall short that could be huge or if PT is able to pull out another finalist here that could be a gamechanger.

Ranked nationally #7 at 120, Jordyn Raney is one of the biggest favorites of the event. Already a two-time state champ, he is poised to continue the path to win six. I would have liked to see a rematch between JD Morris and Rowdy Benner this weekend after a fun one in the SS finals. Morris, at 39-3, has a cleaner path on the bottom half, while Benner would hit #5 Thompson before a Raney semi. This has been a weird weight this season. One that hasn't appeared particularly deep. And while you expect a lot of mixed results from the kids ranked 15-25, at 126 the less than consistent results has crept into the top 10 at times. So if I had to pick a weight for chaos this weekend, 126 might be the weight. One other note of interest and someone to keep your eye on is our lone female competitor at the event Lauren Walton. After winning her girls state title, she jumped right in and has wrestled very well in the boys post season. She was my second choice for someone to out wrestle their ranking, but she is just ahead of Teutsch so he got the nod.

## 132 lbs.

### **Favorite: Breyden Whorton (11, Larue Co)**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 2. Leland Reeves (11, Taylor Co)          | 9. Colin Tucker (12, Wayne Co)                 |
| 3. Gus Roberts (12, Great Crossing)       | 10. Matthew Goatley (12, Trinity (Louisville)) |
| 4. Hunter Jenkins (10, Union Co)          | 11. Korrey Mattingly (12, Male)                |
| 5. Rider Trumble (10, Ryle)               | 12. Deacon Heisler (9, Campbell Co)            |
| 6. Cofy Walls (11, Caldwell Co)           |  |
| 7. Hunter Luttrell (11, Fairdale)         |  |
| 8. Christian Barnes (10, Johnson Central) |  |

**Returning placers:** Breyden Whorton 1st @ 120, Hunter Jenkins 3rd @ 120, Leland Reeves 5th @ 132, Rider Trumble 5th @ 120, Gus Roberts 7th @ 132, Colin Tucker 7th @ 126, Hunter Luttrell 7th @ 120

**Early round matches to watch:** Round 1: #9 Barnes v. #12 Goatley, #6 Walls v. #8 Tucker.  
Quarters: #3 Reeves v. #4 Trumble (WOW), #2 Roberts v. #9 Barnes

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Rider Trumble - just a few weeks ago he won the Dragon and was the #1 guy. Whorton moves up and he loses a tight one at SS and now is #4. He could win it all.

**Team title race implications:** UC has potentially the strongest point scorer of the contenders, but Jenkins has missed a lot of time due to injury this year. Coming back at state duals, he has looked solid in the post season so far. Roberts had a great run at SS 2; will be interesting to see if he can continue that run and score major team points. Trinity was fortunate to have a senior jump back in the lineup and be in the mix for a podium spot. Round 1 will be another big match to keep your eyes on with bout 38 with a JC v Trinity matchup.

Another weight with a returning state champ in Breyden Whorton. While he did wrestle a few weeks at 126, his decent plan wouldn't allow it until after Christmas and the +2, he was back up at 132 for the post season. At 49-2 he is the favorite in a tough weight with lots of 40+ win wrestlers and a few with limited losses. Reeves returns to the weight where he was 5th last year in a hammer bracket. His SS loss to Roberts was a bit of a surprise, but 2-5 in this weight is a total toss up. Which leads to the fact that this bracket is going to be bananas no matter how you "seed" it. That top half with #3 Reeves, #4 Trumble, and #5 Jenkins is absolutely crazy. Just a few weeks ago that was #1, #2, and #3. Will be fun to see how that plays out on both the front and back sides.

