

**The Roddy Report
2007-2008 AAA Preview**

“The Real Sweet 16”

by Chris Bruton

It's that time of the year again. The leaves are changing and there is frost on the ground every other morning. It is starting to get dark earlier and earlier each night. In rooms all over the state, young men are conditioning, training, and drilling. The smell of bleach fills the room; puddles of sweat can be seen scattered randomly all over the mat. Oh yes, it must be wrestling season.

As we look ahead to the 2007-2008 season, I thought we should kick things off by recognizing some young men who tasted success last year and returned this year to continue their legacy in this great state of Georgia. That is the purpose of this report. My hope is that coaches, parents, family, and friends will take the time to sit back and read about their teams, and wrestlers of interest. I hope that this report will inform you about the world of AAA wrestling and motivate you to be more involved this season.

To the wrestlers and coaches: Use this report as a form of motivation. Whether you are predicted to make the finals or only qualify, use the information in this report to set your own goals...and surpass them. The “Roddy Report” is not a personal attack on any wrestler or any team. It is simply an organization of data and some silly predictions. To quote the great Bob Berg:

*“Do not (**I repeat, do not!!!!**) take it seriously; do not put it up on your bulletin board with a note to the effect that ‘{Roddy} thinks you guys stink!’; do not use it as motivation to prove me wrong (Rest assured, I am wrong a whole bunch when it comes to the wrestling predictions biz, so I don’t need to see any more proof). But, feel free to make me look bad by performing at your ultimate level, both personally and as teams, to make folks at State stand up and notice. I promise you that I won’t mind a bit.”*

This is my first attempt at a preseason report. I claim to be accurate in my information; however, I'm sure that mistakes have been made. With that, I will conclude by saying, “Enjoy the report. Good luck this season. This is going to be a heck of a year.”

Team: **GILMER COUNTY (Region 7AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#1** (AAA 3rd Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Danyhul Becker (103- SQ), Luke Mosley (112 – 3rd), Ethan Gudger (125- SQ), Dale Becker (119– SQ), Mikey Mooney

(130– State Placer), Michael Fox (145- 3rd), Lewis Hensley (152 – SQ), David Snider (160 – 2nd), William Coker (285 – SQ)

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Cole Lambert, Hunter Barnes (Kids State Champ), Sawyer Pettit (Kids State Champ), Landon Bramlett, Wesley Nestor (Kids State Champ 2006)

A Quick Comment: Gilmer County is now the elite team in AAA. They are like the top-tier college football teams in the respect that they don't rebuild; they reload. After losing quality wrestlers Ricky Blankenship, Joshua Snider, T.G. Bond, David Riddle, you would expect to see this team looking for some answers to these newfound "holes" in the lineup. Before the previously mentioned four could even accept their diplomas and throw their graduation caps, **Coach Sam Snider** had boys wrestling in the off-season, more than ready to fill those spots.

Gilmer's line up should look a lot like last year's with the exception of their graduates.

State qualifier **Danyhul Becker** is one of the favorites at 103. He was giving up a lot of weight and strength last year; now he's a year stronger and wiser. Everyone who placed last year has gone to other weight classes with the exception of Wesley Forrester (Lumpkin County) and maybe Alex Wendell (South Effingham). Expect Danyhul to be in or near the finals.

Luke Mosley is the favorite at 112; anyone who saw him in February knows that he is the "real deal." The 112-pound weight class was one of the most difficult in AAA last year; still, Mosley placed fourth behind Blaine Harvey (West Laurens), Shane Summerlin (Benedictine), and Joe Denova (Columbus). With those guys at 119 or 125 this year and Mosley staying at 112, expect Luke to be wrestling for 1st and 2nd in February.

Dropping from 125 to 119 this year, **Ethan Gudger** should be stronger at the lower weight class. Even at 125 last year, Gudger was still competitive while wrestling light. I know Coach Snider expects big things from him at 119 this February. The 119-pound weight class will be one of the toughest in AAA, but to think that Gudger cannot place is out of the question.

The very tough **Dale Becker** is a definite placer at 125; part of his very impressive resume is a victory over the two-time state champion Justin Martin (Cass) at State Duals last year. Becker has the tools to go far in his bracket. After getting beat by the state champion D.J. Heard (Carrollton) in the quarterfinals, Dale could not get the "mojo" going in the consolation rounds and was beaten by Trey Henson of Apalachee (6th). He should "right the ship" this year and be on the podium where he belongs. Becker will be in the running for the state title along with Justin Martin (Cass), Michael Parker (Blessed Trinity), and Colby Yates (West Hall).

At this point, **Cole Lambert** and **Cody Bollinger** are unknowns. However, both of these young men should qualify and score points at Traditional. Coach Snider never puts a bad

wrestler on the mat, so while we may not know much about these young men now, we could be singing their praises in February.

Gilmer's middleweights **Mikey Mooney** and **Michael Fox** should be at the top of the list of contenders for their weight classes in 2008. Mooney could be at 135 or 140 and will be one of the favorites at either weight. Fox should improve on an impressive 3rd place finish last year; he's at the top of my list for contenders at 145. Mikey will be in a battle against a Cass or South Effingham wrestler at 140 for the title; Chase Lackey (Cass) and Robbie Collum (South Effingham) would make worthy finals opponents if they certify at that weight class. Fox should be looking toward Columbus for his major competition with Sefan Smith (Lagrange) looking set for the finals.

Lewis Hensley will qualify and score points for the Bobcats. He is a solid technical wrestler and has an outside chance at placing this year. Expect Lewis to be at 152 or 160; either weight class gives Hensley a good shot at the podium.

After finishing 2nd last year at 160, **David Snider** will finally win the state title that has eluded him for the past three years. Every season he's been at the top of the list of contenders for his weight class. This year, David is all by himself at 171 and is a candidate for the Most Outstanding Wrestler honor in AAA. His finals opponent from last year, Tyler Faulkner (Henry County), has graduated, and no one in the 171-pound weight class will be able to match the talent of this young man in 2008.

At heavy, **William Coker** has to be one of the frontrunners after a good performance at traditional last year. He went further in the bracket than a few of the defending placers (including one AAAA placer) from 2007. So much talent from last year has graduated and left William with little competition in the 2007-2008 season. Coker is has a very legitimate shot at the finals this year.

Hunter Barnes at 152 and **Sawyer Pettit** at 189 are not your average freshmen. Barnes is a four-time Kid's State placer with a runner-up and a championship finish. Pettit is a two-time Kid's State placer who won the championship last year. I would not be surprised to see either on the podium in February.

Gilmer could very well be in the finals at 103, 112, 125, 140, 145, 171, and 285. Also, the Bobcats could place at 119, and possibly 152, 160 and 189. Yes, that is seven finalists and four placers. Naturally, this is a best case scenario for Coach Snider; but if it happened, I, for one, would not be surprised. This is not trying to build Gilmer into something that they're not; it is simply giving respect to a team that is truly the elite in AAA.

I think that a more realistic prediction would be finalist at 112, 171, and 285 with placers at 103, 119, 125, 140, and 145. The rest of the weight classes could all go 2-2 or 3-2 and score points. Expect Gilmer to send 14 to Gwinnett and for all 14 to perform well. Either way, Gilmer will have enough points to win the team title.

Don't let Coach Snider fool you; Gilmer is a team ready to embarrass the rest of AAA. They simply have too much firepower in a dual or traditional tournament. It looks like those lightning singlets will reign again in 2008.

Team: **CASS (Region 6AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#2** (AAA 2nd Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Justin Martin (119-3rd), Damon Cadle (130- 1st), Chase Lackey (140- 5th), Michael Gordon (145-5th), Stevie Timm (152-5th), Hunter Dothard (160- SQ), Joe Salvatore (171-5th)

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Mason Martin (Kids State Champ), Preston Berrong, Chase Payne, Jason Evans (AAAA Runner-Up 2006), T.J. Mays (2006 SQ at 171)

A Quick Comment: Following the Traditional Tournament last year, it looked like **Coach Jason Faklaris** and his Colonels would be the favorites in 2007-2008. Spenser Thomas and Greg Magee were both coming off 2nd place finishes and were the only wrestlers graduating. In the months that followed, Cass saw Peter and Lucas Mosher, placing 3rd and 6th respectively, leave for Cobb County and Nick Cordell, a solid 215-pounder who was one match from placing, transfer to Sonoraville. These exits left Cass with a lot of holes and not a lot of answers. Cass will rely heavy on senior leadership to see if they can carry the Colonels to the "Promised Land."

Cass will probably qualify nine to ten for the state tournament. **Mason Martin** will be solid at 103 or 112 and should place at state. A lot of the 103-pound weigh class's talent from last year is gone, but Mason still has to navigate through a tough field that includes Danyhul Becker (Gilmer County), Alex Wendell (South Effingham), and Wesley Forrester (Lumpkin County) if he wants to follow in his brother's footsteps as a state champion.

At 119 or 125, **Justin Martin** should be one of the favorites to win the title. Martin's loss to Michael Parker of Blessed Trinity in the semifinals last year and ended any hope of being a four time state champion. This season, Dale Becker (Gilmer County), who always gives Justin problems, Michael Parker (Blessed Trinity), and Colby Yates (West Hall) will all stand between Martin and state title number three.

Damon Cadle is a force at 130 if he can certify that low, or at 135 if he cannot. Damon had a very impressive victory over Nikita Zhukov in the finals last year, winning 9-5 over the defending AAAA state champion. Cadle has solidified himself as one of the top wrestlers in AAA and is definitely in good shape to acquire championship number three this year.

At this point, **Chase Lacky, Michael Gordon, and Stevie Timm** are not in control of their own destiny. The scale at Coosa Valley Tech will determine where these guys will place. The fear in the Cass camp is that these three will certify at the same weight creating a “log jam” and will leave one of them out of the line-up. Hopefully Cass will have a little luck, and these boys will be separated. The good news is that all three can place at whatever weight they certify. Lackey, Gordon, and Timm, who all placed fifth at state last year, all have an outside chance at the finals this year.

Joe Salvatore is a great athlete coming off a fifth place finish last year with his only two losses coming from Josh Snider of Gilmer (3rd). Joe is looking to improve off his showing last year and to be on top of the podium in February. Salvatore went to numerous camps over the summer and is really looking crisp so far this season.

T.J. Mays is a mystery at this point. He was a state qualifier in 2006 at the 171-pound weight class, missing a medal by only one match. Mays won the Landmark Christian Tournament last December in his only appearance at the varsity level. He could be at 189 or 215 and has a chance to place at both.

Jason Evans will be a great addition to this line-up. He was a state runner-up at 119 pounds in 2006 for Woodland High School (AAAA) and wrestled very tough at 135 last year, but due to a transfer, he must sit until January. Evans has a world of talent; the question now is what weight will he certify at? Currently, he weights about 150 pounds. At that weight, he only throws even more problems into that 135 to 152 range that Cass is already too “jammed” at.

