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## Uphill climb ahead for 2-time defending 3A champ I.C. West

DES MOINES — A team with four defending state champions likely to repeat, and a fifth owning state gold, is usually considered a lock for a state wrestling title.

Instead of planning a victory celebration or making room in the trophy case, however, the Iowa City West Trojans face an uphill battle to win a third straight traditional state team title.

The quest begins Thursday in the first round of the Class 3A state wrestling tournament at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines. The 1A and 2A tournaments begin today with 1A starting at 1 p.m. and 2A at 6 p.m.

On paper, the 3A crown is certainly top-ranked Waverly-Shell Rock's to lose. The Go-Hawks' 13 state qualifiers and top-5 national ranking almost dwarfs the eight qualifiers for the Trojans, who are also ranked nationally.

"To think you could have five guys in the lineup who won state titles while Waverly is favored is pretty hard to understand," West Coach Mark Reiland said. "Waverly is very balanced and very strong. I'm sure in the back of (my wrestlers') minds they're looking for a sliver of hope that they can pull it off."

The Trojans boast defending state champions in brothers Nate and Nick Moore, Derek St. John and Grant Gambrall. Dylan Carew, ranked second at 130, won the 103-pound title as a freshman and placed seventh last year. Add Jeremy Garvin, who was fourth last year, and West returns every placewinner and most of the 134 points from its 2007 state title team.

"They have so much firepower," Waverly Coach Rick Caldwell said.

"Their core group of kids are going to score a ton of points."

Nate Moore and Gambrall, signed to wrestle at the University of Iowa next season, will try to win consecutive titles at 125 and 171, respectively. Nick Moore (140) and St. John (152) are ranked first, two weights above their championship wins a year ago. Garvin was ranked second at 160 but dropped to 152 before district,

"If eight guys do what's best for them then maybe we do have a shot," Reiland said. "We're going to have to ask them to get bonus points."

The key could be emphasizing the individual aspect of the sport.

"Coach Reiland, both years, he just said take care of your own business and if things fall into place they fall into place," Nate Moore said about the team's approach to two titles.

"That's what we're going to do this year. Do our own thing, take care of our business and we'll see what happens."

Two potential match-ups Reiland has a close eye on pit top-ranked Trojans against second-rated Go-Hawks in the quarterfinals. West could help itself with wins from Nate Moore and Gambrall over Matt Kittleson and Lee Averhoff. That would be part of a potentially challenging quarterfinal round for Waverly.

Even if the Trojans keep winning, they'll need the rest of the field to pitch in.

"You've got to hope for a little bit of help from other teams and the close matches don't go their way," Reiland said. "Hope something bad happens that they kind of get the snowball effect."

Reiland admits the feeling isn't like the last two years when West swept the traditional and state duals titles.

"It's a little different than usual," Gambrall said. "I don't think it will effect us too much."

Caldwell said the team race could mirror last year's, when the Go-Hawks started strong but West took control late for its second-straight title.

"This is one of the best teams in the country," Caldwell said. "They certainly are not underdogs. It's going to be a dogfight."

The Trojans are used to winning, individually and as a team.

Solace wouldn't accompany a close runner-up finish.

"Second place sucks," Nate Moore said.

"It's hard to know how I'm going to feel because nothing has happened yet, There's a whole tournament to wrestle."

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