## 138 lbs.

### **Favorite: Hunter Isaacs (12, Walton Verona)**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 2. Miller Brown (10, Oldham Co)            | 9. Jonah Baysinger (11, Scott Co)       |
| 3. Jayden Frazier (12, Paducah Tilghman)   | 10. Nick Armentano (12, Great Crossing) |
| 4. Ayden Lehman (11, Trinity (Louisville)) | 11. Noah Durbin (12, Fairdale)          |
| 5. Isaac Johns (10, Woodford Co)           | 12. Parker Maynard (7, Martin County)   |
| 6. Jeremy Ray (10, Union Co)               |   |
| 7. Carson Hearbst (8, Madison Central)     |   |
| 8. Jacob McDonald (11, Taylor Co)          |   |

**Returning placers:** Jayden Frazier 3rd @ 132, Miller Brown 3rd @ 126, Isaac Johns 4th @ 126, Nick Armentano 7th @ 138

**Early round matches to watch:** Round 1: #5 Johns v. #7 Herbst, #6 Ray v. #10 Armentano.  
Quarters #7 Johns v. #8 McDonald, #3 Frazier v. #4 Lehman

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Parker Maynard - no real clue on this one, so why not go with the 7th grader in the bracket. The simple answer seemed like Johns who was #1 for a while and has a winnable path to the finals, but I will take the wild card of the young guy.

**Team title race implications:** While on the surface it looks like PT and Trinity have the biggest point scorers at this weight in the team race, don't count out UC or GC. Ray has some big wins this season and could make a run here that puts the team race on ice. Also Armentano was a placer at this weight last year and bout 42 in round 1 could set the tone for his tournament.

I don't have a lot of inside info on this, but it feels like this weight is a battle of the walking wounded; a number of kids who have battled injuries throughout their careers if not this season. There have been a ton of head-to-head matches between the top 6 with Hunter Isaacs being the only one to come out unscathed. It seems like Jayden Frazier has been a top 3 guy on these rankings forever, but seems to be third every year. He would have to run a gauntlet to pull out a title (Lehman, Isaacs, Brown), but he has the skills. A very balanced bracket, for Miller Brown to walk out the champ he would need to beat Ray, Johns, and Isaacs (if rankings hold). Don't count out Johns even though he forfeited to 6th at SS 1 (assuming he is healthy). Recall he was #1 a good part of the season with wins over Brown and Ray in the first half of the season.

## 144 lbs.

### **Favorite: Mason Schweitzer (12, Walton Verona)**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 2. Caleb Mays (12, Paducah Tilghman)       | 9. Elijah Williams (11, St. Xavier)      |
| 3. Bryant Beane (12, Trinity (Louisville)) | 10. Jacob Wolfe (11, Frederick Douglas)  |
| 4. Glenn Mayes (12, Union Co)              | 11. Dakota Karr (12, Wayne Co)           |
| 5. Chris Begley (12, Madison Southern)     | 12. Clayton Shaddix (10, Great Crossing) |
| 6. Tyler Lattin (11, Meade Co)             |  |
| 7. Reese McGill (11, Oldham Co)            |  |
| 8. Hunter Hawthorne (11, McCracken County) |  |

**Returning placers:** Mason Schweitzer 4th @ 144, Glenn Mayes 5th @ 144, Tyler Lattin 8th @ 126

**Early round matches to watch:** Round 1: #5 Begley v. #7 McGill, #4 Mayes v. #15 Barnes.  
Quarters: #3 Beane v. #4 Mayes

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Caleb Barnes** - ranked #15 I am picking this kid primarily because I saw at SS 2 that this kid is tough as a \$2 steak. IYKYK.

**Team title race implications:** PT, Trinity, and UC finished 1-3 at SS 1 at this weight and they are expected to be near the top of the weight this week. With Schweitzer, Beane, and Mayes on the bottom half, PT is in prime position to score big points by making the finals. GC and JC could make up some big points here by making a top 6-8 run.

While this weight only has three returning placers from last season, Beane missed due to injury so there are actually four. But what is missing in credentials, 144 makes up with experience as the top guys at the weight are all upper classmen. Walton-Verona has a policy of only winning state titles in pairs (2017 Moore-Ruber, 2018 Moore-Smith, 2020 Moore-Mayer, 2021 Moore-Thornton) so the duo of Isaacs at 138 and Schweitzer at 144 look to continue that trend. Schweitzer is the highest returning placer at the weight, but Mays comes in from Illinois and picked up wins over Mayes and Beane the last couple weeks. Beane has had injury derail a couple of his seasons, but he competed on a bit of a pitchcount this year and appears to be as healthy as he could be at this point in the year. After Mayes I could see a lot of shifting in position. Williams really came on late in the year as well as Hawthorne.

