

2017 Ranger Report

Kentucky High School State Wrestling Championship Preview

Well, this is Kentucky, so of course it is 65 degrees outside again in February, similar to last year. You won't hear me complain. I love the warm weather and if we are able to avoid snow and ice during our season we are all happier for it.

Another wrestling season comes to a close this Saturday night at the Horse Park. For many seniors, it will be their last time to strap on a headgear. For many other competitors, it will be another step on their wrestling journey. Each and every year is stressful and hectic and causes many of us to grow a few more gray hairs or pull out the little hair we have, but we all love it anyway.

We kicked off the season for the second consecutive year with the KY All Star Classic at John Hardin High School. Again, this year we had a successful event showcasing some of Kentucky's best and brightest stars on the mat. Huge thanks to the sponsors (CoreOptix, ETC, No-Ox, Invivta) who step up to support and grow our great sport. Each season brings us highs and lows; sometimes we get both in the same situation. We saw that in the horrible accident involving Tristan Ballinger. The wrestling community nearly lost a great young man this past fall, but on a very positive note we saw the wrestling family across the state show support for Tristan and his family. We have also seen the wrestler spirit within Tristan as he has battled through many challenges in the recovery process. Continue to pray for the Ballingers.

On a high note, the KYWCA is working to improve some things for our wrestlers at the state tournament. They will be presenting the kids on the podium with larger medals and the state champions will receive a bracket board. Also, thanks to the support of the All Star sponsors and fans who came out, we will be giving all state finalists a t-shirt.

Where does KY wrestling stand? That depends on who you ask. We read some stuff online that says we are at the bottom of the barrel and not making up much ground. Others say we are way behind the traditional power states and don't have the ability to catch up due to population and resources. While I agree that we don't have the numbers of surrounding powerhouses like Ohio or Indiana, I am seeing more and more kids travel outside our state borders and not simply compete, but have success. Just a sampling of some of the results I know about over the last 12 months:

FloNationals placers - Cornett, Moore

Flo JH placers - Lutes, S. Moore, Peace

NHSCA JH Nationals placers - Yost, Escalera, Mathias Ervin, Micah Ervin, Ketchen-Carter

NHSCA Sophomore Nationals placers - Moore, Johnson, Smith, Smallwood

NHSCA Junior Nationals placers – Cornett

NHSCA Senior Nationals placers - Vazquez, Duncan

Fargo placers - Moore (Cadet Freestyle), Reed (Junior Greco)

Tulsa Kickoff Classic placers - Escalera, S. Moore

Not too bad. And if my memory serves, these are growing numbers and I see more and more kids traveling the country to these events testing themselves then coming home more determined. Team KY continues to have success. Hopefully, we will see the evidence of this hard work and success on display this weekend in Lexington.

We have also been having many discussions about seeding the state tournament. We had a person comment on Ky wrestling saying "they like the blind draw". The typical answer is "you have to beat them anyways". This is a valid point if you are competing for a state title and you are the top ranked wrestler. However, I would bet that same person cared about seeding last year when his kid was not the top ranked guy. Funny how some forget that. Seeding is part of all sports. The majority of all wrestling tournaments ask you for credentials of the competing wrestler. Now why would they do that? Duh, to separate the best kids in the bracket. The credentials that are listed have been earned over the years by the hard work of that wrestler. So, for some to act like it doesn't matter then why enter their kid's credentials when they go to national events or even look at the brackets. Do you see the point? Nobody in this state wants to see Johnson and Sheffer wrestle any time before the finals. As Forrest Gump would say "that's all I have to say about that".

The following was taken from TheMat.com regarding seeding:

Why Seeding Matters

Every year, there is a lot of confusion as to how conference tournaments and NCAAs are seeded. Many coaches and athletes will tell you, "seeds don't matter" because what happens on the mat determines who advances, and to win it all you need to beat whoever's in your path. But in reality, seeds (and also rankings throughout the season in general) matter A LOT for at least four important reasons:

1. Because fans are entertained so much by rankings, they are automatically critical to the sport. Rankings and seeding (which is just a subset of rankings) are instrumental to drawing fan interest to any sport. I'd go as far as to say no other topic is debated more consistently and with as much fervor by fans as seeding/rankings--and this is for most major sports, not just wrestling. Rankings and in particular seeding make it easier for the average fan to follow the sport, are often used as the basis for making predictions (which is the thing fans most like to do), and are a key input for bookmakers setting betting odds.
2. Rankings give major media outlets a general sense of which matches and athletes to cover to maximize fan interest. Conference tournaments and NCAAs are among the hardest sporting events of any kind for media to follow. While it's nice that ESPN now covers the entire NCAA tournament online, a tiny percentage of fans see even 1/4 of that action. How the fan base broadly perceives the events is defined first and foremost by how the media covers these events.
3. Seeds provide an important incentive for teams and athletes to excel during the regular season. Admittedly, this can be a double-edged sword, since every year, several coaches make line-up decisions by giving at least partial consideration to how rankings/seeding will be impacted, which can lead to "seed protection." But more often, there is a strong incentive to wrestle so as to build a body of work to maximize your chances for a high seed.
4. Not everyone is Logan Stieber or Alex Dieringer. The notion of an "easier path" to the finals absolutely exists in reality. Not all the time, not for every weight, but to think otherwise is foolish. Not having to wrestle a pigtail, getting a bye, wrestling weaker guys to start the tournament with an easier early match (particularly important for the big weight cutters), being on the opposite side of the guys who are bad match-ups, etc. all matter. Also, not everyone's goal is to be an NCAA champion. I know Gable would skewer me for saying this, but there are LOTS of wrestlers who would absolutely "sign on the dotted line" for an 8th place finish before nationals. I certainly would've back in the day.

A couple interesting items we should watch out for this weekend:

- 1) REPEAT: Can anyone stop Sheffer from going 4-for-4 (and 8-for-8 overall)? This is his last go around in Lexington and he may be facing his most formidable opponent so far.
- 2) REPEAT: Who will win 120? The deepest weight class in the tournament from 1-10 with a state champ, state finalists, and multiple placers should have the crowd's attention from the opening round.
- 3) REPEAT with a slight variation: Who will step up to win a wide open 220 weight class with kids like Brandon Reed and Chance Orr not competing this season?
- 4) REPEAT: Can anyone hang with Union County? They proved they were the best dual team in the state 2 weeks ago at Lindsey Wilson and this weekend I see it as a large margin between them and second place, especially with some of the crazy draws.
- 5) The annual format drama: The schedule for the weekend has been revised so quarters will be on Friday night, so a longer day 1 and more succinct day 2. With that it looks like we will have a more wrestler and fan friendly finals setup. Keep your fingers crossed.

Final rankings were posted previously. These are predicted finishes based on the final rankings. The winner of each matchup in the bracket is based on rankings, not any sort of prediction as to who we think will win. As usual, I'm sure we missed our fair share of results (some coaches are really, really bad at keeping track up to date), so they are not perfect. They also do not reflect any scratches that have come in the last day or so (I've only seen one posted by KHSAA). And even IF they were perfect rankings, upsets always happen on the big stage.