Preston Berrong, Chase Payne, Cody Coleman, Alex Kanocz, and Tony Marcellini all have the opportunity to make the varsity team and because 6AAA is one of the smaller regions in the state; it’s not out of the question to see a few of these inexperienced guys make it to Gwinnett. The Colonels hope that these young men will qualify and avoid “two and outs” in February.

Team: **SOUTH EFFINGHAM (Region 3AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#3** (AAA 7th Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Alex Wendell (103- 5th), Brad Boyd (112- SQ), Josh Jameson (119- SQ), Jason Screen (130- SQ), Robbie Collum (135- 3rd), Chad Tucker (145- SQ), Zac Nelson (160-SQ), Adam Morse (189-3rd), Zane Nelson (215- SQ)

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Cameron Collum (Freshman)

A Quick Comment: Coming out of Region 3AAA, I can foresee the Mustangs qualifying 14 with the great coaching job **Coach Onorato** is doing down south. South Effingham will be a really tough dual team because of the big scorers they have available. As tough

as they will be in a dual format, I believe they make a tougher traditional team if their weight certifications line up the way they hope. The Mustangs have eight really solid guys. They were the little team that nobody talked about in 2007; ask Columbus and West Laurens, teams that S.E. lost to by only one point each at State Duals, if they are aware of the Mustangs now.

South Effingham has four studs that could make it to the finals. If **Alex Wendell** can make it back to 103, he would undoubtedly have to be the favorite; everyone who finished ahead of Alex in February has moved to other weight classes. One possible scenario for the 103-pound finals could be a Wendell v. Becker (of Gilmer County) or Forrester (Lumpkin). However, Alex is more likely to be at 112 or 119 where he will be equally tough but not as physically dominant.

Chad Tucker was a state qualifier at 145 last year and the rumor this year is that he might certify at 135 for 2007. If this is true, I could possibly see him in a semifinal or final match against Zhukov or Mooney (if they can get there as well). At 135, Tucker is a nice bet for a finals appearance. Last year at duals, he defeated Germany Coleman of West Laurens, the eventual 145-pound state champion. Tucker has big match experience and the tools to win it all.

Robbie Collum had an impressive 3rd place finish last year; his only loss was to Walter Blash of West Laurens who went on to win the state title. Expect to see this young man in the finals at 140 or 145 this year. Collum has great technique, strength, and speed and will wreak havoc in whatever weight class he chooses.

Adam Morse should have been in the finals last year. The state championship was truly decided in the semifinals when Nick Burks of Hardaway (1st) beat Morse 5-4. Burks pinned his finals opponent Greg Magee of Cass (2nd) in the first period. Hopefully, this year destiny will allow Burks and Morse to meet in the finals where they belong. Adam should definitely be on everyone's radar this year.

Once again, the 112 and 119-pound weight classes will be extremely tough; **Brad Boyd** scored points last year (at 112) and has the tools to place this year at 112 or 119.

The only wrestlers that beat **Josh Jameson** at 119 last year were D.J. Heard of Carrollton (1st) and Justin Hawkins of Henry County (5th). Jameson could have been a placer last year if he had a better draw. Watch out for Jameson this year and expect to see him on the podium.

Jason Screen will be a force at 130 if he certifies; he's definitely a medalist at 130 or 135. A bad draw left him out of the medals last year; but like Jameson's luck, Screen's placement was done in with losses to eventual placers Kavante Conerly (Hardaway) and Mikey Mooney (Gilmer County).

Zac Nelson's two losses at 160 in the traditional tournament last year were to two placers, David Snider of Gilmer (2nd) and Brandon Porter of Hardaway (5th). With a good draw, you could see Nelson in the medal rounds.

Zane Nelson lost his first two matches at state last year. However, Zane is a year older, wiser, and stronger. Expect Nelson to qualify and help his Mustangs in February.

As for **Cameron Collum**, a defending Kid's State Champion, few will argue about the talent that he possesses. Cameron will qualify; the question is: How far can he go in the bracket as a freshman? Most freshmen in middle to upper weight classes constantly wrestle upperclassmen and struggle. Watch as Cameron shocks these older boys throughout the year.

Team: **HARDAWAY (Region 2AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#4** (AAA 6th Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Matt McCoy (103- 5th), Carlos Espinosa (119- SQ), Kevante Conerly (130- 4th), Trevione Hudson (152- 3rd), Nick Burks (189- 1st), Jarquis Buford (215- SQ)

A Quick Comment: Expect for **Coach Sanders** to have two finalists. One of these favorites is **Nick Burks** at 189. Burks already has his state championship. He wrestled a close match in the semis against Adam Morse (South Effingham), but coasted in the finals by pinning Greg Magee (Cass) in the first period. Even though Morse may give him some trouble along the way, Burks is the favorite to win 189 in 2008.

Trevione Hudson, on the other hand, was one of the elite wrestlers in AAA last year. Still, the state title eluded him. Hudson should have met Tim Vlcek (Henry County, 1st) in the finals last year, but instead Vlcek beat him 10-6 in the semis. Hudson went on the walk through the consolation rounds and pinned Clayton Bryant of Lagrange for his third-place medal. Vlcek is gone; Hudson is the new frontrunner at 152 or 160.

Matt McCoy will qualify again in Region 2AAA. He's got an outside chance of placing this year. Last season, Matt picked up four bonus points in the state tournament before being eliminated by Brannen Underwood (Jackson).

Carlos Espinosa had to be the strongest kid in AAA last year at 119. If he's back at 119 or at 125 this year, Carlos has a great opportunity to place. Espinosa's losses in the state tournament last year came against Michael Parker of Blessed Trinity (2nd) and Trey Henson of Apalachee (6th). Carlos has been putting in a lot of work this offseason, looked good at the Missouri camp this summer, and should make it to the podium in Gwinnett.

Kevante Conerly finished 4th at 130 pounds last year and should be back at that weight or at 135. Conerly may not be able to defeat the elite wrestlers of 130 or 135 this year, but will definitely place. In the state tournament last year, Kevante loss to defending AAAA state champ Nikita Zhukov in the semis, stuck Scott Degraff (Chestatee) in the consolation semis, and loss to John Francis (Columbus) for 3rd and 4th. I would expect Conerly to be wrestling for 3rd or 4th again with an outside shot at the finals.

Jarquis Buford is a relative unknown this year. Buford got lost in the shuffle of that great 285-weight class last February. It will be interesting to see how Jarquis does in the “watered down” 285-weight class this year.

Team: **APALACHEE (Region 8AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#5** (AAA 12th Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Zak Moore (103- 2nd), Austin Sheppard (112- SQ)

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Josh Boler (215- Maryland State Champion)

A Quick Comment: Some may ask, why have Apalachee ranked so high? **Coach Moore’s** expertise, a good possibility of two finalists, another sure placer, and a good supporting cast to score points is the answer.

Last season at 103, **Zak Moore** had a great state tournament, even though the result of the weekend did not meet his expectations. I think everyone in AAA was anticipating a Moore v. Warrington finals match. In one of the better finals matches of the evening, Warrington narrowly beat Moore 5-2. I know Moore has revenge on his mind this year; unfortunately, 119 is shaping up to be one of the toughest weight classes in AAA. Blaine Harvey (West Laurens), Evan Warrington (Henry County), and Shane Summerlin (Benedictine) all were finalist last year, and they are all planning to go 119 this year. Zak is more than capable of making the finals, but to get there, he’ll need a good draw to avoid Harvey in the semis.

Austin Sheppard did not place at 112 last year. He got off to a great start winning his first two matches by fall and major decision. In the quarterfinals, Austin was defeated by the eventual state champion Blaine Harvey. Justin Middlebrooks (5th- 112), a senior from Henry County, ended Sheppard’s run during the consolation rounds. Sheppard could be back at 112 or be forced up to 125 with Moore rooted at the 119-pound weight class. Regardless of where he goes, he definitely has a good shot at making the podium.

Newcomer **Josh Boler** won the Maryland State Championship for Curley High School at the 215 pound weight class in 2207. On top of that, according to Coach Moore, he went undefeated through out the 2006-2007 season. I don't know what the exchange rate is for victories coming from Maryland to Georgia, but I do know that all of last year's major players from 215 have graduated. For that reason, I'm going to go ahead and call Boler the favorite at 215. I'm sure that he's probably a safe bet.

Team: **BENEDICTINE (Region 3AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#6** (AAA 8th Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Nick Wright (103- SQ), Shane Summerlin (112- 2nd), Ryan Gregory (160- 3rd)

Significant Others Who Might Join Them **if back**: Brent McKinnon (125- SQ), Casey Tuggle (130-SQ), Phillip Mejia (135- SQ), Brannon West (140- SQ), Justin Smith (145-SQ), Drew Brackett (152- SQ)

A Quick Comment: Benedictine is another team that you may not expect to be in the top ten. After losing finalist Brendan Oxnard (171- 2nd) to graduation, you might expect Benedictine to drop from their eighth place finish last year. The truth is, with the right draw last year, I believe that **Ryan Gregory** could have been a finalist. Expect Gregory to be wrestling on the finals this year, regardless of his draw in the bracket. Gregory's only loss in the state tournament last year was to Henry County's Tyler Faulkner, the eventual state champion. Well Faulkner graduated and David Snider (160- 2nd place) is at 171; that leaves the 160-pound weight class to Gregory alone. Look to see Gregory facing Hudson of Hardaway in the semis or finals.

Many were thinking that **Shane Summerlin** was not a worthy finals candidate for Kyle Frank (2006 State Champion at 103) two years ago. Summerlin silenced all critics last year. All of the talk last February was about Blaine Harvey (West Laurens), Luke Mosley (Gilmer), Joe Denova (Columbus), and Kyle Frank (Spaulding). While the 112-pound weight class was probably the toughest last year (with 285 a close second), Summerlin still fought through a field that Harvey was beating with falls and techs, and almost shocked the state with a victory over Blaine in the finals. Now Blaine won that match 22-15, and that finish may not sound close to most, but everyone who watched the match saw the invincible Harvey put to his back a couple of times. Even though Harvey ultimately won the state title, after his performance, Shane Summerlin will not be overlooked ever again. Expect this young man to be in or near the finals.

Nick Wright and the others mentioned above can help Benedictine by scoring points. Some of the "Significant Others" may have graduated, but those who remain should perform well. While none of them may stand on the podium, all of the wrestlers could have the Cadets in the top five by the end of the state tournament.

