

2002-2003 SEASON COLUMNS by Don Shaffer

Pre-Season Column

Four returning state qualifiers and a standout freshman class will go a long way toward assuring the Reynolds Wrestling program of another highly successful season.

The Raiders are coming off an outstanding campaign in which they finished the regular season undefeated, won Section, District and Regional team titles as well as the District 10 Duals title. The Raiders took seven wrestlers to the PIAA Championships and finished fourth in the team standings.

But, that was last year.

"I'm very excited about this year's team," said Reynolds coach Brian Hills, who enters the current campaign with a 210-28-1 overall record.

"I think this team has a real nice mix," Hills said. "We have a group of very experienced wrestler who have reached a certain level of success. I expect a lot out of those guys. But, we also have a nice group of younger wrestlers who, although they are inexperienced, will step in and fill some slots very nicely for us."

"This team has the potential to do very well and maybe even surprise some people," Hills said. "I think this team can be very successful. A lot will depend on how quickly some of our younger wrestlers step into their roles."

The Raiders will be led by a quartet of seniors including state qualifier Owen Brickell (140), Joel Davis (160), Mike Hills (275) and Dan Burns (152), who comes to Reynolds after starting three seasons at Greenville. All are seasoned veterans and will be counted on to provide leadership.

Brickell is a defending Northwest Regional, District 10 and Section 3-AA champion. He owns a career record of 51-14.

Davis had an outstanding junior season, carding a record of 31-12 while advancing to the Northwest Regional. Hills, with a career record of 45-36, will start his third varsity season at heavyweight.

Burns comes to Reynolds with a career mark of 70-32. He injured his knee early in preseason workouts and is hoping to rehab the injury in time to crack the starting lineup for the Lewistown Holiday Tournament.

Juniors include returning state qualifiers Jake Habel (112), Travis Battles (145) and Nick Sommerfeld (189).

Battles is the lone Raider returnee to have placed at the state tournament, finishing fifth at 119 pounds. He bulked up in the off-season in order to play football and will start the season at 145 pounds.

Habel went to states last year at 103 pounds, and Sommerfeld at 171. Both will move up one weight this year.

Other juniors likely to see varsity mat time are Bob Bralich (152), Nate Glaser (130) and Jordan Rearick (135).

Glaser (1-2) saw limited time last season while Rearick, like Burns, is new to the program. He wrestled last season in the eastern part of the state and competes for the Raiders while attending Keystone Adolescent Center.

Jason Brown (125) and Eric Campbell (171) are returning sophomore letter-winners. Brown started most of the season at 103 pounds while Campbell did not make the lineup until the Section 3-AA tournament but made the most of it by becoming a District 10 qualifier.

This season's outstanding freshman class includes projected starters Matt Dunn (103), Mason Stewart (119) and Mike Edwards (215). Dunn, a two-time Pennsylvania Junior Wrestling champion, headlines that very talented group. Stewart and Edwards also excelled on the junior high level and both placed at last year's PJW All-Area Finals.

With only 25 or so varsity members, injuries will be carefully watched this season. Several have already crept up with Burns and Davis, who was injured late in the football season and will not be 100 percent for several weeks.

"Early in the season, we're going to have to kind of hold everything together with duct tape," Hills said. "We'll try to be careful with a couple of our guys until they can get healthy. Injuries are certainly something we're going to have to be cautious of. We don't want to do any more damage than what has already been done."

Pushing hard for mat time are sophomore Ryan Foust (171) and freshman Paul Kulka (103). Foust and Campbell will battle it out most of the season for the 171-pound slot, while Kulka, a solid lightweight, could be used at 103 pounds.

Other members of the team include juniors Damien Brink and Adam McDowell, sophomores Ian Brink, David Chaney and Jason Gainor and freshmen Josh Tofani and Josh Burns.

The Raiders' home opener with Slippery Rock has been postponed until Jan. 23. The Raiders will open the dual-match season Dec. 7 at Jamestown. The first home match is Dec. 10 versus Grove City.

The following is the Raiders' tentative starting lineup for the season-opening Mountaineer Tournament at Philipsburg-Osceola High School. Wrestlers are listed by weight class, name, class and last season's record.