As always, Dutch and I have put in hours and hours on rankings and this report. Thanks to Stacy for not meeting me at the door with a gun over the last few very late nights and Amber for actually letting me back in the house at 2 am night after night. It is impossible to pull all of this information together alone. And Dutch has been a huge part of getting this great report out.

Report Audit

How the predicted individual champions fared?

	<u>10 Year Average</u>	
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Won title	9.2	65.7%
Finished 2 nd	1.9	13.6%
Finished 3 rd	2.0	14.3%
Finished 4 th	0.2	1.4%
<u>*Lower than 4th</u>	<u>0.7</u>	<u>5.0%</u>
TOTAL	14.0	100%

*total of 7 predicted champs have finished outside the top 4 in the last 8 years
(2007 – Korey Shotwell Campbell Co 130 DNP, 2010 - Jake Lee Campbell Co 160 7th,
Tyler Crow Meade Co 215 DNP, 2012 – Trevor Ford Desales 285 DNP,
2013 – Cody Stephens McCreary Central 106 DNP, Sam Preston Johnson Central 195 6th,
2015 - Hudson Heidorf Trinity 145 5th)

Who won the individual state title?

	<u>10 Year Average</u>	
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Ranked 1 st	9.2	65.7%
Ranked 2 nd	2.5	17.9%
Ranked 3 rd	0.7	5.0%
Ranked 4 th	0.8	5.7%
<u>*Lower than 4th</u>	<u>0.8</u>	<u>5.7%</u>
TOTAL	14.0	100%

*total of 8 individuals won the state title who were predicted to finish outside the top 4 in the last 8 years
(2007 - Darwin Perez Larue Co 130 6th, Derek Nickel Doss 215 6th, 2008 - Shane Parks Woodford Co 125 8th,
Dakota Choate PRP 152 6th, 2011 - Thomas Buckman Union Co 189 6th, 2013 – Jorge Vega Fern Creek 106 5th,
2015 – Geordan Blanton Johnson Central 145 6th, 2016 – Grant Krueger Ashland Blazer 195 7th)

Who placed?

	<u>10 Year Average</u>	
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Predicted Top 8	5.9	73.7%
Predicted 9 th - 12 th	1.2	14.4%
Predicted 13 th -16 th	0.5	6.0%
<u>Predicted below 16th</u>	<u>0.5</u>	<u>6.0%</u>
TOTAL	8.0	100%

How the predicted team champions fared and who placed high?

2007

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>	<u>4th</u>	<u>5th</u>
Predicted	Woodford Co.	Union Co.	Larue Co.	Paul Dunbar*	Fern Creek
Actual	Union Co.	Woodford Co.	North Hardin	Fern Creek	Larue Co.

*Paul Dunbar finished 8th

2008

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>	<u>4th</u>	<u>5th</u>
Predicted	Union Co.	Campbell Co.*	Ryle	Trinity	Wayne Co.
Actual	Union Co.	Ryle	Woodford Co.	Trinity	Wayne Co.

*Campbell Co. finished 6th

2009

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>	<u>4th</u>	<u>5th</u>
Predicted	Trinity	Ryle	Campbell Co.	Union Co.	Larue Co.*
Actual	Trinity	Union Co.	Ryle	Campbell Co.	Johnson Central

*Larue Co. finished 7th

2010

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>	<u>4th</u>	<u>5th</u>
Predicted	Ryle	Trinity	Campbell Co.*	Johnson Cen	Larue Co
Actual	Trinity	Ryle	Union Co	Johnson Cen	Larue Co

*Campbell Co finished 6th

2011

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>	<u>4th</u>	<u>5th</u>
Predicted	Trinity	Union Co	Ryle	Larue Co	Johnson Central*
Actual	Union Co	Trinity	Ryle	Larue Co	St. Xavier

*Johnson Central finished 7th

2012

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>	<u>4th</u>	<u>5th</u>
Predicted	Campbell Co	Larue Co	Union Co	Johnson Central*	Trinity
Actual	Campbell Co	Union Co	Trinity	Larue Co	Simon Kenton

*Johnson Central finished 6th

2013

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>	<u>4th</u>	<u>5th</u>
Predicted	Campbell Co	Union Co	St. Xavier	Simon Kenton	Johnson Central*
Actual	St. Xavier	Campbell Co	Union Co	Woodford Co	Simon Kenton

*Johnson Central finished 14th

2014

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>	<u>4th</u>	<u>5th</u>
Predicted	Union Co	Campbell Co	St. Xavier	Trinity	Woodford Co
Actual	Union Co	Campbell Co	Trinity	St. Xavier	Woodford Co

2015

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>	<u>4th</u>	<u>5th</u>
Predicted	Union Co	Trinity	Fern Creek	Campbell Co	St. Xavier*
Actual	Fern Creek	Union Co	Trinity	Campbell Co	Oldham Co

*St. Xavier finished 8th

2016

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>	<u>4th</u>	<u>5th</u>
Predicted	Union Co	Oldham Co	North Oldham*	Campbell Co*	Trinity
Actual	Union Co	Woodford Co	Oldham Co	Trinity	St. Xavier

*North Oldham finished 6th, Campbell Co finished 7th

106 lbs.

Favorite: Zeke Escalera (8, Union Co)

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|---|--|
| 2. Preston Mattingly (10, Apollo) | 14. Marquelle McDaniel (10, Central) |
| 3. Brendan Pye (10, Scott) | 15. Keaton Elliot (8, Calloway Co) |
| 4. Thomas Deck (9, Madison Central) | 16. Reece Goss (8, Woodford Co) |
| 5. Rickey Garcia (10, John Hardin) | 17. Mauro Lopez (11, Wayne Co) |
| 6. Isiah Macaraniag (11, Walton Verona) | 18. Dalton Lawson (9, Johnson Central) |
| 7. Migdoel Ocasio (10, Simon Kenton) | 19. Gage Fowler (8, Christian Co) |
| 8. Carson Deckard (9, Oldham Co) | 20. Nathan Ohlmann (9, St. Xavier) |
| 9. Simon Powell (9, Doss) | 21. Jake Moseley (10, Fairdale) |
| 10. Thomas Hoppes (8, Larue Co) | 22. Jalin Polin (9, DeSales) |
| 11. Scotty Villums (8, Male) | 23. Paul Perry (10, Meade Co) |
| 12. Bryce Moberly (0, North Oldham) | 24. Andres Calleja (12, Paul Dunbar) |
| 13. Joey Delong (12, Dixie Heights) | |

Returning placers: Preston Mattingly 8th @106.

Early round matches to watch: **Round 2:** #4 Deck vs. #6 Macaraniag. **Quarters:** #2 Mattingly vs. #8 Deckard, #3 Pye vs. #9 Powell, #7 Ocasio vs. #1 Escalera, #4 Deck vs. #5 Garcia

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: The field - the bracket is separated nicely so the results mirror the rankings exactly. Also, this group isn't as experienced as last year's crop of 106's, so it is impossible to predict.

Team title race implications: Zeke is likely to start Union off with a lot of bonus points in his run to the finals. Macaraniag is key to Walton challenging the top teams. Woodford and Johnson need placements from Goss and Lawson to keep pace. If Deckard can sneak into a podium spot Oldham could challenge the top 5.

Mattingly is the only returning state placer (8th) at 106 this year. That leaves the bracket wide open to some new faces to reach the podium. Coming in ranked #2, Mattingly is on the opposite side of #1 Escalera. He will be looking to avenge his early season loss to Zeke (11-8), but will have to get past #3 Pye to make the finals. Top ranked Escalera, only an 8th grader, comes in undefeated on the season (45-0) hoping to improve on his 2-2 finish last year where he lost in the blood round. The draw was not kind last year as Zeke hit #2 Wallace in the quarters and fell into #6 Miller in the consolation round. Good 'ole random draw. Although it is easier to live with a bad draw when you are the clear favorite. Pye and Deck are looking to spoil the Escalera/Mattingly rematch; expect both kids to challenge the top two in the semis.

113 lbs.

Favorite: Cagen Wallace (11, Wayne Co)

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| 2. Brandon Miller (11, Taylor Co) | 14. Zach Cowan (8, Madison Central) |
| 3. Adam Bender (11, Woodford Co) | 15. Joseph Morgan (10, Apollo) |
| 4. Gabe Adams (9, Union Co) | 16. Derek Ringlen (12, Doss) |
| 5. Shay Horton (10, Ryle) | 17. Morgan Sallee (9, Danville) |
| 6. Daylon Stafford (10, Sheldon Clark) | 18. David Ashley (12, North Bullitt) |
| 7. Michael Mattox (12, Harrison Co) | 19. Dylan Preston (8, Scott Co) |
| 8. Tristen Spalding (9, Walton Verona) | 20. Nathan Ainslie (9, Henry Clay) |
| 9. Trevor Frietsch (10, Simon Kenton) | 21. Noah Kirkman (9, Owensboro) |
| 10. Josh Schmidt (12, St. Xavier) | 22. Ethan Futrell (8, Trigg Co) |
| 11. Brett Shea (11, Oldham Co) | 23. Evan Allen (11, DeSales) |
| 12. Landon Lenhart (9, Trinity (Louisville)) | 24. Mason Lesshafft (9, Moore) |
| 13. Daniel Knight (12, Christian Co) | |

Returning placers: Cagen Wallace 2nd @106, Brandon Miller 4th @113, Adam Bender 4th @106, Michael Mattox 5th @113

Early round matches to watch: **Round 1:** #7 Mattox vs. #9 Frietsch. **Round 2:** #3 Bender vs. #7 Mattox. **Quarters:** #5 Horton vs. #10 Schmidt, #6 Stafford vs. #1 Wallace, #3 Bender vs. #4 Adams, #2 Miller vs. #8 Spalding.

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Josh Schmidt - he went on a tear at the Dragon, if he can capture that same magic he could make a run to the semis and take home a top 6 medal

Team title race implications: Schmidt could be a vital boost to the St X team title hopes if he can make a run. Adams should score solid placement points for Union. Bender will challenge for a title and score big points as Woodford's first placer of the tournament IF these BS rankings hold true. Spalding making the podium is critical as well for WV.

Wallace is the undefeated favorite (52-0) coming off his runner-up finish last year at 106. Lack of seeding put #2, #3, #4 on the lower half of the bracket. That sets up Wallace, on top, to advance to the finals on Saturday night. #3 Bender will have to get past #4 Adams in the quarters to get a rematch with #2 Miller in the semis. Miller beat Bender in the WCI finals 2-1. Unlike some folks in Versailles, we will trust the rankings and predict a similar outcome. If Adams comes up short against Bender on Friday, he may get another shot at him on the backside on Saturday. Our perennial overachiever Mattox always sneaks onto the podium, but a loss to Stafford at region left him with a tough draw this weekend.

120 lbs.

Favorite: Brady Wells (12, Campbell Co)

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| 2. Chase Yost (9, Woodford Co) | 14. Seth Lutes (9, Scott) |
| 3. Jake Insko (9, Apollo) | 15. Logan Henry (12, Bullitt East) |
| 4. Nate Wheeler (10, St. Xavier) | 16. Devonta Turner (12, Trigg Co) |
| 5. Blake Roth (11, Walton Verona) | 17. Ray Hamilton (10, Paducah Tilghman) |
| 6. Tyler Storck (11, Henry Clay) | 18. Mikey Whisner (11, Simon Kenton) |
| 7. Sam Bacon (10, Union Co) | 19. Tyler Hudgins (10, Harrison Co) |
| 8. Zach Manns (12, Franklin Co) | 20. Virgil Garcia (9, Male) |
| 9. Brody Haverstick (12, John Hardin) | 21. Michael Stephens (10, Whitley Co) |
| 10. Bradley Miller (10, Taylor Co) | 22. Jayden Webb (9, Johnson Central) |
| 11. Jordan Bates (10, Boyle Co) | 23. Dylan Harkins (10, DeSales) |
| 12. Matt Mills (12, Sheldon Clark) | 24. Khalid Asad (10, Oldham Co) |
| 13. Jakerion Merritt (9, Christian Co) | |

Returning placers: Brady Wells 3rd @120, Nate Wheeler 3rd @106, Chase Yost 1st @106, Blake Roth 7th @106, Tyler "the dork" Storck 6th @120, Brody Haverstick 8th @113, Bradley Miller 6th @106.

Early round matches to watch: **Round 1:** #5 Roth vs. #9 Miller, #3 Wheeler vs. #12 Lutes. **Round 2:** #4 Yost vs. #8 Haverstick, #5 Roth vs. #6 Bacon. **Quarters:** #4 Yost vs. #7 Storck, #5 Roth vs. #9 Mills, #2 Insko vs. #3 Wheeler, #1 Wells vs. #10 Bates.

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Blake Roth - he has been on fire the last month, losing a tight 3-2 match with Wells last weekend; if he can beat a "healthy" Bacon again in round 2 he will be on a collision course with Yost in the semis

Team title race implications: If the Yost/Roth semi materializes, that match will go a long way in determining their team order of finish. Add Wheeler, and this deep, deep weight could provide a roadblock for teams battling for a trophy. Bacon gives Union another solid point scorer with placement points.

With 7 returning state placers, everyone agrees that this weight is loaded. From round 1 this bracket will be intense. The last time Wheeler/Lutes met it was a 2-0 match, rematch in the first round. Roth/Bacon have split this year and could see each other in round 2; there will be medical staff on hand should they be needed. Wells was a state finalist in '15 and 3rd last year; he comes in as the favorite this time. He has been in some tight battles this season with Bacon, Wheeler, and Roth, but the bracket gods were smiling on Brady with an easier path to the semis than the other contenders. Yost, a returning state champ, will have his hands full beginning in round 2. His path to the finals could include #8 Haverstick, #7 Storck, #5 Roth (all returning state placers). Insko comes in ranked #2 with recent wins over Roth, Yost, and Haverstick; he has been on a roll since dropping from 126. His quarter matchup with Wheeler should be a tough battle. The quarters on Friday night will be something to watch at this weight.