Team: **WEST LAURENS (Region 4AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#7** (1st Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Kyle Daniels (103- SQ), Blaine Harvey (112- 1st), Jimmy Warren (119- SQ), Terry Orange (130- SQ)

A Quick Comment: West Laurens with all of their consecutive state titles may have finally come to the end of their run. In February 2007, the Raiders put on a performance that few have ever seen. Blaine Harvey (112), Michael Slaughter (125), Walter Blash (135), Josh Harvey (140), Germany Coleman (145), and Dondricus Anderson (215) all won state titles last year. Chris Bonner (189- 4th) and Steve Johnson (285- 4th) helped the cause allowing the Raiders to win the team title a huge 16 points ahead of the second place Cass.

All of the state placers from last year are gone with the exception of Blaine Harvey. For this reason, I have dropped the defending state champions to seventh. **Coach Ed Bland** has not given any information about the new faces you'll see in blue and black this year. I have a suspicion that West Laurens will reload and contend for their second AAA state championship. I'm anxious to see what the Raiders have in store for us.

Blaine Harvey will be going for state championship number three this year. If he goes 112, he will win it; if he goes 119, he should win it. Harvey might be the most dominate wrestler in all of AAA this year. Expect him to be at the top of the podium in February.

Kyle Daniels had a great opportunity to place last year. Had it not been for an injury he encountered during his quarterfinals match against Wesley Forrester of Lumpkin (103- 6th), he might have fought his way back through the consolation rounds and medaled. If he is at 103 this year, watch for him to place.

Jimmy Warren is a tough kid who could score some points for the Raiders this year. **Terry Orange** went 1-2 at the state tournament; he has an outside chance to place in February.

Team: **LAGRANGE (Region 2AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#8** (19th Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Justin Gilbert (135- SQ), Stefan Smith (145- 4th), Clayton Bryant (152- 4th)

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Cory Hardnet

A Quick Comment: In the past, Lagrange was always a team that, regardless of their showing during the regular season, could always place in the top ten at traditional. I know **Coach Scooter Weathers** was not pleased with his team's 19th place finish last year. Expect the Grangers to be back to their winning ways this February.

Much to AAA's surprise, **Stefan Smith** came out of nowhere last year to place fourth at 145. Folks from the Columbus area warned us about this kid, and we never took notice. Smith will not fly under the radar again. Michael Fox (Gilmer County), Smith's consolation finals opponent, returns this year, along with Michael Gordon of Cass (5th) and Toney Beahringer of Elbert County (6th). Because most of last year's placers have graduated, Smith has a very legitimate shot of making the finals this year at 145.

Clayton Bryant was four points away from a finals match-up with Tim Vlcek (Henry County) last season. Rashad Moss (Troup) beat Bryant 3-0 in the semis last year. Rashad is back this year at 152 or 160 and could give Bryant a rematch if he certifies at the lower weight. Clayton's consolation finals opponent Trevione Hudson (Hardaway) is expected to be at 160; that fact leaves Bryant and possibly Moss as the favorites at 152 this season. The only thing that could keep Clayton from a finals date in February at 152, is a Tanita WA-300 in October. If he certifies, Bryant will be the favorite at 152.

The very athletic **Justin Gilbert** has looked impressive each February. Last year, he made it to the quarterfinals before falling to Chuck Leggett of Gainesville (2nd) 3-2. Justin lost 8-6 to Anthony Bastone of Columbus (6th) in the consolation quarterfinals and missed placing by one match. Expect Gilbert to place this year at 135 or 140.

At this point, not much is known about **Cory Hardnet**. Coach Weathers believes that the young man is a legitimate threat to reach the podium in Gwinnett. Keep your eyes out for this kid.

Team: **OLA (Region 4AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#9** (AAA 16th Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Chris Upchurch (103- SQ), Paul Baus (112- SQ), Kody Arnold (135- SQ), Jesse Duncan (140- SQ), Brandon Edington (145- SQ), Jeremy Moats (152- SQ), Joey Carman (189- SQ), Jake Hollingsworth (285- SQ)

A Quick Comment: Ola is still a young school. I was very impressed with what I saw in the Mustang's underclassmen last year. **Coach Anthony Partello** has to be proud of the program he is building in Henry County. While I don't expect for Ola to have any finalists, I do expect a lot of placers (which is why they are ranked so high). Ola has some young talent and I believe they have a great opportunity to win Region 4AAA.

Last February, **Chris Upchurch** had a good state tournament; his only losses were to Zak Moore of Apalachee (2nd) and Peter Mosher of Cass (3rd). Obviously, he had a really tough draw. Upchurch was one match away from placing. I expect him to be in the medal rounds this year.

Paul Baus got off to a great start last year with two quick victories. In the quarterfinals, Paul was defeated by Cass's Lucas Mosher (6th) 5-4. He lost his next match by fall to Conner Comeaux of Chestatee. Paul was so close to placing last year; his narrow loss to the eventual sixth-place Mosher shows that he was right on the edge. Expect Baus to win a medal in February.

Going 1-2 at the State Traditional tournament in 2007 was **Kody Arnold** and **Jesse Duncan**. It is really tough to say how well these young men will do this year. Both are long shots to make the podium, but expect them to score some very valuable points for their Mustangs.

Brett Edington went 2-2 in the state tournament last year. I expect him to be with Arnold and Duncan in the sense that, while he might not place, he'll still score some team points.

Jeremy Moats went 2-2 at 152 last February. Jeremy has a legitimate shot at placing this year. How far Jeremy goes depends a lot on his draw and if he can dodge Clayton Bryant (Lagrange), Stevie Timm (Cass), and some other top performers in the quarterfinal round.

The effort that **Joey Carman** gave in his quarterfinal match against the eventual state champion Nick Burks of Hardaway (he lost 2-0) should have made him a sure bet to place last year. After losing by fall to Damien Batten (Burke County), Carman's thoughts of making the podium were over. Joey has a good shot at placing this year; he may need a good draw, but Carman has the tools to make it to the podium in February.

Last year, **Jake Hollingsworth** went 1-2 at traditional. It is always hard for an underclassman to succeed at a weight class like 285, but Hollingsworth has done well so far. Jake will definitely score points for the Mustangs this year and he has an outside chance of placing.

Team: **HENRY COUNTY (Region 4AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#10** (AAA 3rd Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Evan Warrington (119- 1st), Chris Stewart (125- SQ), Tyler Austin (130- SQ), Anthony Fretwell (135- 4th)

A Quick Comment: **Coach Marty Hustell** had a lot of talent graduate from his third-place team of 2007. Tim Vlcek (1st), Tyler Faulkner (1st), Justin Middlebrooks (5th),

Justin Hawkins (5th), and Randy Brown (6th) were all placers last year and have all moved on. It makes sense that the Warhawks dropped from third to tenth with the hit their roster took, but there are naysayers that believe Hustell and his boys should drop even farther. Last year it took 68.50 points to break the top ten. I believe the 2008 version of the Warhawks can score that many points and then some.

Most of AAA knows that **Evan Warrington** and Anthony Fretwell could score thirty points a piece by fighting their way to the finals this year. Evan is one of the elite wrestlers in the state. He was a AAAA runner up his freshman year and a AAA state champion last year with a 5-3 victory of Zak Moore (Apalachee). Evan will be at 119 this year where he will be one of the favorites. Zak Moore and Blaine Harvey (West Laurens), stand in his way. Coach Hustell anticipates a Warrington v. Harvey match-up and says that Evan is confident and looking forward to a victory.

Everyone knew that **Anthony Fretwell** was a talented wrestler, so why was everyone surprised by his fourth-place finish? Fretwell wrestled in a very competitive 135-pound weight class last year and pulled off a great finish for his 2007 season. However, Anthony didn't let a little success make him content. Anthony's father, **Coach Cliff Fretwell**, took his son, along with many others, to numerous national events. Anthony got some "big time" match experience as well as some good competition and has made big strides in technique this summer. Basically, the kid's a stud. Expect Fretwell to be in or near the finals this year. Last February, Anthony may have been under the radar with some of his competitors. This year, he is one of the favorites at 145 and will not be able to "sneak up" on anyone.

Chris Stewart and **Tyler Austin** are the only other young men that are left from 2007 version of the Warhawks. Stewart went 1-2 and Austin went 3-2 last year at state. Austin has an outside chance of placing this year at 135 but will definitely score points. Stewart is a long shot to medal at 140 this year, but he can assist his team by scoring points as well.

If Warrington and Fretwell win their weight class (very likely), Stewart and Austin get some pins and advancement points (also very likely), and Coach Hustell prepares the other ten young men to be competitive (we know he will), there is no reason why the Warhawks can't be in the top ten in 2008.

Team: **COLUMBUS (Region 2AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#11** (AAA 5th Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Joe Denova (112- 3rd), Bo Buehler (160- SQ)

A Quick Comment: It is hard to say how good Columbus is this year. They lost so many good wrestlers to graduation. All of AAA remembers the state championship team

Coach Larry Morgan put together two years ago and knows that Coach Morgan is too good a coach to let some kids graduating stop his team from ending high on the leader board each February. While not much is known about many of the wrestlers that will fill those voids, know Columbus will field a competitive team this year.

Columbus fans were building up **Joe Denova** early last year. At first, most were not drinking the blue and orange Kool-Aid. However, as the year progressed, you realized that Columbus's freshman phenom was legit. Denova ended his season with a third-place finish at 112. At 125 this year, Joe is a lock for the finals. Expect to see great matches between Denova and Colby Yates (West Hall) or Justin Martin (Cass). If Joey can certify at 119, I believe he has a great chance of making the finals as well. However, Denova at 119 just further "log jams" that already competitive weight class.

Bo Buehler lost 11-10 last year in the quarterfinals to Corey Johnson (Flowery Branch). If he had won the match, Buehler would have medaled. In his first consolation match, Buehler forfeited due to injury default. A healthy Buehler will make it to the podium in 2008.

Team: **WEST HALL (Region 7AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#12** (AAA 20th Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Colby Yates (125- 3rd), Roldofo Vasquez (140- SQ), Chan Morris (145- SQ)

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Tanner Yates

A Quick Comment: **Colby Yates** has been one of the best wrestlers in his weight class for the last couple of years. His shot for a state championship last year ended with a loss to quite possibly the best 125 in the state, Michael Slaughter (West Laurens). If Colby certifies at 125, you can expect to see him in the finals against Justin Martin (Cass) or Joe Denova (Columbus). If he certifies at 130 pounds this year, you should see him in the finals as well. Watch out for this kid throughout the season; you'll be glad you took the time to watch him.

Roldofo Vasquez is a very athletic kid that will certify at 140 or 145 this year. Vasquez went 1-2 last year and is a long shot to place this year. However, with a good draw, you could see Rudy in the late rounds of the consolation bracket scoring some big points for his team.

Putting out a great showing last year was **Chan Morris**. Chan was one match away from placing last year, losing to Michael Fox of Gilmer (3rd) in the consolation quarterfinals. If he is at 152, he is a lock to place this year. However, **Coach Rodrigo Galvan** says he's "hit the weight room HARD" and might have to go 160. Look for this kid on the podium at either weight.

The freshman **Tanner Yates** will be trying to follow in his big brother's footsteps. If Tanner can certify at 103, expect him to be scoring points for West Hall in Gwinnett this year.

Team: **BLESSED TRINITY (Region 5AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#13** (AAA 11th Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Michael Parker (119- 2nd), Chad Grenda (125- SQ), Scott Buzzard (140- SQ), Brent Osborne (145- SQ), Harris Howard (285- SQ)

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Michael Crupie, Spencer Chestnutt, Shane Fadem, Patrick Moffett, Matt Parker, Charles Pagano, Geoff Drake, Joe Longoria

A Quick Comment: The only person happier than **Michael Parker** after his semifinal victory over Justin Martin (Cass) was **Coach Richard Barden**. Coach Barden has coached this Blessed Trinity program into a team that will be very competitive year in and year out. Last year the Titans placed 11th in the state. Even after losing seven graduates, you can still look for the Blessed Trinity to be close to the top ten. That is a testament to the good job Coach Barden is doing.

The state runner-up, Michael Parker, had an excellent performance last February. Even though he fell to D.J. Heard of Carrollton in the finals, Parker had to be pleased with his weekend. Now Michael has his eyes set on the top of the podium. At 125, he'll again have to defeat Martin to get there. If he can sift his way through Joe Denova (Columbus), Colby Yates (West Hall), Dale Beck (Gilmer), and Martin, then Michael will be fixed at the top of the podium and will receive a well deserved first-place medal.

Chad Grenda, Scott Buzzard, and Brent Osborne all had good state tournaments last year. While none are a serious threat for the finals, all have an outside chance for placing. If Blessed Trinity wants to break the top ten this year, it is vital that these three young men score bonus points every chance they get.

Get used to seeing the name **Harris Howard** now. Last year, he lost to William Coker (Gilmer) in the quarterfinals, only to go on a pinning frenzy in the consolation rounds. He won all of his matches by fall until he met and was beaten by Taylor Medlin (South Effingham) only one match away from placing. Ladies and gentlemen, Howard dominated his opponents in a weight class that saw four former placers (including one finalist) fall short of medaling. Harris is on his way to the finals this year. If he regains that dominance he showed in the consolation rounds last year, you may just be looking at a state champion.

Team: **CARROLLTON (Region 6AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#14** (AAA 9th Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Brian Butler (103- SQ), James Bennett (125- SQ), Brandon Kennedy (130- SQ), Michael Trager (145- SQ), Josh Young (152- SQ)

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Alfredo Rocha, Mason Mitchum, Brandon Dickerson

A Quick Comment: **Coach Mike Mason** has shown that he can create state champions. D.J. Heard ended up being a two-timer during his tenure at Carrollton. This season, Coach Mason doesn't have any expected finalist, but he does have five or six real threats for placing.

Brian Butler, a tough 103-pounder, went 3-2 at the state tournament last year. Both of his losses were to state placers. Brian was one match away from the podium in a weight class that has all of last year's placers (excluding Forrester of Lumpkin and maybe Wendell of South Effingham) in different weights this year. This opens the door for Butler who was so close last year. Expect this young man to have a medal around his neck at the end of February.

Also going 3-2 at state and missing the medal rounds by just two matches is the very technical **James Bennett**. James was finally put out by the senior Joab Hudson of Apalachee (6th). Bennett was the 2007 Freestyle State Champion and the Greco Runner-Up. Barring injury, there is no reason why this young man should fail to place this season.

Michael Trager was a state qualifier last year at 145 pounds. Even though he went 0-2, he got that very important experience of wrestling in the Gwinnett Arena. It's intimidating wrestling in such a big space with so many people watching. With this experience under his belt, expect Trager to score some points for the Trojans this year.

Two thousand and eight could be the year when **Josh Young** puts it all together. A true physical specimen, Young has all of the tools to put together a medal run. He gave Stevie Timm of Cass (152- 5th) fits all last year. With a good draw, you could see this young man wrestling for 3rd and 4th.

Brandon Kennedy, who wrestled 130 last year, should qualify at 125 this year. Expect him to win a few matches at state and score some valuable team points.

The freshman **Alfredo Rocha** could be a real threat to place at 112 this year. Alfredo was excellent in the middle school ranks and hopes that his success translates into high school victories.

Mason Mitchum has been stuck behind Heard and Springer so far in his high school career. Mason will score some team points for the Trojans at state this year.

Brandon Dickerson is a mystery, but will be intimidating in size and shape alone. He could be a darkhorse at 215 this season.

Team: **ELBERT COUNTY (Region 4AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#15** (AAA 13th Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Josh Seymour (103- SQ), Luc Ayers (140- SQ), Tony Beahringer (145- 6th), Kyle Williams (189- SQ), Terrance Thurman (285- SQ)

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Justin Cobo

A Quick Comment: Even with the loss of C.J. Banks (215- 5th), **Coach Eli West** will have this Elbert County team back in the top twenty this season. The team leader **Tony Beahringer** will be back and looking to medal again this year. On his route to a sixth-place finish, Tony lost to Karl Kudyba of Flower Branch (2nd), Stefan Smith of Lagrange (4th), and Michael Gordon of Cass (5th). Look for Beahringer to be on the podium at the end of this season.