## 150 lbs.

### **Favorite: Malachi Rider (11, Paducah Tilghman)**

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|---|-----------------------------------|
| 2. Malachia Harris (11, Trinity (Louisville)) | 9. Gunnar Arnold (12, Ohio Co)    |
| 3. Rilen Pinkston (11, Highlands)             | 10. Jaimen Carey (11, Boyle Co)   |
| 4. Jasitin Kubwimana (12, Lafayette)          | 11. Dana Bishop (12, Apollo)      |
| 5. Ethan Sentelle (11, Great Crossing)        | 12. Gavin Pugh (12, Simon Kenton) |
| 6. Max Speaker (11, St. Xavier)               |                                   |
| 7. Matthew Ball (12, Larue Co)                |                                   |
| 8. Boobie Leavell (9, Christian Co)           |                                   |

**Returning placers:** Malachi Rider 1st @ 150, Jasitin Kubwimana 3rd @ 144, Matthew Ball 6th @ 150, Malachi Harris 6th @ 144, Rilen Pinkston 7th @ 144, Ethan Sentelle 8th @ 144

**Early round matches to watch:** Quarters: #4 Kubwimana v. #5 Sentelle

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Gunnar Arnold - no real reasoning here, but he was a top 7-8 guy late in the season, so maybe he can return to form and sneak back up in that range.

**Team title race implications:** UC lost Fletcher last week and PT has the prohibitive favorite at 150. Harris is ranked to score finals points for Trinity as they make their points run in the upper half, but he will have to bring his A game to get there. GC should get podium points here with Sentelle, but it needs to be closer to 5th than 8th.

Malachi Rider was the state champ at this weight last year and will be very hard to knock off the throne this year. Malachi Harris won the MOW award at the All Star Classic in a 4 man group that included Herron (#1 @ 157), #1 Schweitzer (#1 @ 144), and Banfield. Tremendous performance. But his season was almost ended before it started due to eligibility after his transfer from Moore to Trinity. That was all eventually cleared up and Harris has picked up where he left off in the fall. But he is slated to hit a buzzsaw in the semis in 37-0 Rilen Pinkston who got a huge win at SS 2 over Jasitin Kubwimana by fall in a back and forth battle. This is a really, really good top 4. And bout 310 (semi: Pinkston v Harris) is one I am excited to see.

## 157 lbs.

### **Favorite: Braedon Herron (12, North Hardin)**

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| 2. Aiden Butler (11, Great Crossing)  | 9. Kyle Richmond (12, Campbell Co)        |
| 3. Logan Castle (11, Johnson Central) | 10. Nolan Banfield (12, Montgomery Co)    |
| 4. Lucas Ricketts (9, Union Co)       | 11. Jacob Fulkerson (12, Central Hardin)  |
| 5. Justin Krebs (12, St. Xavier)      | 12. Lucas Hutchison (11, Madison Central) |
| 6. Charlie McKune (12, Moore)         |   |
| 7. Tristin Millet (11, Oldham Co)     |   |
| 8. Colin Ross (12, Ryle)              |   |

**Returning placers:** Charlie McKune 2nd @ 150, Nolan Bandfield 3rd @ 150, Justin Krebs 4th @ 150, Logan Castle 8th @ 157, Braedon Herron 8th @ 138

**Early round matches to watch:** Round 1: #6 McKune v. #10 Banfield, #7 Millet v. #9 Richmond.  
Quarters: #1 Herron v. #6 McKune, #4 Ricketts v. #5 Krebs

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Charlie McKune - although he had a tough SS 1 weekend and his draw stinks, McKune always seems to show up ready to roll at state. I'm not calling him pulling off a number of "upsets", but he has the talent to go on a run and finish on the top half of the podium.