126 lbs.

Favorite: Ryan Moore (11, Walton Verona)

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| 2. Tanner Yenter (12, Campbell Co) | 14. Chance Caldwell (12, Dupont Manual) |
| 3. Gentry Deck (10, Madison Central) | 15. Jackson Grimsley (9, Taylor Co) |
| 4. Jacob Dodd (12, Wayne Co) | 16. Sheridan Willoughby (10, Bourbon Co) |
| 5. Colton Lampe (11, Fern Creek) | 17. Layne Siebert (10, Scott) |
| 6. Payne Carr (8, Union Co) | 18. Ben Lundy (11, South Oldham) |
| 7. Austin Cook (12, St. Xavier) | 19. Brent Hudgins (10, Harrison Co) |
| 8. Drew Johnson (12, North Oldham) | 20. Jacob Robbins (9, Boyle Co) |
| 9. Tylan Tucker (11, Woodford Co) | 21. Muhan Nard (12, Owensboro) |
| 10. Nicholas Curtis (12, Bullitt Central) | 22. Payton Watson (11, Whitley Co) |
| 11. Aaron Brossart (11, Ryle) | 23. Andrew Rutledge (10, Montgomery Co) |
| 12. Nick Dickerson (11, Calloway Co) | 24. Michael Donaway (11, Nelson Co) |
| 13. Dylan Martin (10, McCracken County) | |

Returning placers: Ryan Moore 5th @120, Tanner Yenter 1st @113, Jacob Dodd 8th @120, Colton Lampe 3rd @113, Austin Cook 7th @120, Drew Johnson 6th @113

Early round matches to watch: **Round 1:** #4 Dodd vs. #10 Brossart. **Round 2:** #2 Yenter vs. #8 Tucker, #4 Dodd vs. #7 Cook, #3 Deck vs. #11 Johnson. Quarters: #2 Yenter vs. #5 Lampe, #1 Moore vs. #6 Carr, #3 Deck vs. #9 Curtis.

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Tylan Tucker - after an injury kept him out of state last season when he was the clear favorite at 113, Ty returns with an opportunity to face Yenter (the champ in that weight) in round 2. The winner there is expected to make the finals.

Team title race implications: Moore should score big points to put Walton near the top of the team race. Another solid placer for Union with 8th grader Carr. Cook and Tucker should compete for podium spots, but their teams could use some bonus and high placement.

Another bracket with plenty of returning state placers (6). Yenter, the state champ at 113, looks to repeat, but comes in as the #2 behind his former teammate Moore who beat him in a tough region final. PinandWin may want to have a discussion with the officials this weekend on nearfall and leg laces. Moore has wins over Deck and Carr, so he has a familiar path to the finals. The top side has a lot more intrigue with the Yenter/Tucker/Lampe/Cook/Dodd; all top 10 returning state placers who will meet as early as round 2. Tucker's health and conditioning is the big question. If he is 100% he will be a tough out for anyone. Deck, also coming off major surgery last season, has wins over Lampe and Dodd. Carr, coming off a MS state title, is hoping to bring home a HS medal. Even though Nkawtg thinks he shouldn't be allowed to compete, Carr has shown he is more than capable of wrestling at the high school level.

132 lbs.

Favorite: Saul Ervin (11, Union Co)

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| 2. Blake Evans (11, Pleasure Ridge Park) | 14. Jonathan Shepherd (10, Wayne Co) |
| 3. Dante Castellano (12, Simon Kenton) | 15. Anthony Pierce (9, South Oldham) |
| 4. Braden Wyatt (12, Bourbon Co) | 16. Dillon Whitaker (9, Taylor Co) |
| 5. Desmond Lewis (12, Valley) | 17. Diontae Rone (10, Holmes) |
| 6. Kaden Darbro (11, St. Xavier) | 18. Derrick Witmer (11, Boyle Co) |
| 7. Joe Slone (12, Johnson Central) | 19. Will Kenney (11, Madison Central) |
| 8. Wyatt Andreoni (10, Woodford Co) | 20. Dalton Lowe (12, Belfry) |
| 9. Alex Rivera (10, Moore) | 21. Ishmael Griffie (11, Christian Co) |
| 10. Stiles Metcalf (12, Larue Co) | 22. Ethan Murphy (11, North Oldham) |
| 11. Dillon Burton (11, Newport) | 23. Leondre Duncan (12, Fern Creek) |
| 12. Collin Barrett (12, Campbell Co) | 24. David Connor (8, McCracken County) |
| 13. Dwayne Johnson (12, Eastern) | |

Returning placers: Saul Ervin 2nd @120, Dante Castellano 3rd @126, Dwayne "the rock" Johnson 5th @126

Early round matches to watch: **Round 2:** #9 Andreoni vs. #10 Johnson, #2 Castellano vs. #4 Lewis, #1 Ervin vs. #6 Slone. **Quarters:** #5 Wyatt vs. #7 Rivera, #2 Castellano vs. #9 Andreoni, #1 Ervin vs. #8 Darbro

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Dillon Burton - after an impressive showing at Region 6, Burton could surprise some people on the top half of this bracket

Team title race implications: Saul puts up huge points here as we hit the heart of Union's murderers row. In a weight that is wide open for spots after the top kids, Darbro, Slone, and Andreoni must place to keep St X, Johnson Central, and Woodford in contention.

After a couple of deep weights with a lot of returning firepower, 132 is a much softer weight. Saul is back after a disappointing runner-up finish a year ago, looking for title number 2. Last year it took an MOW performance to stop him. Castellano looks to be fully recovered from his preseason surgery and hopes to take care of unfinished business from last year when he got caught in a cradle early in the semis match. He could get his chance in the semi against Ervin. This is the first weight where a clear #1-#2 meet before the finals. Evans has had a solid season and should be the favorite to come out of the top side. Wyatt and Lewis are two seniors hoping to finish their careers with a state medal. With only 3 returning state placers, the remaining podium spots are up for grabs.

138 lbs.