- 103- Matt Dunn, freshman, (0-0)
- 112- Jake Habel, junior, (29-14)
- 119- Mason Stewart, freshman, (0-0)
- 125- Jason Brown, sophomore, (25-9)
- 130- Nate Glaser, junior, (1-3)
- 135- Jordan Rearick, junior (0-0)
- 140- Owen Brickell, senior (34-6)
- 145- Travis Battles, junior, (39-8)
- 152- Bob Bralich, junior (0-0)
- 160- Joel Davis, senior, (31-12)
- 171- Eric Campbell, sophomore (1-2)
- 189- Nick Sommerfeld, junior, (30-13)
- 215- Mike Edwards, freshman (0-0)
- 275- Mike Hills, senior (22-13)

Comment:

In a recent column it was pointed out that the Brickells were the second father and son team to win Section titles, they actually were the third. Other father and son Section champs are Wes and Nate Palm.. It's nice to know there are some things you can always count on.

Wrap Up

Under the direction of veteran head coach Brian Hills, the Rasslin' Raiders of Reynolds High School posted another highly successful season in 2002-03, setting several team and individual standards along the way.

Freshman Matt Dunn became a household name and capped the season by becoming the school's 19th PIAA Class AA champion. While he was the only Raider to strike "Gold" in Hershey, he certainly wasn't alone in bringing home some hardware.

Dunn was one of a school-record six Raiders to place at the PIAA Championships. The others were Owen Brickell (3rd), Dan Burns (sixth), Travis Battles (sixth), Mike Hills (seventh) and Nick Sommerfeld (seventh). Joel Davis also was a state qualifier.

Their performance allowed the Raiders to finish second in team points behind champion Wilson. "I knew this was a team that would get better as the season went on," said Hills, recapping the season. "Early in the year, I'm not sure how impressive we were but we had some people banged up with Davis (broken leg) and Burns (knee) not being 100 percent. We had some holes in the lineup."

"As the season went on I think the big thing was how this team jelled, and how close they grew together," Hills said. "We were a good dual-match team. But, I think, in the end, we were a very good tournament team, too. Maybe even better than I thought they would be. This team just kept getting better each time out."

The 2002-03 season also provided these highlights.

The Raiders, fifth at Manheim, won team titles at the Mountaineer, Lewistown and Tool City tournaments. They captured the Mercer County Athletic Conference and District 10 team dual match championships, as well as Section 3-AA, District 10 and Northwest Regional banners.

State champion Juniata handed the Raiders their only loss of the regular season, then beat the Raiders a second time in the first round of the state dual match championships in Hershey.

Reynolds also set a team record for most District 10 champions - seven - and, individually, senior Owen Brickell (211) blasted Mark Bodo's takedown record (166). Davis, meanwhile, became the school's 200th Section champion.

"I think our four seniors (Brickell, Burns, Hills and Davis) are all great kids. Academically, they have some real talent, too," Hills said. "I've probably gotten more calls about these kids - because of their grades - than any group I've ever had."

Hills said it's possible all four could wrestle on the collegiate level, though none has made a commitment yet.

THE MATT DUNN SHOW: Freshman phenom may be the easiest way to describe this 15-year-old wonderkid in a wrestling singlet.

Dunn breezed through the best competition the state had to offer, while chalking up a 40-1 record. He collected 25 pins, one short of the team record.

His lone loss came to Easton sophomore Seth Ciasulli, the PIAA Class AAA runner-up, who has been ranked as high as fifth in the nation.

Dunn reeled off nearly 30 consecutive wins to close out the season. He joins Justin Nestor (a 2003 NCAA Division I national qualifier for the University of Pittsburgh) as the only Raiders to win a PIAA title as freshmen.

And if that wasn't enough, Dunn sparkled in his state finals match, winning by major decision. **THE CENTURY**

CLUB - A pair of Raiders just missed reaching the century mark in career victories.

Brickell closes out his standout career at 98-19, posting a 41-3 mark as a senior. An early season knee injury likely kept Dan Burns from reaching 100 wins. He posted a 25-14 record, after going 70-32 in three years at Greenville High School.

Looking ahead to next season, three wrestlers will shoot for 100 wins. Juniors Travis Battles (91-25), Jake Habel (88-27) and Nick Sommerfeld (80-30) all look like locks to reach triple digits.

FRESHMEN MAKE THEIR MARK - Dunn wasn't the only freshman to make his mark this season, as Mason Stewart (119) and Mike Edwards (215) also turned in solid performances.

Stewart placed fourth at Regionals and ended with a 31-13 record, while Edwards became a District 10 qualifier and closed the year 24-13.

All three freshmen also ranked among the team's pin leaders. Dunn was first with 25, followed by Stewart (19), Sommerfeld (18) and Edwards (12).

SOME MORE GOOD STUFF - Reynolds has lost five dual matches in the last three years, and all have been to the No. 1 team in the state (Juniata and Wilson). ... Even with those five losses Reynolds' all-time dual-match record now stands at 535-68-2. ... Brian Hills has now coached 13 PIAA Class AA state champions. ... At the recent Area VI Junior Olympic tournament, Reynolds advanced 15 wrestlers to the PJW state championships in Johnstown. ... The Raiders had 11 varsity wrestlers win 24 or more matches. ... As a team, Reynolds netted 875 takedowns compared to 345 for their opponents. ... Davis was second on the team with 105 takedowns.

2002-2003 End of Regular Season Column

Senior Owen Brickell is closing in on the team takedown record (166), which was set by state champion Mark Bodo in 1993. Through the District 10 duals, Brickell has 155 takedowns.

A returning state qualifier, it would appear as though Brickell will not just break the record, but will shatter it. Brickell is currently averaging 5.3 takedowns per match. Assuming he'll wrestle 12 to 13 more matches, he could make a run at 200. That would likely be a record that would stand for some time.

Matt Dunn also appears primed to take a shot at another long-standing team record - that for "most falls." The freshman phenom has 21 pins heading into the Section tournament. The team record of 26 was set by Kevin Brandt in 1981 and equaled by Jason Walter in 1991.

Dunn (28-1) also would appear to have an outside shot at the record for most wins in a season (41).

THREEPEAT: The Raiders recently wrapped up their third consecutive District 10 Class AA Dual Match Championship. Maplewood fell victim to the Raiders, 47-19, in the semifinal round before Reynolds routed Hickory (45-12) in the finals.

The Raiders then advanced to Hershey for the PIAA Dual Match championships where they fell 31-27 in the quarterfinal round to eventual state champion Juniata. It marked the third consecutive season the Raiders lost to the eventual state champs in the opening round.

WHO IS GOING TO BE No. 200? - Reynolds will likely reach another team milestone at this year's Section 3-AA tournament by crowning their 200th Section champion.

The Raiders will need two champs to pull off the feat. It seems like a no-brainer because three wrestlers - Brickell, Jake Habel and Nick Sommerfeld - are defending 3-AA champions.

HILLS ADDS TO RESUME: The Raiders finished their dual-match season with an overall record of 13-2 (including the post season), with both losses coming to state champion Juniata.

Coach Brian Hills' career record now stands at 223-30-1 (88.1 percent). He is one of just four Mercer County to coaches to post 200 or more wins. The others are Bob Parker of Commodore Perry, Carl Wombacker of Hickory and Reynolds' own Neal Lineman - the first to accomplish the feat.

MORE NOTES: When Bodo set his takedown record, he did so in stunning fashion. He did not give up a takedown until the state finals and capped off a perfect 37-0 season with a win over Montoursville's Rennie Rodarmel in the finals. ... Reynolds has had at least two Section champions for 31 consecutive years. ... The team has won eight straight Section team titles, an 13 of the last 14. ... Mason Stewart (16) and Nick Sommerfeld (14) are the Raiders' other top pinners heading into the post-season. ... The Section 3-AA, District 10 and Northwest Regional tournaments all will be held at Sharon High School on successive weekends. ... Reynolds has wrestled in the D-10 Duals finals in each of the five years the tournament has existed.