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CLASS 3A



The West High wrestlers broke down their championship chances in November and said then that they felt they had the components to challenge Waverly-Shell Rock for the Class 3A state title.

The Trojans still feel the same entering the state meet.

"I think we're probably pretty close to where we thought we'd be," West coach Mark Reiland said. "Waverly has some kids performing better than what I thought they would, and we've got some kids performing better than I thought they would, and (Des Moines) Roosevelt has kids that are better than we thought."

West could be in the mix for its third state title Saturday night if things fall into place. With a trio of top-ranked wrestlers who have stood on top of the medal podium in the past -- Dylan Carew (140), Nick Moore (152) and Derek St. John (160) -- West figures to be in the trophy chase. Throw in talented freshmen Jack Hathaway (103), Gradey Gambrell (125) and Justin Koethe (135) and four other qualifiers, and the Trojans might have enough to be in the race for the gold trophy.

"We've got to wrestle the way we're capable," Reiland said. "If we do, we're going to put a bunch of guys through to the quarters, to the semis and to the finals. If we don't, it doesn't really matter because somebody's going to."

City High likely won't be in contention for a team trophy with only three qualifiers. But the Little Hawks have a realistic chance of putting all three -- seniors Jimmy Lazaro (119), Stephen Blayer (130) and Kevin Harp (heavyweight) -- on the medal stand.

Blayer placed seventh last year at 119 and has been wrestling better since a slip in January. Lazaro's wide-open style could cause fits for opponents who haven't wrestled him before. And aside from a stumble in the Mississippi Valley Conference semifinals, heavyweights haven't gotten a handle on Harp's leg-riding skills.

CLASS 2A

West Liberty's Tomas Lira and Williamsburg's Austin Blythe are trying to take care of unfinished business from last year, and Solon's James Morris is trying to make amends from an early exit last February.

Lira's remarkable run ended in the 189-pound finals last season while Blythe fell short in his bid to become the first freshman heavyweight champion in state history.

Lira is 31-2 and ranked fourth entering this year's tournament. Both of his losses came against Stewart Holloway of West Burlington Notre Dame.

Blythe is 42-1 and ranked No. 1 in 2A. His only loss came against West Branch's Kyle Kober, the No. 1

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heavyweight in 1A.

Morris went 0-2 in last year's tournament, but the Solon junior 215-pounder hasn't lost since. He's 36-0 and ranked third in 2A.

West Liberty's Javier Rendon is ranked fifth at heavyweight and has been prepped for the state meet with a season-long series of run-ins with Kober.

Williamsburg freshman J.C. Vercande could be somebody to watch at 103 pounds. The Raiders have had a history of performing well in the early rounds of the tournament in recent years and Vercande has 38 victories.

CLASS 1A

Will this be the year Kober gets to the top step of the medal stand? The West Branch heavyweight has been close the past two years, losing in the finals as a sophomore and placing fourth last year. He's 40-0 this year as a senior and is the highest returning place-winner in Class 1A.

Kober has been battle-tested this season with four wins against Rendon and a victory against Blythe on his resume.

-- Andy Hamilton

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