Favorite: Bryce Sheffer (12, Union Co)

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| 2. Konner Kraeszig (11, St. Xavier) | 14. Kameron Rice (12, Johnson Central) |
| 3. Trent Johnson (11, John Hardin) | 15. Blake Day (11, Ashland Blazer) |
| 4. Jakob McClintic (10, Oldham Co) | 16. Ronan Wyatt (10, Woodford Co) |
| 5. Noah Davis (11, Larue Co) | 17. Salim Mardis (11, Simon Kenton) |
| 6. Zach Holub (11, Cooper) | 18. Quentin Neal (12, Doss) |
| 7. Justin Torgerson (12, Lafayette) | 19. Clayton Boyd (10, Conner) |
| 8. Kestin McClain (11, McCracken County) | 20. Evion Thornton (10, North Hardin) |
| 9. Louie Regalado (12, Fort Campbell) | 21. Walker McCubbin (9, South Oldham) |
| 10. Austin Nixon (12, Dixie Heights) | 22. James Nash (10, Bullitt East) |
| 11. Isaiah Newberry (10, Moore) | 23. Joey Stuart (10, Madison Central) |
| 12. Chase Fink (9, Anderson Co) | 24. Eric Green (9, Pikeville) |
| 13. Nick Ellings (12, Dupont Manual) | |

Returning placers: Bryce Sheffer 1st @126, Trent Johnson 4th @138, Konner Kraeszig 2nd @113, Jakob "squid" McClintic 6th @126, Justin Torgerson 3rd @132

Early round matches to watch: **Round 1:** #8 Regalado vs. #10 Nixon. **Round 2:** #5 McClintic vs. #8 Regalado, #6 Torgerson vs #7 McClain. **Quarters:** #1 Sheffer vs. #2 Johnson, #3 Kraeszig vs. #5 McClintic.

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Zach Holub - he pulled out an upset over Nixon for a region title and got a dream draw that sets him up to place top 6

Team title race implications: Aside from his battle with Johnson, Sheffer should rack up a ton of points for Union. Kraeszig making the finals will be huge to keep St X near the top of the standings. Oldham is just on the outside, but McClintic could give them some surprise high placement points

Let's start with THE BLIND DRAW SUCKS!!! The Sheffer/Johnson showdown is one of the most talked about matches of the season. There was no official press release for this "Big Announcement" like some have done in the past (and then realized they wanted no part of that weight class). But there was a lot of buzz around the state when we heard that Trent broke out an old VHS tape of Visionquest. He then slapped an 8 track of Lunatic Fringe in Marty's stereo, and began training to knock off the 3-time state champ, Bryce "Shute" Sheffer. Unfortunately, we won't get to see that match under the bright lights of the finals. Instead, it will be Friday night in the quarters. Both guys deserve better than that. Then again, according to some, the draw doesn't matter. Anyway, kudos to Johnson for going for it this year when he was the prohibitive favorite at 145 all season. While the focus is on the top 2 at this weight, with 5 returning state placers, this is a solid weight. Kraeszig is set to make a return to the state finals after jumping up 4 weight classes.

145 lbs.

Favorite: Joey Roberts (12, Woodford Co)

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| 2. Clayton Hanson (12, St. Xavier) | 14. Wesley Whelan (12, Ashland Blazer) |
| 3. Chance Oxford (12, Union Co) | 15. Spencer Carpenter (12, Simon Kenton) |
| 4. Kevin Vasquez (11, Lafayette) | 16. Garren Moody (11, Danville) |
| 5. Jacob Henley (12, Oldham Co) | 17. Levi Goodin (12, Larue Co) |
| 6. Cody Roland (12, Scott) | 18. Logan Bertrand (11, Madison Southern) |
| 7. Ryan McManus (11, Madison Central) | 19. Rey Vela (12, Fort Campbell) |
| 8. Noah Duke (7, Ryle) | 20. Keldon Tilley (10, Bardstown) |
| 9. Nathaniel Lawrence (9, Franklin Co) | 21. Hunter Vlach (8, McCracken County) |
| 10. Blake Gamble (11, Johnson Central) | 22. Zlatko Skulijan (9, Hopkinsville) |
| 11. Tristan Garcia (11, Male) | 23. Isander Reyes (11, Valley) |
| 12. Roger Young (12, Meade Co) | 24. Tyree Wilson (11, Fern Creek) |
| 13. Drevon Jones (11, Newport) | |

Returning placers: Joey Roberts 5th @132, Jacob Henley 5th@138, Nathaniel Lawrence 6th @138, Tristan Garcia 8th @ 138

Early round matches to watch: **Round 1:** #6 Roland vs. #10 Garcia. **Round 2:** #7 McManus vs. #9 Gamble.

Quarters: #2 Hanson vs. #4 Henley, #5 Vazquez vs. #11 Duke, #1 Roberts vs. #7 McManus, #3 Oxford vs. #6 Roland

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Noah Duke - yes he is only a 7th grader, but he has beat some pretty good high school kids this season. Plus, he has a good draw (and mustache).

Team title race implications: The semi match between Oxford/Roberts will be huge in the team race, moreso for Woodford. Hanson, who should be waiting in the finals, could add high placement points to the St X team effort.

With Johnson dropping to 138, this makes Roberts the clear favorite here with wins over the top contenders. Hanson, who missed virtually all last season due to a bad shoulder, looks poised to close out his high school career with a high podium finish. With a couple dominant wins over Hanson, will this weekend be 3 in a row for Roberts or will the third time be the charm for Hanson? Looking to follow where his brother left off, Kevin Vazquez should find himself on the podium Saturday night. Also following a family tradition, Chance Oxford is coming back to the weight his brother won a title at last year. We usually see kids dropping a weight class after the growth allowance or at the end of the season, but this year Henley bumped up. Will he be as successful as he was projected at 138?

152 lbs.

Favorite: Zane Brown (10, Male)

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| 2. Cody Huston (12, Cooper) | 14. Donald Evans (12, Pleasure Ridge Park) |
| 3. Derrick Smallwood (11, John Hardin) | 15. Daniel Baker (11, Madison Central) |
| 4. Micah Ervin (9, Union Co) | 16. Nathan Begley (10, Johnson Central) |
| 5. Aaron Tiepe (12, Walton Verona) | 17. Cameron Bixler (10, Franklin Co) |
| 6. Jack Fuller (10, Apollo) | 18. Marik Black (12, Woodford Co) |
| 7. Dax Hays (12, Montgomery Co) | 19. Devon Henley (11, Bullitt East) |
| 8. Colin Stevens (9, Trigg Co) | 20. Myles Harris (10, Tates Creek) |
| 9. Dallas Miles (12, St. Xavier) | 21. Jack Hanes (12, Calloway Co) |
| 10. Kenneth J Sunbom (12, Anderson Co) | 22. Jose Miduel (12, Wayne Co) |
| 11. Isaiah Hale (11, Oldham Co) | 23. Brennon Scott (12, Simon Kenton) |
| 12. Christian Shelby (12, Henry Clay) | 24. Jon Gaudin (10, Trinity (Louisville)) |
| 13. Keaon Taylor (11, Doss) | |

Returning placers: Zane Brown 2nd @132, Cody Huston 2nd @145, Micah Ervin 7th @132, Dallas Miles 4th @145

Early round matches to watch: **Round 2:** #4 Ervin vs. #5 Miles, #7 Hays vs. #8 Stevens. **Quarters:** #2 Huston vs. #4 Ervin, #1 Brown vs. #3 Smallwood, #6 Tiepe vs. #7 Hays.

