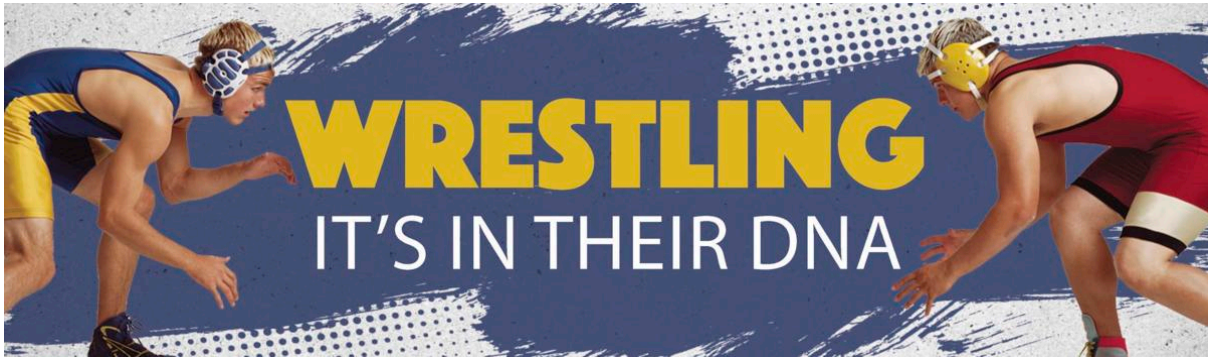




Teays Valley wrestlers show what buckeye wrestling is all about

By KORI STEWART Circleville Herald Sports Editor Mar 11, 2022 Updated Mar 16, 2022



COLUMBUS— A high school wrestling tournament can be an overwhelming experience for the uninitiated. There are multiple bouts happening at once, teams mixing and mingling on the perimeter and no schedule or structure to be found at first glance.

“At first, especially if you’re used to team sports, you walk into a tournament where there’s four mats going,” OHSAA Senior Manager of Officiating & Sport Administration Tyler Brooks said ahead of the state championship this weekend.

“Or you go to [states] and you’ve got three divisions running simultaneously and you’re flipping through a program trying to track [what’s going on], it’s overwhelming at first.”

The sport itself is a beautiful dance between elite athletes; a head-to-head battle of strength and will and intensity.

Wrestlers have no teammates to hide behind, no play-callers to fall back on. Once the two competitors are inside the circle and shake hands, it is up to them to handle everything.

“I think they’d be the first to tell you they’re a different breed, but it comes from a place of passion and intensity. I mean, the sport is centered around self-sacrifice and discipline for months on end,” Brooks explained.

This season, that self-sacrifice and discipline has led 672 high school wrestlers to the promised land: the 2022 OHSAA Wrestling State Tournament at the Schottenstein Center.

The Schottenstein Center, or the Schott as it is more commonly called, first held the state wrestling championship in 1999. The Schott continued to host the tournament until 2020 when the event was canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Still under COVID restrictions, the 2021 state tournament was held at three different Columbus-area high schools with limited spectators.

None of the five Teays Valley wrestlers competing at states this year have competed at the Schott.

Senior Zander Graham and junior Gunner Havens both qualified for the 2020 tournament but never got to stand under the center's bright lights.

Last year, Havens and fellow juniors Joey Thurston and Camden McDanel competed at the 2021 state tournament at Hilliard Darby High School.

Now facing the pomp and circumstance of the Schottenstein, the five Vikings look to put their stamp on the state championship.

In Ohio, making a statement at the state wrestling championship is a big deal. Like Texas high schools and football, Ohio high schools take wrestling seriously.

The traditions and strategy of amateur wrestling get passed on from father to son, from friend to friend and permeates the culture of high school sports in the Buckeye State.

"It's just a really endearing community in Ohio... because it seems like wrestlers go on to become coaches and become officials. And then there's just this tight-knit community for such a large sport," Brooks said.

"That's basically every conversation me and my dad have, it's strictly wrestling. My sister actually gets so tired of it. Cause she's like, 'when are we not going to talk about wrestling in the family?'" Graham said on Tuesday.

Most Teays Valley wrestlers come from families that have a wrestling background. Thurston's dad, Bobby, was a two-time state qualifier for Teays Valley in the 1990s and Havens' dad, Chad, coached wrestling when Havens first started.

The wrestling community is strong in Ohio, over 600 schools in the state participate in wrestling and about 330 of those are represented at this year's state championship.

Over three days, the community will come together in Columbus to celebrate the rich history of the world's oldest sport and its presence in the state.

"Ohio has a place among the best wrestling states in the nation. When you look at the depth of wrestling that we have I think Ohio definitely holds its own," Brooks said.

2022 OHSAA State Wrestling Championship: Day 1



Havens at states

Kori Stewart

Gunner Havens before his first match

Friday night results

The Vikings went 4-1 in the first round of the state tournament Friday night.

Junior Gunner Havens quickly pinned his opponent in the first period, continuing his season-long game plan of fast pins.

Senior Kadin Walls had the one Teays Valley loss in the first round. Walls faced a No. 2 seed and struggled in the first period, giving up eight points.

The second period wasn't any easier for Walls, he suffered took a nearfall before being pinned 3:01 into the bout.

Fellow senior Zander Graham won his match with a major decision of 14-6 in his first state championship appearance.

Junior Camden McDanel, who placed second at last year's state championship, won his first match by pin in the first period. McDanel is expected to make it back to the 190 weight-class final.

Junior Joey Thurston had an exciting first go at this year's state tournament. Thurston faced off against a senior from Whitmer and struggled to find a rhythm early in the bout.

After staying scoreless in the first period, Thurston gave up two points on a reversal before escaping for one point. Heading into the third period, it was clear Thurston needed to do something big to pull off the win.

Thurston wasted no time in throwing a big shot, pinning his opponent 21 seconds into the third period.

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Thurston at States

Kori Stewart

Joey Thurston pinned his first opponent in the third period.

During Walls' consolation round match, his teammates watched on from the stands, cheering for him to make it into Saturday's competition.

Walls fought for the full bout. After scoring first in the match, Walls went into the second period up 2-0. He struggled in the middle frame, giving up five points and earning zero.

In the third period, Walls showed true grit in his determination to keep going. Late in the period, Walls closed the gap to a couple of points, but one final takedown from his opponent, meant Walls' high school wrestling came to an end on Friday night.

"I'm proud of myself, I didn't give up," Walls said after the bout.

Even with a final loss, Walls ends his wrestling season on a high note as a state qualifier.

The tournament continues through Sunday night as the OHSAA looks for the top wrestling in 14 weight-classes and three divisions.