**Team title race implications:** UC has another fantastic freshman here to keep pace with the other contenders from GC and JC. Butler and Castle are tough, but I expect both to be challenged along the way. PT does have potential to score here and Williams could be a key to keeping them in striking distance of the Braves.

Braedon Herron has been a menace to the 157 lb weight class this season going a ridiculous 62-0. Hard to pick against those results, but after the top spot I think this bracket is pretty wide open. Especially when you consider past history. Butler, Castle, and Ricketts have earned the 2-4 spots, but behind them are senior wrestlers who finished in top 4 spots at state last year. Could make for a wacky bracket, especially on the back side. How will seniors react to losing that last shot at a state title? Or how will the less experienced wrestlers deal with the pressure of the state tournament, in particular those with team expectations bringing extra weight on their shoulders.

## 165 lbs.

**Favorite: George Ferree (12, Trinity (Louisville))**

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|---|---------------------------------------|
| 2. Dalton Matney (9, Johnson Central)   | 9. Brandon Burchett (11, Fairdale)    |
| 3. Aiden Zinser (12, Scott)             | 10. Isaiah Murphy (12, Fern Creek)    |
| 4. Owen Lamer (9, Taylor Co)            | 11. Jake Dowdy (10, Union Co)         |
| 5. Malachi Young (12, Great Crossing)   | 12. Bryce Dennemann (11, Campbell Co) |
| 6. DJ Wilson (9, Paducah Tilghman)      |                                       |
| 7. Bryant Faucett (11, Bullitt Central) |                                       |
| 8. Kaden Lameier (12, Dixie Heights)    |                                       |

**Returning placers:** George Ferree 1st @ 157, Dalton Matney 4th @ 175, Bryce Dennemann 5th @ 157, Brandon Burchett 6th @ 157, Aiden Zinser 8th @ 150

**Early round matches to watch:** Round 1: #5 Young v. #8 Burchett, #9 Lamier v. #10 Murphy.  
Quarters: #3 Zinser v. #4 Lamer, #2 Matney v. #5 Young. #6 Wilson v. #9 Lamier

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Bryce Dennemann - coming in as the #16, I think the returning state placer has the chance to put up a few wins this weekend

**Team title race implications:** The upper half is where Trinity is going to make their hay. George Ferree is a returning state champ who should put up a lot of team points. JC has a great shot at a finalist here as well due to the bracket makeup on the bottom half. PT and GC could end up meeting head-to-head in the placement round here; interesting if they are close in the team race. This is a weight where UC has potential to earn some icing points if Dowdy can sneak in an extra win or two.

Wild how this weight has a lot of the extremes, seniors and freshmen. The senior Ferree is looking to add another title to his trophy case, but the youngster Matney is darned tough. He showed that in the win over senior Aiden Zinser at SS 2. Ferree is a different animal, but I am anxious to see how Matney handles the bright lights of the finals should he get there. With the 16 man bracket coming through 2 semi-states, the draws can only be so bad, but this is one bracket where the distribution of ranked wrestlers is off a bit. The top half has #1, #3, and #4, but again the impact is minimized the way these 16 man brackets are constructed. Can't talk about this weight without mentioning our guy Faucett who came out of the stands at the All Star Classic to fill in for a sick Ferree and got the win. He's had a really solid year and has a good shot to make the podium. Prior to the loss to Matney, Zinser looked like the main challenger to Ferree, so that might be a semi to keep an eye on.