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Dallas Miles - he is a 3x state placer looking to end his high school career with another placement. Each year he climbs a little bit higher on the podium. If he can get past the early round match up with Ervin, then he will need to get by Huston to make the finals. If he takes a second round loss to Ervin, placement will be tough. Man, what a tough draw.

Team title race implications: High placement for Miles (St. X) and Tiepe (Walton-Verona) is a must if they want to help their team make a run. Ervin doesn't have an easy draw, but should be another solid placer for Union, although bonus points might be hard to come by on his side of the bracket.

Does Zane Brown make the finals 3 years in a row? Our opinion is that Smallwood is the only major threat on his side of the bracket. They meet up in the quarters and it should be a good one. Brown holds the (2-0) lead this season. Can he get the trifecta? Smallwood, who sat out his Sophomore year will be looking to finally get past Brown on his way to a state title. Hopefully Smallwood will be sporting that sweet robe prior to the matchup. We are guessing he is listening to the theme song of Rocky prior to the match. The upper side of the bracket is where it gets messy. Miles faces Ervin 2nd round and the winners gets (ding, ding,ding) Huston, last year's 145lb runner-up. Huston has been on a mission this year. Did we mention Huston also has a pretty bad a&! mustache? It should be Huston vs. the winner of Brown/Smallwood. However, don't look past Miles. We say every year how dangerous he can be. Awesome bracket to watch!!!!

160 lbs.

Favorite: Mason Smith (11, Walton Verona)

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| 2. Dylan Gray (11, Caldwell Co) | 14. Alex Thompson (11, South Oldham) |
| 3. Geordan Blanton (12, Johnson Central) | 15. Antonio Abren (10, Christian Co) |
| 4. Jared Branch (12, Fern Creek) | 16. Tyjeric Williams (11, Valley) |
| 5. Cameron Ward (11, St. Xavier) | 17. Ryan Strunk (12, McCreary Central) |
| 6. Dalton Bell (11, Larue Co) | 18. Griffin Dulak (11, John Hardin) |
| 7. Lucas Carrillo (11, Oldham Co) | 19. Logan Osborne (11, Newport) |
| 8. Isaac Nichols (12, North Hardin) | 20. Noah Kulmer (12, Trinity (Louisville)) |
| 9. Jared Kelsay (10, Scott) | 21. Israel Angeles (12, Woodford Co) |
| 10. Johnny Lee (12, Meade Co) | 22. Malik Cunningham (12, Trigg Co) |
| 11. James Barrie (12, Dixie Heights) | 23. Ty Ezel (12, Madison Southern) |
| 12. Dylan Mays (12, Madison Central) | 24. Tatum Campbell (9, Montgomery Co) |
| 13. Brent Burke (11, Sheldon Clark) | |

Returning placers: Mason Smith 3rd @145, Geordan Blanton 3rd @152, Dylan Gray 5th @160, Jared Branch 5th @145, Lucas Carrillo 7th @160

Early round matches to watch: **Round 2:** #6 Carrillo vs. #10 Lee, #4 Branch vs. #8 Nichols, #7 Bell vs. #9 Kelsay, #3 Gray vs. #11 Barrie. **Quarters:** #2 Blanton vs. #6 Carrillo, #1 Smith vs. #4 Branch, #5 Ward vs. #7 Bell

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Dalton Bell - a true example of some of the chaos with weight changes this season, Bell competed at 138 for the All Star meet, missed much of the season, and when he came back actually wrestled 152 at state duals. He entered the post season at 160 and has a decent draw to get a nice podium finish.

Team title race implications: Smith/Blanton/Ward will all need to add some much needed bonus points to keep their team title hopes alive. The Smith/Blanton winner will give their team a decided advantage between these two teams as they jockey for position on the leaderboard.

This bracket has 5 returning state placers and one state champ (Blanton). Can Smith finally get that elusive state title? We talked about it last year that if you can beat Smith at the state tournament you will win a state title. 2016 Oxford, 2015 Duncan, 2014 Sheffer all got past Smith and won a title. Smith has been on a roll this season. He has only given up one takedown to a KY wrestler and looks determined to win a title. Smith will have to get past Branch in the quarters and the much anticipated match up of Smith/Blanton in the semi's. Blanton is coming off a 3rd place finish last year and a state title run in 2015. Does he have enough to get past Smith and claim his second state tile? Branch started the season wrestling 152 and decided to move up to 160 after losing to Huston and Smallwood. Is the grass greener moving up a weight? The lower half of the bracket is a little more wide open. Gray is coming in with only 1 KY loss which was a major decision to Smith. Can he get past the winner of Ward/Bell to make it into the finals? Once again seeding was not kind to the bracket.

170 lbs.

Favorite: Casey Cornett (12, Simon Kenton)

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| 2. Joe Jackson (10, Johnson Central) | 14. Kaleb Campbell (11, Cooper) |
| 3. Jacob Bratcher (11, Dupont Manual) | 15. Eli Soeder (12, Oldham Co) |
| 4. Raymond Williams (12, North Hardin) | 16. Kaine Garner (11, Valley) |
| 5. Braden Mulcahy (10, Walton Verona) | 17. Dawson Bingham (12, Larue Co) |
| 6. Mathias Ervin (9, Union Co) | 18. Cole Riney (12, Central Hardin) |
| 7. Sam Jenkins (10, North Oldham) | 19. Dakota Santiago (11, Taylor Co) |
| 8. Gavin Williams (12, Madison Central) | 20. Eric Bloh (11, Danville) |
| 9. Jack Lucas (10, Male) | 21. Ethan Tomerlin (8, Fort Campbell) |
| 10. Diion Leavell (11, Christian Co) | 22. Logan Deasel (9, McCracken County) |
| 11. Nathan Prosser (11, McCreary Central) | 23. Dillon Adkins (10, Ashland Blazer) |
| 12. Austin Towles (12, St. Xavier) | 24. Mason Hall (10, South Oldham) |
| 13. Kaleb Oakley (12, Harrison Co) | |

Returning placers: Casey Cornett 1st @170, Raymond Williams 5th @170

Early round matches to watch: **Round 2:** #4 Williams vs. #7 Lucas, #3 Bratcher vs. #5 Mulcahy. **Quarters:** #4 Williams vs. #8 Leavell, #1 Cornett vs. #9 Jenkins, #3 Bratcher vs. #6 Ervin, #10 Williams vs. #2 Jackson

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Braden Mulcahy - he is currently ranked #5 going into the state tournament. The key match will be the 2nd round. If Mulcahy can avenge his 5-3 loss to Bratcher he should put himself into a position to wrestle for a high spot on the podium.

Team title race implications: Mulcahy and Jackson will need to place high if they want to keep the team race close. Yes, another Ervin to score solid placement points for the Braves. Towles is just outside a podium spot; if he can pull out a key win or two it will be big for St. X.

With only 2 returning state placers this bracket is wide open with one exception, Cornett. He is looking to ride off into the sunset with his 2nd state title. Casey is the clear favorite to win this bracket. The bottom half of the bracket will be a battle from the beginning until the end. Ervin will hit the winner of Mulcahy/Bratcher. This will be a crucial match in determining the order of finish on Saturday night. The winner of that mess will likely have to get past Jackson to make the finals. Johnson Central is depending on the points from Jackson to keep their title hopes alive.

