

2019
Preview

WRESTLING

Individuals, teams
ready to hit the mats in
championship questsMust-see
matchesDEC. 13-14
PANTHER HOLIDAY
CLASSIC

In addition to 10 local squads and some top AAA teams, the field at Mount Aloysius features Ohio, Virginia and Colorado schools.

JAN. 7

FOREST HILLS AT
WESTMONT HILLTOP

After a pair of barn-burners last year, this one is a can't-miss dual meet.

JAN. 10-11
MID-WINTER
MAYHEM

The first-year tournament at Indiana (Pa.) is going big, with 36 teams from across the state.

JAN. 21

WESTMONT HILLTOP
AT CHESTNUT RIDGE

The Laurel Highlands Athletic Conference title likely will be at stake as the perennial powers meet.

JAN. 24-25
THOMAS TOURNEY
AT BEDFORD

Nine local teams will get one final big tuneup before the postseason begins.

3 OF A
KIND

Trio of Division I recruits lead the way

Pugh listens to
momma, picks
App State

Sometimes a guy just needs to listen to his mother. That's what Tristan Pugh did when it came time to make a decision about his college commitment. The Shanksville-Stonycreek student, who took sixth in the PIAA tournament last season wrestling for Berlin Brothersvalley as part of a co-op, took his mom's advice before announcing he plans to wrestle for Division I Appalachian State in Boone, North Carolina. Pugh could have waited until later in his senior year to see what other offers came along, but Appalachian State wanted an answer from him right away. Berlin coach Sal Lascari told him to wait, but Jennifer Pugh had other ideas. "There was some pressure," Pugh recalled. "Sal told me not to; my mom told me to - and you're always supposed to listen to your momma." Whatever she and his coaches have been telling him has been working. Pugh enters his senior season with a career record of 113-21 and is coming off a sixth-place finish in the state. He expects to wrestle 145 this season and 149 for App State. "They've got it going on right now," he said of the Mountaineers. "They have won four SoCon titles in a row. They're winning matches. They've got good guys coming in. It just kind of looks like home, honestly."

Stephens sees
Columbia as
smart choice

After growing up in tiny Meyersdale, Jalen Stephens wasn't sure if he was ready for New York City. One visit to Columbia University eased all of those fears. "It's in the city, but if you're on campus, you don't feel like you're in the middle of New York City," said Stephens, who recently announced his plans to wrestle for the Lions. "It's its own little rectangle. You don't have to take a subway or anything to get there." Stephens, a 285-pound junior who placed third in PIAA Class AA last season, also looked at Princeton, Penn and Bucknell. "I was definitely looking into Ivy League schools, and class sizes were a big thing," said Stephens, who is 63-11 in two seasons with the Red Raiders. "Most of my classes have 12 to 20 kids in it, and that's what they'll be like there." He wants to study biology and or bio chemistry before going to school to become a physician assistant. Columbia should offer a boost there as well. "You get to shadow their team doctor, who is one of the best orthopedics in New York City," he said. "That's a good thing to be around." Stephens believes he'll be able to learn on the mat as well. "I love the coaches," he said. "They have two heavyweight coaches. That's important, to have."

Cassidy wants
title on way to
George Mason

Kaden Cassidy has his sights set on a PIAA championship - the Bedford senior has placed third in the state twice and had another season wiped out by injury - but he's not looking for an easy path to a crown. "Hopefully I can get it done this year no matter who's there," said Cassidy, who has already signed to wrestle for Division I George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. "I'm not going to run away. I'm not the type of kid to drop a weight class. I've never done that. There's always someone out there that is good." Cassidy certainly fits into that category. He's 68-7 in his career and is ranked 12th nationally by FloWrestling at 138 pounds. He plans to compete at the weight all season, and George Mason coach Frank Beasley hasn't put any restrictions on Cassidy. "They honestly don't care where I go (this season), but they swear up and down that I'll be a 149-pounder by the end of my freshman season," Cassidy said. "I'm taller, so if I gain any muscle, I'll be a 149- or 157-pounder." Having his college plans solidified won't change Cassidy's mindset. "A little bit of pressure is off, but I can't wait to get on the mat," he said. "I've been practicing a lot harder. I don't want to get out of high school and think that I should have worked harder. I'm just putting it all out there."

Eyes on
the
prize

TEAM RACES

- Chestnut Ridge will continue to be the favorite in District 5 and the LHAC until someone dethrones the Lions. Coach **Josh Deputy**, who takes over for **Greg Lazor**, says Westmont might be the conference favorite.
- Coach **Matt Beaujon's** Hilltoppers return 13 starters - including a half-dozen regional qualifiers - from a Westmont Hilltop team that captured its second consecutive District 6-AA dual meet title. They'll be favored to repeat.
- North Star should set the pace in the WestPAC. Coach **Tim Rosa** has a strong group of seniors and some talented youngsters that gives him solid depth.

Fresh
facesLOGAN REFFNER
North Star

No. 52 on PA Power Wrestling's Top Incoming Freshman Report, he was fourth in the junior high state tournament last year.

CALAN BOLLMAN
Chestnut Ridge

A four-time Pennsylvania Junior Wrestling medalist, Bollman will push some of the top wrestlers in the region - if he can find a way to break into a loaded Lions lineup.



DUSTIN FLINN

Forest Hills

A two-time state medalist in junior high, he is ranked as the No. 60 freshman in the state.

AUSTIN WAGNER

Penn Cambria

Being a freshman 220-pounder is never easy, but Wagner has the skills to hang with more experienced wrestlers.

ERIC KNOPSNYDER/FOR THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT