

## 2007 – 2008 AAAAA PRESEASON PREVIEW

(The Real AAAAA “Super 32”)

by Bob Berg [11/18/07]

OK, wrestling fans, it's about that time of year again, time to begin the process that will lead, in a short few months, to another AAAAA State tourney and to the crowning of the traditional State tourney team and individual champions. Let's enjoy the journey, starting with this first look at the top teams likely to vie for AAAAA State tournament champion honors. But, please remember the few caveats that go along with this list: this is a **tourney** top 20+, not a **dual** top 20+, as it is based on potential point scoring at the traditional State tourney to be held once again in Gwinnett County, where, come next February, **all five classifications will once again hold their State tournaments under one roof**. A top 20 dual team list might look completely different, although many of the same teams would occupy top 20 slots.

As in past years, we've heard lots of rumors circulating about top flight wrestlers being out for all or part of this season. While we've tried to take those into account (where we have been able to obtain confirmation), there is still a good possibility that teams will lose (or gain) manpower, relative to what we credit them with at this point. So, please keep in mind that the teams we see in our mind's eye right now may bear little resemblance to the teams which take the mat next month or at the Gwinnett Civic Center. We also have little if any feel for how the new weight certification rules will impact teams, line ups and, ultimately, point scoring at the State tourney.

In any event, sit back and enjoy this preseason peak at the teams and wrestlers likely to lead the parade to Gwinnett County, come next February, as the 2007 – 2008 AAAAA season unfolds. And please remember the #1 rule for assessing this Preview: 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 “Bob Berg 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.

### **The Top 10:**

Team: **COLLINS HILL (REGION 7AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #1 (AAAAA 3<sup>rd</sup> last year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: State Champ Knapp (135 – 1<sup>st</sup>); State placers J. Smith (130 – 4<sup>th</sup>), N. Smith (171 – 3<sup>rd</sup>) and Coffey (285 – 5<sup>th</sup>); AA State Champ Mitchell (AA 103 – 1<sup>st</sup> at Wesleyan); former State placer Tiller; State qualifiers Carson, Willard, W. Collins and Wood.

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: King of the Hill Champs Smithson, Hertica, Parker, Hoppenbrouwer, Mangrum and Walker; KOH placers Manning, Sawchuk, Keim, Watkins, C. Collins and Weston; Kids State Champ Partridge.

A Quick Comment: Collins Hill has never run from a fight, and the last time they were projected as the frontrunner, they performed admirably and brought home a State Championship. Given a lineup packed with firepower, where State qualifiers and King of the Hill Champs will have a hard time making the starting 14, it is a given that the Big Green will show up at the Gwinnett Center with an incredible array of weapons, ready to bring home another team gold. Harrison, Union Grove and perhaps Walton will put up a brave fight, but the combination of the returning State Champ and placers, the addition of nationally-ranked Mitchell, the incredible number of talented wrestlers in the room, the superb coaching of Coach Ramos and staff, and last, but not nearly least, the Collins Hill lineage (do the names Hertica, Parker and Hoppenbrouwer sound familiar?), will, I believe, result in the Collins Hill flag flying at full mast when the curtain closes on another AAAAA State tournament next February.

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Team: **HARRISON (REGION 5AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #2 (AAAAA 6<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: State Champ J. Condon (160 – 1<sup>st</sup>); State placers Bell (119 – 4<sup>th</sup>), R. Medved (130 – 3<sup>rd</sup>), A. Medved (135 – 5<sup>th</sup>); AAA State placers P. Mosher (AAA 103 – 3<sup>rd</sup>) and L. Mosher (AAA 112 – 6<sup>th</sup>); State qualifiers Shubert and Floyd; GISA State Champ Wittenberg (GISA 135 – 1<sup>st</sup>)

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: A. Condon; King of the Hill placers York, Brown and Joseph; Kids State Champ Christakis.

A Quick Comment: In a scheduling nightmare for the ages, the Hoyas will hit the Ironman (Ohio), the Powerade (Pennsylvania), the Clash (Minnesota) and McCallie (Tennessee). If they can survive those venues and land at the Gwinnett Center healthy and ready, the AAAAA State tourney could seem like a walk in the park to Harrison, which could translate into another AAAAA team State Title for the green and black. Certainly, they have a lineup to go the distance, led by nationally-ranked Condon and three transfers who should score lots of points at the Big Dance. Whether it will be enough points to beat Collins Hill is the question of the day, but no team could be better prepared for the rigors of the State tourney than one which has competed in three of the top tournaments in the nation, and that is where Coach Stephen is betting Harrison will likely stand, come February, 2008.

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Team: **UNION GROVE (REGION 2AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #3 (AAAAA 5<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: State Champ Crozier (125 – 1<sup>st</sup>); State placers J. Lazor (119 – 2<sup>nd</sup>), Roberts (145 – 2<sup>nd</sup>) and B. Banks (160 – 3<sup>rd</sup>); former State runner up Floyd ('06 112 – 2<sup>nd</sup> at McEachern); Region Champs Mena and S. Bodiford; State qualifiers Tanner, Vinson, Phillips and Vaughn.

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: M. Smith, Logan, Phippen and Freeman; Kids State placer A. Lazor.

A Quick Comment: Union Grove best have a mighty big bus, as it will take one to carry all the likely State qualifiers from South Metro to the Gwinnett Center. This is a team that is pretty much loaded at every weight class, which should translate into several State Champs, several more State placers and a definite run at the top spot in the AAAAA team State pecking order. Of course, as with the others in the projected top 3, there will be lineup questions, weight certification questions, etc., and the lineup needs to come through a very tough schedule, highlighted by the difficult Brecksville (Ohio) Holiday Invitational (where they will see not only the best that Ohio has to offer, but also Walton), relatively unscathed. Still, look for Union Grove to absolutely dominate the Region tournament, and the odds are that you will be hearing the Union Grove name countless times, at or near the top of the AAAAA standings, as the State tourney unfolds.

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Team: **WALTON (REGION 6AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #4 (AAAAA 2<sup>nd</sup> last year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: State Champ P. Holloway (119 – 1<sup>st</sup>); State placers Legg (103 – 3<sup>rd</sup>), D'Anna (125 – 3<sup>rd</sup>), Lanham (135 – 3<sup>rd</sup>) and J. Olsen (145 – 5<sup>th</sup>); State qualifier A. Holloway.

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Francis; King of the Hill placers Sulmonetti, Laskey, Espinoza and James.

A Quick Comment: I struggled on where to rank the defending State AAAAA runner up, but the news that returning State placer D'Anna may be lost for the year pretty much cinched what I had been thinking all along - - that this was a very powerful Raider team, but one that might be just a tad less powerful than the top 3. Look for break-out years from Lanham and Olsen, along with significant contributions from the "others" listed above, which, indeed, may be enough to allow Walton to make a run at the team State title. More likely, look for excellent results and a solid #4 showing for what has become a consistent fixture in the AAAAA top 5.

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Team: **BROOKWOOD (REGION 8AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #5 (AAAAA 9<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: State placers Matyac (140 – 3<sup>rd</sup>) and McLafferty (145 – 5<sup>th</sup>); Region Champ Vega; State qualifiers Collister, Pace, Meek and Nilson.

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Morrison, Pope, Epps and Coyle.

A Quick Comment: Rest assured, it is with much trepidation that I pick the Broncos to dethrone long-time king Parkview as the leader of Region 8AAAAA. Trepidation, yes, but the more I see of Brookwood, the more I like them ... and, more importantly, the more I become convinced that this could be their year. Matyac and McLafferty could both wear gold medals, while several of the others listed above could join them on the steps of the podium. Last year, Brookwood may have surprised some people with its top 10 finish, but this year, reaching the top 5 is clearly within reach.

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Team: **NORTH GWINNETT (REGION 7AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #6 (AAAAA 11<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: State placer Sheehy (152 – 2<sup>nd</sup>); Region Champ Biggers; State qualifiers Shelton, Newman, Hagen, Rogers, Reffett and Buffington.

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Epps, Moore and Cole; King of the Hill placers Franklin, Daube and Ojolola.

A Quick Comment: Collins Hill may be the Region elite, but the red and black of North Gwinnett is not all that far behind. Sheehy has reached the finals two years running and looks to capture an elusive State title in his last shot. He is likely to be joined in the Gwinnett Center by what may seem to be a cast of thousands, as the Bulldogs return seven others who made the short bus trip last year. North Gwinnett just missed the top 10 at State last year; in the humble opinion of the author of this Report, that is an error that will be remedied this time around.

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Team: **PARKVIEW (REGION 8AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #7 (AAAAA 4<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: State placers Davis (119 – 5<sup>th</sup>) and Farris (285 – 2<sup>nd</sup>); former State placer and Fargo Greco Champ Fields; State qualifiers Jones, McAraw and Hail.

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: King of the Hill placers Sewell, Aiken, Anderson, Johnson, McFall and Elakatt.

A Quick Comment: This is a tough call. Other than Farris, who is probably the favorite to win at 285, the other Panther studs are likely to find themselves in brutal weight classes. Beyond

that, I am just not all that familiar with the others likely to man the starting lineup. So, in my mind, this is a rebuilding year for Parkview, one that may find them outside the top 5 for the first time in recent memory. Then again, with Coach Beuglas manning the helm for the Big Orange, I won't be a bit surprised if Parkview, with a bunch of names who have become familiar over the course of the wrestling season, is on the short list when we preview the 2008 State tourney, come mid-February.

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Team: **McEACHERN (REGION 5AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #8 (AAAAA 1<sup>st</sup> last year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: State Champ Westerman (103 – 1<sup>st</sup>); State placer M. Smith (112 – 2<sup>nd</sup>); Region Champ Parker.

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: King of the Hill Champs Horan, Z. Smith, Wester and McGee; King of the Hill placers Garcia, E. Luster, Walker, Brown, Aghai, Heidelberg, Siguenza and Malandro.

A Quick Comment: The Indians are definitely facing a rebuilding year, but don't think for one second that the cupboard is bare, not with four returning King of the Hill Champs and several other high placers. And, of course, don't ever underestimate the combination of Coach Van Horn and his staff and that famous McEachern MOJO, which can take junior varsity wrestlers, surround them with State Championship banners and pictures of multi-time State Champs, and turn them into State point scorers in 10 seconds flat. If that metamorphosis occurs across the board, then move the defending State Champs back into the top 5; if it happens on a more selective basis, as we are guessing it will, then a rare second five finish is the likely result.

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Team: **POPE (REGION 6AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #9 (AAAAA 10<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: State placers Bushart (103 – 4<sup>th</sup>) and Joissaint (285 – 4<sup>th</sup>); State qualifiers Crowe, J. Mallard, Andrews and Savransky.

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: King of the Hill Champs Winiarczyk, Fischel and A. Mallard; Markley and Power; Kids State placer P. Anthony.

A Quick Comment: The Greyhounds are probably a year away from challenging for higher ground, with a lineup littered with freshman, sophomores and first-time junior starters. Still, the impact of a top-notch junior program is starting to show, and by the time February rolls around, the “newbies” are going to have enough experience to run with the big dogs. King of the Hill points tend to translate into State points the next year, and with three returning KOH Champs,

Pope hopes the trend continues this time around. So, next year, look out Walton; this year, look out top 10.

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Team: **VALDOSTA (REGION 1AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #10 (AAAAA 20<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Faces You are likely to See Again in Gwinnett: State placer Morrison (140 – 6<sup>th</sup>); State qualifiers Strickland, Reinhardt, George, Braithwait, Stokes, Scruggs and Daniels.

Significant Others Who Might Join Them: Kids State Champ Scott; Brown, Baldwin, Childree, Welch, Thompson, Goss, Inman and King.

A Quick Comment: Although we anticipate another three-team race, among Valdosta, Lowndes and Tift County, in Region 1AAAAA, it looks like the Wildcats have the goods to come out on top and send a very competitive team to the Gwinnett Center. Last year was an uncharacteristically down year for Valdosta at State, but with the addition of Kids State legend Javon Scott (you may remember his brother, former two-time State Champ Jamal Scott) and continued improvement from a very good group of middleweights, another top 10 finish is the projected result.

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### **The Next 10:**

Team: **HIRAM (REGION 4AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #11 (AAAAA 13<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State placers B. Dukes (152 – 6<sup>th</sup>) and J. Dukes (171 – 4<sup>th</sup>); Region Champs Anderson, Gazaway and Hunter; State qualifiers Johnson, Freeman and Beal; former Kids State Champ Gary; Ruhle.

A Quick Comment: If anyone is going to challenge the top 10 teams, as listed above, the Dukes of Hiram (sorry, this is the last year for that) are the most likely candidate. The aforementioned Dukes are certainly odds on favorites to reach the podium again, while Fargo placer Anderson leads a cast of veterans who can score well in a relatively weak Region and bring a full busload of wrestlers to the Gwinnett Center. If Gary and Ruhle are in the lineup, an excellent team showing at State is a likely result.

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Team: **CENTENNIAL (REGION 6AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #12 (AAAAA 15<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State placer Nabors (160 – 6<sup>th</sup>); State qualifiers St. James, Rioux, Sills and Becker; Wright, M. Versteeg, Mollick, C. Versteeg, Konigsberg, Sealy, Malone, Covert and Jenkins; King of the Hill placer McDaniel; transfer K. Salone; Kids State placer T. Salone.

A Quick Comment: This might look like a bit of a stretch, given the fairly low number of returning State points. However, if anyone is going to “coach up” a veteran team, Coach St. James is a likely candidate. There is lots of competition in the wrestling room and, as a result, a deep lineup which can do some serious damage, both in a tough Region 6AAAAA and at State.

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Team: **KELL (REGION 6AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #13 (AAAAA 12<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State placers Spice (130 – 5<sup>th</sup>) and Tabachino (285 – 6<sup>th</sup>); Region Champ Aar. Stringer; State qualifier Decormier; An. Stringer, Buffardi, Abraham, Vann and Hughes; Kids State placer Sanders; returning '06 State qualifier Colbert (transfer from Cherokee).

A Quick Comment: I suspect that this is just the kind of team Coach Lattizori likes. Lots of firepower, but not widely known and likely to sneak up on a lot of unsuspecting teams. I'm not sure why. Kell is a veteran team, with some very tough customers like Decormier, Buffardi and Vann looking to hop up on the podium along with Spice and Tabachino this time around, along with some highly regarded newcomers like Kids State finalist Sanders. Losing Stenger hurts the Longhorns' chances of garnering enough points to reach the top 10, but not by much.

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Team: **CAMDEN COUNTY (REGION 3AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #14 (AAAAA 7<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State placers St. Spradlin (103 – 5<sup>th</sup>) and Sam Spradlin (112 – 3<sup>rd</sup>); Region Champs Gonzalez and Robertson; State qualifiers Lentz, Wainright and Taylor; Harris and Gabriel. [I am assuming that State placer Wall (189 – 2<sup>nd</sup>) will not be back for his senior year; too bad, as he was clearly one of the top wrestlers in the State this year.]

A Quick Comment: With Wall, Camden County is back in the top 10 again this year, with a chance to challenge the top 5. Without Wall, Camden County still has more than enough talent with dominate Region 3AAAAA, take a huge contingent of wrestlers to State and finish in the top 15. And, of course, expect at least one Region champ from Camden County to be someone I've not heard of, keeping up the tradition of “unknown” stars hitting our radar screen for the first time at or slightly before the traditional Region tourney.

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Team: **PEACHTREE RIDGE (REGION 7AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #15 (AAAAA tie 13<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State finalists Sartain (103 – 2<sup>nd</sup>) and 2x State Champ Albert (135 – 2<sup>nd</sup>); State qualifier Kuntz; Ali, Menchaca and Chapman.

A Quick Comment: I'm not sure what the Ridge has, beyond Sartain and Albert, but, then again, I'm not sure how much more they need to make a serious run at the top 10. Those two should be good for 40+ points, which provides a good start on a good team finish at State.

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Team: **LOWNDES (REGION 1AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #16 (AAAAA 28<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: Region Champs Armstrong, Moody and Haskins; State qualifiers Williamson, Chavarria, Chamberlain, Johnson and Crenshaw; Lawler, McDowell, R. Smith and Black.

A Quick Comment: Lowndes comes in to this year with an experienced team, likely to vie with Valdosta and Tift County for top Region honors, and just as likely to bring a large contingent North to the Gwinnett Center in February, 2008. Three Region Champs return, with several other seniors looking to join them. If their best wrestling comes after the first of the year, then a #16 ranking may be just about right.

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Team: **MURRAY COUNTY (REGION 5AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #17 (AAAAA tie 29<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: 2006 AAAA State placer Baggett; State qualifiers Napier, Miles, Adams, Bennett, Rainey and Hughes; Gibson, Shoemaker and McConathy.

A Quick Comment: Surprised? Don't be. This is a senior-laden squad with a whole lot of talent that will sneak up on the top echelon of teams, in the Region and at State, if they are not prepared for war. Both Baggett and Bennett were one match away from the podium at State last year, while Rainey made the State quarterfinals and came very close to joining them. Gibson and Adams both won the Murray County tournament last year, while Shoemaker placed at a tough McCallie venue. Be afraid of this team ... very afraid.

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Team: **EAST COWETA (REGION 4AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #18 (AAAAA 32<sup>nd</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State placer Flavin (189 – 3<sup>rd</sup>); Region Champs Anglin and Cooper; State qualifiers Rana, Doolittle and Talley; 2006 State qualifiers Crumbley and Fisher; Dunston.

A Quick Comment: Flavin is one of the favorites at 215 this year, while Anglin (one bout from placement last year) and Cooper (horrible draw at State last year) should score major points in their respective weight classes. If the other veterans step up, then the battle with Hiram for the Region crown should be a very close one.

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Team: **TIFT COUNTY (REGION 1AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #19 (AAAAA tie 21<sup>st</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State placer Dunn (171 – 5<sup>th</sup>); Region Champ Drawdy; State qualifiers Denny, Turner, Wilcox and Dillard; Sheeler and Delapaz.

A Quick Comment: As is usually the case, it looks like Region supremacy will be a three-horse race, with Valdosta, Lowndes and Tift County in the mix. Dunn and Drawdy are certainly the most likely to medal at State, but the others listed above are familiar names, and we look for Tift County to do this year what they just missed doing last year - - reach the top 20 at State.

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Team: **SHILOH (REGION 8AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #20 (AAAAA 43<sup>rd</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: 2005 State placer Helena; State Qualifiers Ho, Jackson, Taylor, Austin and Beck; Cameron, Silverio, Olaba and Martinez; not sure if Thomas and Jordan are back.

A Quick Comment: Helena was a finalist at 103 his frosh year, and looks to bookend that with another finals appearance as a senior. He'll lead a veteran group, looking to improve on last year's disappointing performance at State.

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### **The Rest of the Super 32:**

Team: **KENNESAW MOUNTAIN (REGION 5AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #21 (AAAAA 25<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State placer A. Maus (135 – 4<sup>th</sup>); State qualifiers R. Maus, Fultz and Ventre; Herrera, Stevens, Williams, Zimmerman, Abanafi, Iltzky, Roundsaville and Poole.