182 lbs.

Favorite: Max Andreoni (12, Woodford Co)

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|--|---|
| 2. Kevin Shantz (11, Meade Co) | 14. Caleb Lane (11, Valley) |
| 3. Avery Buckman (12, Union Co) | 15. William Lake (12, Cooper) |
| 4. Elijah Jackson (12, Simon Kenton) | 16. Andrew Vasquez (11, Oldham Co) |
| 5. Roy Bowers (12, Dixie Heights) | 17. Peyton Martin (11, Male) |
| 6. Katayvon Anthony (12, Hopkinsville) | 18. Brendan Becker (12, North Hardin) |
| 7. Andrew Marchal (10, Atherton) | 19. Adam Nauert (10, DeSales) |
| 8. Chase Blanton (10, Harrison Co) | 20. Oscar Martinez (12, Apollo) |
| 9. Don Harris (11, Danville) | 21. Stuart Branson (12, Tates Creek) |
| 10. Matthew Horn (10, Johnson Central) | 22. Jacob Wilkerson (11, Pikeville) |
| 11. Zach Cumella (12, St. Xavier) | 23. Jacob Smith (12, Western Hills) |
| 12. Niko Bussell (9, Christian Co) | 24. Devaughn Richardson' (12, Fern Creek) |
| 13. Zade Hawkins (11, Madison Central) | |

Returning placers: Max Andreoni 2nd @160, Avery Buckman 3rd @170

Early round matches to watch: **Round 2:** #6 Anthony vs. #7 Marchal. **Quarters:** #2 Buckman vs. #10 Horn, #1 Andreoni vs. #5 Bowers, #4 Jackson vs. #6 Anthony, #3 Shantz vs. #8 Blanton

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Katayvon Anthony - he will be our long shot here. Anthony is coming off a loss to Buckman at regionals. Join the club. If Anthony can get past Jackson in the quarters he should be able to place top 4.

Team title race implications: Union County will be leaning on Buckman to rack up some bonus points here. Andreoni has been a bonus point machine all year. Woodford will need these points to stay in contention. Another unfortunate draw as these 2 meet in the semis

182 has two returning state placers. They just happen to be #1 Andreoni and #2 Buckman. The question is, does the Buck stop here? Andreoni is undefeated and has pinned or teched every opponent this year including Buckman. Does the hot streak continue? We all feel that Andreoni is finally going to capture that long awaited state title. Buckman has also been on a war path. He has only had one loss this season. Will he be able to settle the score with Andreoni in the semifinals? The lower half of the bracket has a few more questions of who will make it to the finals. On paper Schantz looks to be the favorite, but Jackson just beat Bowers in the regional finals and has a favorable draw. Can he get past Schantz to reach the finals? We are sure that Bowers would like to get that rematch. You never know, they could see each other on the backside depending on how it all shakes out.

195 lbs.

Favorite: Matt Steven (12, Larue Co)

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| 2. Dalton Jett (12, Meade Co) | 14. Gerald Seeney (11, Scott) |
| 3. Brady Taylor (12, Johnson Central) | 15. Ross Hicks (11, Union Co) |
| 4. Ray Karl Irving (11, Henry Clay) | 16. Andrew Maupin (9, Franklin Co) |
| 5. Kadin Kulmer (10, Trinity (Louisville)) | 17. Justin Voelker (12, St. Xavier) |
| 6. Daniel Kimble (11, Oldham Co) | 18. Keegan Cundiff (11, Dixie Heights) |
| 7. Damorean Travis (11, Jeffersontown) | 19. Brandon Vera (10, Bryan Station) |
| 8. Andrew Varble (12, Woodford Co) | 20. Brad Bailey (11, South Oldham) |
| 9. Allen Anderson (11, Moore) | 21. Dalton Burke (12, Pike Co Central) |
| 10. Nick Owens (12, Hopkinsville) | 22. Justin Gray (12, West Jessamine) |
| 11. Steven Brown (12, Doss) | 23. Michael Walker (11, Whitley Co) |
| 12. Cody Lonkard (11, Ryle) | 24. Jeffrey Covington (12, Valley) |
| 13. David Woods (11, Calloway Co) | |

Returning placers: Matt Steven 3rd @182, Ray Karl Irving 2nd @195, Kadin Kulmer 8th @182, Damorean Travis 7th @220, Daniel Kimble 6th @195

Early round matches to watch: **Round 2:** #3 Taylor vs. #10 Anderson, #2 Jett vs. #9 Woods, #5 Kulmer vs. #8 Varble, #1 Steven vs. #6 Travis. **Quarters:** #1 Steven vs. #7 Kimble, #2 Jett vs. #5 Kulmer.

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Ray Karl Irving is our guy. Irving came into the season as the top ranked guy before the injury. If he is 100%, he could give some guys trouble.

Team title race implications: Voelker could be a wild card at this weight for St X. Could he give them some unexpected points to get them in range of Union? Taylor could put up champ numbers for Johnson Central. Varble and Kimble are the solid placers that have Woodford and Oldham in the hunt.

195 has five returning state placers. Most of the top guys have state tournament experience and will look to shine. Steven has been killing it this year. He enters the state tournament undefeated (55-0). Will he be able to finish the perfect season? He will have to get past the big gun from Johnson Central. Taylor will be looking for a title to finish up his high school wrestling career. The bottom half is also loaded with talent. Jett is the favorite on the lower half but has some very tough guys in his way. He will have to face Kulmer in the quarters which could go either way. Waiting in the semi's will be state runner-up Irving. Recovered from injury, Irving should be ready to compete for a title.

220 lbs.

Favorite: Colby Culver (12, Calloway Co)

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| 2. Lawrence Malala (12, Jeffersontown) | 14. Chandler Watkins (10, Ryle) |
| 3. Trevon Wright (12, John Hardin) | 15. Jack Hill (11, Woodford Co) |
| 4. Alex Roberts (11, Oldham Co) | 16. Mason Boggs (11, Lafayette) |
| 5. Zachariah Jones (10, Central Hardin) | 17. Tim Rolf (10, Campbell Co) |
| 6. RJ Boies (10, Anderson Co) | 18. Tyler Kassinger (11, South Oldham) |
| 7. Jonathan Gregory (10, Wayne Co) | 19. Nathan Justice (11, Scott) |
| 8. Benjamin Deprest (10, St. Xavier) | 20. Patrick Dumire (10, Valley) |
| 9. Bryan Pratt (10, Meade Co) | 21. Jordan Akihary (10, Madison Central) |
| 10. Jacob Peters (12, Dixie Heights) | 22. Tyler Edwards (10, Southern) |
| 11. Alex Horn (10, Johnson Central) | 23. Dakota Putman (10, Sheldon Clark) |
| 12. Seth Anderson (11, McCreary Central) | 24. Gage Gray (10, Fern Creek) |
| 13. Ben Fooks (12, Bourbon Co) | |

Returning placers: Colby Culver 4th @220, Alex Horn 8th @195

Early round matches to watch: **Round 2:** #2 Malala vs. #9 Pratt, #4 Jones vs. #10 Peters. **Quarters:** #1 Culver vs. #2 Wright, #5 Roberts vs. #8 Duprest, #2 Malala vs. #7 Gregory, #5 Jones vs. #6 Boies

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Alex Horn - one of two returning state placers he can make a deep run in a less proven field

Team title race implications: Deprest and Horn are really the only guys in the team title hunt here. Horn is a returning placer, but doesn't have the most favorable draw. JC will be counting on placement points from him.