## 175 lbs.

### **Favorite: Gavin Ricketts (12, Union Co)**

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 2. Jude Powell (12, Fairdale)          | 9. DeAndrell Mattison (12, Central) |
| 3. Joshua Strayer (11, Great Crossing) | 10. Jacobie White (12, Harrison Co) |
| 4. Caleb Duke (11, Ryle)               | 11. Jashawn Harris (12, Fern Creek) |
| 5. Jack James (10, Paducah Tilghman)   | 12. Jax Crowe (9, Boyle Co)         |
| 6. Seth Davis (10, Johnson Central)    |                                     |
| 7. Logan Robertson (11, South Oldham)  |                                     |
| 8. Brady Allen (12, St. Xavier)        |                                     |

**Returning placers:** Jude Powell 2nd @ 165, Gavin Ricketts 3rd @ 165, Brady Allen 5th @ 175, Joshua Strayer 7th @ 165, Jacobie White 8th @ 175, Jack James 8th @ 165

**Early round matches to watch:** Round 1: #6 Davis v. #10 Lambert. Quarters: #4 Duke v. #6 Davis, #2 Powell v. #5 James

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Brady Allen - even though Coach Kraeszig has retired and was recently seen at Rec Hall for senior night (congrats Konner!), I expect to see a little St X magic so why not here where Allen was 5th at this weight last year.

**Team title race implications:** As good as Ricketts has been this year UC has solid big time points here with a likely finalist. GC, PT, and JC all have placer level guys; if they happen to hit on the back side it could provide some interesting momentum shifts on day 2.

Coming into the season it looked like 190 was going to be the confluence of a bunch of hammers and become the weight of weights for this tournament. At different points in the season we saw some guys come down to 175 where they have stayed to solidify this weight and other have moved on down (Matney) and some back up (Kiser). Ricketts has wins over Powell and Lane Kiser and gives UC another title favorite. Powell and Ricketts have faced off a couple times with a couple sudden victory results, one going to each wrestler. If we get to see the rubber match on Saturday night that could be exciting. Also, if we get a Strayer-Duke match for 3rd be sure to keep your eyes out for that one. Lot's of points will be on the board and someone will be put on their back; guaranteed entertainment. And yes that is a Duke, but not Noah. Caleb has enjoyed a great season and making a name for himself.

## 190 lbs.

### **Favorite: Lane Kiser (11, Trinity (Louisville))**

- |  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 2. Uriah Virzi (11, Paducah Tilghman)    | 9. Kshaun Brown (12, Union Co)     |
| 3. Zack McCoart (10, Johnson Central)    | 10. Erik Gavitt (10, Greenwood)    |
| 4. Wade Mettling (12, Oldham Co)         | 11. Cody Mershon (12, Campbell Co) |
| 5. Marcus James (10, Taylor Co)          | 12. Cael Green (11, Lafayette)     |
| 6. James Stegman (12, St. Xavier)        |                                    |
| 7. Omarion Wimberly (12, Christian Co)   |                                    |
| 8. Tucker Roth (10, Pleasure Ridge Park) |                                    |

**Returning placers:** Uriah Virzi 1st @ 215, Lane Kiser 2nd @ 175, Wade Mettling 3rd @ 190, Zack McCoart 4th @ 165, Marcus James 6th @ 190, James Stegman 8th @ 190

**Early round matches to watch:** Round 1: #5 James v. #9 Brown. Quarters: #2 Virzi v. #4 Mettling

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Cody Mershon - have to pick this guy to make up for missing on him all season

**Team title race implications:** Another upper weight where Trinity is looking for major points. But it is shaping up to be a team race faceoff in the finals with another PT state champ. Kiser has gotten the best of Virzi in a couple matchups this season, but will a state finals match go the same? JC needs a top 3 spot here and this is another weight where UC has the opportunity for gravy points that widens the gap at the top.

The weight that I thought would be the best in the state had some defections by year end, but still ended up with six returning state placers and a returning state champ ranked #2. Lane Kiser lost a tough state final last year down at 175 and tried to compete there this year, but ended up back at a more natural weight of 190 where he has shown he is the guy to beat. Uriah Virzi was the state champ up at 215 last year and somehow made the cut down to 190 and helped put PT in the team title hunt. I still have no idea how he got down to 190. With the returning state placers in line behind the favorites, I'm anxious to see how the region 1 kids slot in. Also exciting to see a new team jumping right into contention for their first state medalist with Erik Gavitt from Greenwood. Haven't seen the kid compete, but looks like he has a legit shot to take home some hardware along with my guy that I snubbed all year, Mershon. This is another bracket with some weirdness the way the rankings fell with the bottom half having #2, #3, and #4, but maybe it is balanced out by also having #19, #23, and #24.

## 215 lbs.

**Favorite: Austin Silva (12, John Hardin)**

2. Chase Price (12, Johnson Central)
3. Oscar JT Adams (12, Paducah Tilghman)
4. Trey Cranfill (12, Oldham Co)
5. Cole Sherill (11, Caldwell Co)
6. Samuel Bertin (12, Fairdale)
7. Drew Stearman (11, North Oldham)
8. Gillam Nicodemus (11, Daviess Co)
9. Luke Hyden (10, Walton Verona)
10. Caleb Mpungu (12, Frederick Douglas)
11. Cole Christian (11, Ashland Blazer)
12. Emmanuel Mills (12, Scott)

**Returning placers:** Chase Price 2nd @ 190, Trey Cranfill 4th @ 157, Austin Silva 5th @ 215, Cole Sherill 8th @ 285

**Early round matches to watch:** Quarters: #3 Adams v. #5 Sherill

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Luke Hyden - this one is a combination of being a homer and wondering if Cranfill is healthy after defaulting out to 6th at SS 1. No inside info, but this could open a clearer path for Hyden to make the podium.

**Team title race implications:** A huge match in the semi round could be bout 330 with Price v Adams as someone is making the finals, but also in giving another boost of momentum in the team race. This is another weight where UC have horrible luck as Pogue was not able to compete at SS 1.

At 64-0 we have another nominee for the menace to society award as Austin Silva has run through this season to date. He has a major decision win over Chase Price last month and a pin over Adams last week so he is the clear man to beat. As mentioned above, Price and Adams are on a collision course in the semis. They had a 4-3 battle at state duals with Price coming out on top. This time a lot more will be on the line. Adams is a previous state champ ('21) so he knows what it means to step it up under the bright lights of the finals. Should be very exciting. Although we have a few more returning placers, it feels like the back half of the podium is a little more unsettled. It may come down to who brings their A game Saturday morning and we may get some surprise medalists in the end.

## 285 lbs.

### **Favorite: Stephen Whitehead (12, Madison Southern)**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 2. Emauryon Arnold (12, Holmes)              | 9. Andrew Hendricks (12, Trigg Co)      |
| 3. Willie Rodriguez (11, Covington Catholic) | 10. Jake Heady (11, Larue Co)           |
| 4. Colton Lewis (9, Pleasure Ridge Park)     | 11. Jimmy Mooney (10, Paducah Tilghman) |
| 5. Carter Guillaume (11, St. Xavier)         | 12. Joseph Cooper (10, East Carter)     |
| 6. Gary McCaulley (12, Bryan Station)        |   |
| 7. Joe Scarborough (10, Oldham Co)           |   |
| 8. Brady Adkins (10, Johnson Central)        |   |

**Returning placers:** Carter Guillaume 2nd @ 285, Jimmy Mooney 4th @ 190, Stephen Whitehead 5th @ 285, Willie Rodriguez 7th @ 190

**Early round matches to watch:** Round 1: #8 Adkins v. #10 Heady, #7 McCauley v. #11 Mooney.  
Quarters: #4 Guillaume v. #8 Adkins, #1 Whitehead v. #3 Rodriguez, #5 Lewis v. #6 Scarborough

**Kid who might out wrestle their ranking:** Jimmy Mooney - the PT heavy jumped up in weight this year and has been very good all year. A couple of close losses and a forfeit put him in a tough spot this weekend with the draw, but I have a feeling he will be a tough out coming from that #11 ranking.

**Team title race implications:** not a lot of major team implication at heavy, but both JC and PT have the opportunity to score here. I think both have a shot at the podium, so they could have a huge impact on the team race.

Another undefeated wrestler coming into state is Stephen Whitehead at 47-0. He had a great semi-state with wins over Willie Rodriguez and Emauryon Arnold, both of whom have been very good this year. Two other heavies who have been excellent are Colton Lewis and Carter Guillaume. I feel like this is actually a pretty deep heavyweight field where I think all of the top 5 are potential contenders for the title. Three of these five will be back in the field next year so we can expect more fireworks among these guys next season.

## Team Champions

**Favorite: 1. Union Co (11 Q, 3 finalists, 3 champs, 8 total placers)**

2. Paducah Tilghman	(10 Q, 3 finalists, 1 champ, 8 placers)	14. Boyle Co	(9 Q, 3 placers)
3. Johnson Central	(11 Q, 3 finalists, 0 champs, 9 placers)	15. Madison Southern	(3 Q, 1 finalist, 1 champ, 2 placers)
4. Great Crossing	(11 Q, 1 finalist, 0 champs, 7 placers)	16. Harrison Co	(6 Q, 1 finalist, 0 champs, 3 placers)
5. Trinity (Louisville)	(7 Q, 3 finalists, 2 champs, 6 placers)	17. Campbell Co	(8 Q, 2 placers)
6. Oldham Co	(8 Q, 1 finalist, 0 champs, 7 placers)	18. Christian Co	(3 Q, 1 finalist, 0 champs, 3 placers)
7. Walton Verona	(5 Q, 3 finalists, 2 champs, 3 placers)	19. Caldwell Co	(5 Q, 3 placers)
8. Ryle	(8 Q, 1 finalist, 1 champ, 5 placers)	20. Simon Kenton	(4 Q, 2 placers)
9. St. Xavier	(9 Q, 6 placers)	21. Central Hardin	(3 Q, 1 finalist, 1 champ, 1 placer)
10. John Hardin	(3 Q, 1 finalist, 1 champ, 3 placers)	22. North Hardin	(2 Q, 1 finalist, 1 champ, 1 placer)
11. Taylor Co	(5 Q, 1 finalist, 0 champs, 4 placers)	23. Frederick Douglas	(6 Q, 1 placer)
12. Fairdale	(7 Q, 1 finalist, 0 champs, 3 placers)	24. Pleasure Ridge Park	(3 Q, 2 placers)
13. Larue Co	(6 Q, 1 finalist, 1 champ, 2 placers)	25. South Oldham	(4 Q, 2 placers)

For the second year in a row I came into the season believing there was not just a serious contender to challenge Union County, but a team that was the legitimate favorite to dethrone them. And for the second year in a row the Braves have been up to the challenge. Last year it was a generational Ryle team that couldn't pull off the feat. This time around it is regional foe Paducah Tilghman that I predict will come up just short of stopping the runaway train for one year anyway. Throughout the summer I will admit I thought it was going to be all PT, but at this point I will take a believe it when I see it approach on this topic. ESPECIALLY when you see all the young guns UC has in the lineup. But PT has built a solid program that will be challenging for the foreseeable future. While I have Johnson Central just outside the title hunt at third, I also thought they would be in the mix in the preseason. It looks like they are just a couple bullets short of battling with the two top dogs this year. But if a few things break right, don't be surprised if JC makes it interesting. I will admit I was quietly hoping to see them make a cinderella run for Coach Matney last year. It didn't happen, but I am certain he is smiling down on those kids as they continue to represent him well. Great Crossing has quietly built a great team down in Georgetown. They don't have a lot of big name flashy wrestlers, but from top to bottom they all wrestle hard and don't give up anything easily. I know a lot of those coaches, parents, and kids have put in a ton of work, so I am glad to see it pay off on the mat. Not to say other teams haven't done the same, but I have seen a lot of the energy these guys have put into their program. The last team that I think will challenge for a trophy is Trinity. Only bringing seven kids to the dance, but they have some heavy hitters that expect to be wrestling Saturday night and scoring big points. They don't have much room for error with the other top team bringing larger lineups (Union - 11, PT - 10, JC - 11, GC - 11), but they should have a lot of high placers to make up for it.