A Quick Comment: I'm just not sure what to do with this team, but this may be way off, in terms of a final State projection. The Maus brothers will score, but the real key here will be

veterans like Zimmerman, Ilitzky and Roundsaville, who lost out last year because of the amazing depth in Region 5AAAAA. The Region looks to be down somewhat this year, so expect better things from the Mountain this year.

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Team: **SPRAYBERRY (REGION 6AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #22 (AAAAA tie 17<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State placer Hudson (112 – 1<sup>st</sup>); State qualifier Belton; A. Lesesne, Rinehart, Cole, Morgan, Genov, D. Lesesne, Hazard and Williams.

A Quick Comment: Much like Milton (see below), I am basing this rating on a group of kids who didn't make State last year, but should get their with a good chance to score points this year. Hudson will lead the way, of course, and Belton, who missed State placement by one match last year, should also step on a podium step this time around. If veterans like Genov and Morgan can wrestle up to their potential at the right time, another top 20 finish may be possible for the Jackets.

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Team: **MILTON (REGION 6AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #23 (AAAAA 44<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State qualifier T. Nielson; Massoor, Schneider, Gilkenson, Hanley, Ade, Baker, Tillitsky and Eastis.

A Quick Comment: Unlike Kennesaw Mountain, who I may have project too low, Milton is a team that may be projected too high. Then again, after summering with Lee Kemp, this is a battle-tested group who just needs to figure out a way to get over the year-end hump and get its wrestlers to the Gwinnett Center. Nielson and Hanley can stand on the podium, and with a little help from those listed above, Milton can significantly improve on last year's State finish.

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Team: **SOUTH GWINNETT (REGION 8AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #24 (AAAAA 27<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: Region Champs N. Isburgh and J. Isburgh; State qualifiers Sanders and Abedayo; Cooley.

A Quick Comment: Depth may be a problem for the Comets, but expect a boatload of points from Team Izzy, and with a few others winning bouts at State, South Gwinnett could crash into the top 20.

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Team: **GROVES (REGION 3AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #25 (AAAAA 19<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: Region Champs McKee, Walden and Scott; State qualifiers Murch and Major; Freeman.

A Quick Comment: Scott lost his go-to-placement bout in what was clearly the toughest AAAAA State bracket last year, and is very likely to stand on the podium this year. McKee and Walden return as defending Region Champs, and with help from those listed above and steady improvement from the newcomers, another top 20 finish at State is definitely not out of the question.

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Team: **NEWTON COUNTY (REGION 2AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #26 (AAAAA 35<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: Region Champ Durden; State qualifiers Mitchell, Ware, Mendoza and Joseph; 2006 Region Champ Knight and State qualifiers Parker and Branch; Lawson and Merfoot.

A Quick Comment: Union Grove may be the class of this Region, but Newton County can certainly compete with Luella, MLK and Redan for the runner up spot (and a trip to the State Duals). With as many as 10 possible State qualifiers this year, this is a team very likely to improve on last year's 35<sup>th</sup> place finish at State.

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Team: **FORSYTH CENTRAL (REGION 7AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #27 (AAAAA tie 21<sup>st</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State placer Vazquez (140 – 5<sup>th</sup>); Region Champ Conrad; State qualifiers Tay. White, Parker and Tillery; 2006 State qualifiers Ty. White, Gerrell and Arnold; Buck.

A Quick Comment: Vazquez could vie for a State title this year, which could provide some significant momentum for the rest of the team. With 9 wrestlers having been to the State tourney in one or both of the last two years, Forsyth Central should put a veteran crew through to the Big Dance this year, with a definite shot at the top 25.

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Team: **REDAN (REGION 2AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #28 (AAAAA 31<sup>st</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State qualifiers Dixon, Porter, Dix and Burton; 2006 Region Champs Webster and Rodgers; Bell and Wimpey.

A Quick Comment: Redan lost a great senior class last year, so this year will be viewed, in all likelihood, as somewhat of a rebuilding year. Still, if last year's transfers Bell and Wimpey can step up, to join the returning State qualifiers from the past two years, Redan could be quickly back in the mix for a top 25 spot at State.

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Team: **MLK (REGION 2AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #29 (AAAAA 34<sup>th</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State qualifiers Hunt, A. Meadows, J. Meadows, Miller, Gater, Bumbry and Samuels.

A Quick Comment: MLK was something of an unknown last year, moving up from a lower classification. After its 34<sup>th</sup> place finish at State last year, and with seven returning State qualifiers in the fold, MLK won't sneak up on anyone this year. A top South Metro finish in mid-December could signal that this is a team ready to bust into the top 20 in AAAAA.

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Team: **PAULDING COUNTY (REGION 4AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #30 (AAAAA 33<sup>rd</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: Region Champ Barron; State qualifiers Lunsford, Baker, Churchill, Willis and Rowlands; Lynch.

A Quick Comment: Combine a solid core of returning State qualifiers and a Region with only a few "deep" teams, and you have a formula for a top 30 finish at State. Paulding County missed that projection by only a few spots last year, and looks to rectify that problem this year.

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Team: **COFFEE (REGION 1AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #31 (AAAAA tie 21<sup>st</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State placer S. Drew (119 – 3<sup>rd</sup>); State qualifiers Screech and Hurst; O'Steen; Kids State placer A. Drew. Not sure if Region Champ Mizell, Lott and Merritt are back.

A Quick Comment: Coffee tied for 21<sup>st</sup> last year, but may need at least some of the question marks listed above to be in the lineup to match or better that finish this year. Old time Atlanta

Hawks fans will remember that John Drew used to score points in bunches on the hardwood; Coffee fans hope the Drew brothers can do likewise on the mat.

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Team: **LUELLA (REGION 2AAAAA)**

Preseason Rank: #32 (tie) (AAAAA tie 52<sup>nd</sup> last year)

The Names to Look For: State qualifiers Loper and Lunn; former State qualifier Flowers; some or all of State qualifiers Christianson, Pape, Johnson, White and Mitchell, along with Kirk and Ames, if back this year.

A Quick Comment: Losing Region Champ Pierce (now at Stockbridge) hurts, but if a majority of those listed above are back, Luella will challenge MLK, Newton County and Redan for the Region silver medal behind Union Grove, and likely send a large contingent to State.

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### **The Region Races:**

Region: 1AAAAA

The Remaining Teams:

Colquitt County: Could be much improved, if several of Fowler, Dillard, Underwood, Brooks, Cruz, Grier and Weaver return.

Houston County: State qualifiers Holmes, Whitley and Browder looking to return to the Gwinnett Center.

Warner Robins: Top 30 within reach, with State qualifiers Jones, Kochera, Rogers, Barnwell and Bruce leading the way.

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Region: 2AAAAA

The Remaining Teams:

Lithonia: Melton, Johnson and Green looking for return to State in '08 after going in '06 but missing out last year. Are State qualifiers Ransom and Fluellen back?

Stephenson: Region Champ Nelson leads what should be a fairly young team. Former qualifiers Mullins and Hollis look to return. Mosley and Blake would help, if they haven't graduated.

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Region: 3AAAAA

The Remaining Teams:

Beach: Big man Ward looks to be the top returning talent.

Jenkins: Region Champs King and Solomon, plus State qualifier Davis, should make Jenkins a Region spoiler.

Johnson Savannah: Lots of talent led by returning State qualifiers C. Hutcherson, Roland, Franco, Batts, Lark and Jarvis. If Mays and Alstad are back, look for improvement over last year's tie for 50<sup>th</sup> at State.

Savannah: Warren looks for a return trip to the Gwinnett Center.

Savannah Arts: Tsoi and Riddle are returning qualifiers from '07, joined by '06 qualifiers Coffman and McCoy. Washington and O'Toole should also contribute.