Other possible placers for Elbert this year are **Josh Seymour** and **Kyle Williams**. If Seymour can return at 103, he will be very hard to ward off. Williams is expecting to be 145 this year and will be very tough at that weight.

Terrance Thurman went 1-2 at state last year in a very tough 285-pound weight class. Harris Howard (Blessed Trinity), who is one of the favorites at heavy this year, pinned Thurman in the consolation rounds last February and ended Thurman's run for the podium. If Thurman gets a good draw this year, he is a serious threat to place at 285.

Team: **BURKE COUNTY (Region 3AAA)**

Preseason Rank: **#16** (AAA 15th Last Year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: Jonathan Davis (119- SQ), Marcus Stephens (125- 4th), Juan Casarez (130- SQ), Zach Eubanks (140- SQ), Daniel Farmer (171- SQ), If Back: Damien Batten (189-SQ)

A Quick Comment: Few were aware of just how young **Coach Jason Moore's** Burke County team was last year. Mitchell Davis (135- 5th), the team leader, was the only graduate. That leaves the senior **Marcus Stephens** in the leadership role. Marcus finished fourth at 125 last year and should be in or near the finals at 125 or 130 this year.

Jonathan Davis, Juan Casarez, Zach Eubanks, and Daniel Farmer were all young wrestlers last year. They should all qualify and score points in Gwinnett this year. They all have an outside chance at placing.

The Region Races:

Region 1AAA:

The Remaining Teams:

Cairo – Bill Alexander could improve on 3-2 showing if back.

Crisp County – I have no information about this team.

Dougherty – New faces look to improve on last year's 48th place finish.

Monroe – I have no information about this team.

Westover – I have no information about this team.

Region 2AAA:

The Remaining Teams:

Carver, Columbus – I have no information about this team.

Harris County – Will Diacsenko can make some noise at 171.

Jordan – I have no information about this team.

Kendrick – Antonio Richardson will need some help to get Kendrick into the top 30.

Northside, Columbus – I have no information about this team.

Shaw – Big men Chad Smith and Juan Pickett leave a legacy for the Raiders. Carson Grimsley can make some noise if he returns.

Spencer – If Jay Mitchell is back, he should improve on his third-place finish from last year.

Troup – Justin Doughman and James Hembree have a good shot at placing. Rashad Moss could find his way back to the finals. Troup could be in the top 16 by season's end.

Region 3AAA:

The Remaining Teams:

Hephzibah – I have no information about this team.

Butler – I have no information about this team.

Cross Creek – Is Daniel Normington back? If so, he will make the podium.

Glenn Hills – I have no information about this team.

Region 4AAA:

The Remaining Teams:

Eagles Landing – Nikita Zhukov will wrestle for his second state championship. E.J. Russell should be a placer at 189 or 215; he's a tough kid and will have a good showing in February. Drew Goodwin has a great chance of placing at 103. Look for Josh Fayard and Dustin Ingram to score points at the state tournament.

Jackson – I have no information about this team.

Spalding County – Two-time state champion Kyle Frank will be missed.

Central Macon – I have no information about this team.

Northeast Macon – I have no information about this team.

Region 5AAA:

The Remaining Teams:

Chamblee – Many new faces look to improve on a 48th place finish.

Dunwoody – Big scorer Zack Anderson (160- 4th) will be missed.

North Atlanta – I have no information about this team.

Riverwood – Thomas Nesmith (285- 6th) leaves a big shadow for the Raiders to fill.

Westminster – Graduates Candler Cook, Patrick Hickey, and Ben Kahn leave big holes for the Wildcats to overcome.

Region 6AAA:

The Remaining Teams:

Cartersville – Joseph Gilbert (285- 2nd) will be sincerely missed.

Cedartown – Not much is known about this first year team.

Central Carroll – Brandon Gaddis will try to improve on his 2-2 performance in Gwinnett last year.

Sandy Creek – Derrick Wojack (160- 6th) returns to find the podium again. Julien Holmes should place this year. Jesse Deyo could find his way to the medal rounds as well.

Villa Rica – I have no information about this team.

Region 7AAA:

The Remaining Teams:

Chestatee – Scott Degraff (130- 6th) will find his way back to the podium.

East Hall – I have no information about this team.

Lumpkin County – Wesley Forrester is a favorite at 103.

North Hall – I have no information about this team.

White County – Finalist Ricky Wilbanks leaves an example for the Warriors to follow.

Flowery Branch – Tom Pennington is a favorite at 215.

Gainesville – Chuck Leggett and state champion Bo Wren will be missed by the Red Elephants. Little Hicks should score some points this year.

Johnson. Gainesville – I have no information about this team.

Pickens – Ronnie Coulter and Lee McMahan lead Pickens to a possible top 20 placement.

West Forsyth – West Forsyth will be young, but very talented. They could be a top-25 team. Freshman Tyler Everton is the real deal and could place anywhere from 130-140 pounds. He won the Triple Crown Award. Daine Magnussen and Cole Westray come down from AAAAA and could ruin the party for some of the boys in AAA this year. Ross Anderskow is a move-in from Ohio and could make some noise at 130-140. Freshman Tyler Lott will fight to qualify and score points. This team will be young but could find themselves in the top 20 by the end of the season.

Region 8AAA:

The Remaining Teams:

Hart County – The Bulldogs look to improve on a 36th-place finish

Monroe Area – I have no information about this team.

Oconee County – Nagee Handy will be missed at 285 this year.

Stephens County – Josh Walden (152- 6th) could own another medal in February, if he's back.

A Special Thanks To:

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