The first few weeks of the season saw a lot of shake-ups in the 220 weight class as two of the favorites did not compete this season. Junior National All American and top ranked Brandon Reed transferred schools and second ranked Chance Orr decided to focus on his academics this winter. That left the gate wide open for a few kids to seize the moment and go for a title. Culver has been the man all season, but a few guys have dropped down from heavyweight and are looking to challenge for that top spot. The draw worked out nicely here and the top kids are separated quite well and should set up for some great matches throughout the bracket.

285 lbs.

Favorite: Landin Jones (12, North Oldham)

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|---|---|
| 2. Hunter Ruber (12, Walton Verona) | 14. Nic Lolli (11, Scott Co) |
| 3. Kairus Washington (11, Dixie Heights) | 15. Logan Johnson (12, Montgomery Co) |
| 4. Justus Williams (12, Madison Southern) | 16. Gavynn Davis (11, McCracken County) |
| 5. Byron Pierce (10, Johnson Central) | 17. Marcelo Sierra (11, Tates Creek) |
| 6. Christian Denney (10, Wayne Co) | 18. Cody Melton (10, Moore) |
| 7. David Nikolao (12, Fort Campbell) | 19. Bradyn Robertson (11, Central) |
| 8. Payton Snyder (11, Union Co) | 20. Nate Humphrey (11, Owensboro) |
| 9. Jonah Welch (12, Danville) | 21. Gavin Thomas (12, Bardstown) |
| 10. Zeph Ragsdale (11, Fern Creek) | 22. Connor McCubbin (11, South Oldham) |
| 11. Dalton Holiday (12, Simon Kenton) | 23. Hunter Elkins (12, Oldham Co) |
| 12. JT Daniels (9, Newport) | 24. Dejuan Watkins (9, DeSales) |
| 13. Isaac Marrett (11, St. Xavier) | |

Returning placers: Landin Jones 2nd @285, Karius Washington 7th @220, Hunter Ruber 4th @285, Justus Williams 3rd @285

Early round matches to watch: **Round 1:** #8 Welch vs. #9 Snyder **Round 2:** #3 Ruber vs. #10 Marrett, #6 Pierce vs. #8 Welch. **Quarters:** #3 Ruber vs. #6 Pierce, #2 Washington vs. #4 Williams, #1 Jones vs. #5 Nikolao.

Kid who might out wrestle their ranking: Jonah Welch - preseason top 5, Welch suffered an injury in the fall that was expected to end his wrestling career. He made it back and if he is completely healthy he could challenge for a spot in the top half of the medal stand.

Team title race implications: Again Walton and Johnson battling head to head for a spot in the semis and big team points. St X also has a wrestler in the picture here that could provide much needed placement points. He also hit Ruber early, so lots of head-to-head matchups in the team race at heavy.

The first and last question here is what is going on with Jones? Rumors swirling about an injury, but as I type this there is no reported change in the bracket by KHSAA. So we assume he is healthy and ready to wrestle. Will he be 100%? If so, he is the favorite. He's been a top contender for the last few years, but the bottom half of that bracket is loaded (Jones, Washington, Williams). Washington comes in hot with a win over Ruber (great match) and near upset of Jones at the Mustang. But his draw is brutal. To win the title he will have to beat #4 Williams (last year 3rd), #1 Jones (last year 2nd), and #3 Ruber (last year 4th). He is good enough, but that is a lot for a heavyweight.

Team Champions

Favorite: Union Co (3 finalists, 3 champs, 11 total placers)

2. St. Xavier	(2 finalists, 0 champs, 7 placers)	14. Dixie Heights	(2 placers)
3. Walton Verona	(3 finalists, 2 champs, 8 placers)	15. Campbell Co	(2 finalists, 1 champ, 2 placers)
4. Woodford Co	(3 finalists, 2 champs, 6 placers)	16. North Oldham	(1 finalist, 1 champ, 3 placers)
5. Johnson Central	(1 finalists, 0 champs, 5 placers)	17. Scott	(2 placers)
6. Oldham Co	(0 finalists, 0 champs, 6 placers)	18. Male	(1 finalist, 1 champ, 1 placer)
7. Simon Kenton	(1 finalist, 1 champ, 4 placers)	19. Cooper	(1 finalist, 2 placers)
8. John Hardin	(0 finalists, 0 champs, 4 placers)	20. Calloway Co	(1 finalist, 1 champ, 1 placer)
9. Madison Central	(0 finalists, 0 champs, 4 placers)	21. Fern Creek	(2 placers)
10. Wayne Co	(1 finalist, 1 champ, 4 placers)	22. Taylor Co	(1 finalist, 1 placer)
11. Larue Co	(1 finalist, 1 champ, 3 placers)	23. Ryle	(2 placers)
12. Meade Co	(2 finalists, 2 placers)	24. Henry Clay	(2 placers)
13. Apollo	(1 finalist, 3 placers)	25. Jeffersontown	(1 finalist, 2 placers)

Union County put up a dominant performance last season with 3 finalists, 2 champs, 7 placers and nearly a 50 point margin of victory. This year doesn't appear to be any different with even more kids likely on the podium; I think they will exceed that 50 point margin this time around. The real question is who will finish with a team trophy. It looks like St Xavier, Walton-Verona, and Woodford County could be in a very tight battle for that runner-up spot. Johnson Central isn't too far back of that group, but more in a third tier with Oldham County and Simon Kenton. There appears to be a distinct separation in finalist firepower after Woodford County. If anyone falters for the teams in the 2-4 slots and Oldham County can find a way to get one or two wrestlers into the finals they could surprise a lot of people.

New faces into the top 10 are Walton-Verona, John Hardin, and Madison Central. Very exciting to see these teams develop. Small school Walton has a solid core of kids along with a tremendous MS club team that should feed the HS team well for the next few years. John Hardin has a great young coach in Josh Johnson who I think is one of the best technicians in the state. Expect them to continue getting better and better. Madison Central is a little more of a surprise. We tend to see smaller numbers out of Madison County, but high quality. They seem to be keeping the kids in the program and getting better leading to success at the HS level.

Keep trackwrestling refreshed on your phone. With such a tight race for the trophy spots after Union County, many fans could be on the edge of their seat through the end of the night. And we won't even have to wait until midnight for the trophy presentation.