Windsor Forest: Sororian, Roman, Tessema and J. Hutcherson are all returning State qualifiers, with Crawford looking to join them this time around.

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Region: 4AAAAA

The Remaining Teams:

Morrow: Are Wright, Wymes, Presley, Scott and Bentley back?

Mundy's Mill: The top 30 is definitely in reach (Mundy's Mill was 24<sup>th</sup> last year), if returning State qualifier Bess is joined by Nelson, Barkley, Stiggers, Fodiker, Turner, Thomas and Brown.

Newnan: Five returning State qualifiers (Forbus, Thompson, Rumohr, Coots and Whitley) could move Newnan into the Region first division.

Tri-Cities: Felton is a middleweight contender, while Brewster anchors the lineup at 285.

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Region: 5AAAAA

The Remaining Teams:

Campbell: Watkins and Jackson should contend for State berths.

Etowah: Returning State qualifiers Wagner and Byrne bookend the lineup. Look for significant contributions from Galloway, Ertel and Reichsteiner.

Marietta: Burris, Smith and Fiore are a solid nucleus. Grosse, Hibbert and Cothran should also be in the mix for Region honors.

North Cobb: One of the up-and-coming teams in Cobb County, looking to crack the top 30 after a 41<sup>st</sup> place showing last year. Conti and De. Jackson are returning State qualifiers; Hay, Dar. Jackson, Sotres and Frankovsky could very well join them this year.

South Cobb: Taylor looks to be the best bet for a podium spot; Parks, Watts and Wade (if back) can score points, as well.

Woodstock: Lemke returns, looking for another State trip, while Sexton, Holt, Conway and Baitcher look to join him.

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Region: 6AAAAA

The Remaining Teams:

Alpharetta: Janis, Ashtari and Bogosian are the best of the returning crop.

Chattahoochee: Webb and Byerly are returning State qualifiers. Klug, Paykagar, Hardy, Zentner and Kent (Centennial transfer) can also score heavily.

Lassiter: My heart says “rank them much higher”, but my head looks at two returning State qualifiers (Pfifer and Suarez) and a small group of significant others, led by Collins, Dupree and Metzger, and says “not in this Region”. Don’t be surprised, though, to see Coach Day spring a new group of excellent wrestlers on us.

Northview: Devita is the best of this crew, with Cleary, Balkharian, Overton and Buck looking to join him at the Gwinnett Center.

Roswell: Zahm and L’Estrange are seasoned veterans, with Wilson, C. Smith and Lynch likely to man the lower weights.

Wheeler: Look for sizable contributions from Moot, J. McGrath, Grachek, Costello and Veal, among others.

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Region: 7AAAAA

The Remaining Teams:

Duluth: Smith looks to be the only recognizable returning name.

Mill Creek: Returning placer Harrison (112 – 4<sup>th</sup>) is the big gun. Improved performances by Willingham, Voss and Porchedu could vault them into the top 30.

Norcross: State qualifier Momen returns, with Fallow most likely to be the best of the rest.

North Forsyth: This is another young team on the rise. Borque and Hill are returning State qualifiers; Simmons, Berry, Frey, Bourne, Massey, Cross, O'Connor, Lanier, Briend, Kennedy, Coker and Wilson might be names to keep in mind as the Region tourney approaches.

South Forsyth: Region Champ Slattery leads a team trying to improve on last year's tie for 17<sup>th</sup> at State. Mrozik and Mullins are also returning State qualifiers.

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Region: 8AAAAA

The Remaining Teams:

Berkmar: Again, Smith is the only recognizable returning name.

Central Gwinnett: This team lost a bunch to graduation, but D. Brown should contend for State placement, and both Beck and Hajric can score.

Meadowcreek: No information to report.

Thanks for reading, and I hope practice is going well, as we move towards the start of another wrestling season. So, good luck to all teams and best wishes for a healthy and successful season.  
Bob