

2005-2006 SEASON COLUMNS by Don Shaffer

Pre-Season - November 24, 2005

Five state place-winners are among seven returning state qualifiers as the nationally-ranked Reynolds Raiders prepare to tackle what has to be considered the most demanding schedule in school history.

"I don't think there's any doubt that this is the toughest schedule we have faced, certainly since I've been here," said head coach Brian Hills. "We have placed this challenge before our wrestlers based on their experience. Obviously, we feel it's going to have a positive effect on our season. We're looking forward to the challenge."

The Beast of the East Tournament at the University of Delaware has been added to a rugged schedule that already included the ASICS Ironman and Manheim Tournament. The Tool City tournament, once the toughest stop on the Raider tour, would now have to be considered a distant fourth among in-season tournaments.

The Raiders open at home with Lakeview on Dec. 7 before jumping right in with Ironman on Dec. 9-10 and Beast of the East the following weekend.

According to their website, Beast has been rated the nation's toughest high school tournament seven of the last eight years. Ironman is a Top 5 event and Manheim is listed in the Top 10. Though it sounds intimidating, the Raiders, ranked No. 14 in the country by "Amateur Wrestling News," expect to be competitive.

A total of 14 letter-winners return to give Hills considerable flexibility when filling the 14 starting spots. Adding to that considerable depth, as many as four quality freshmen are projected as starters.

Seniors Matt Dunn (124-8), Mike Edwards (89-36), Paul Kulka (57-19) and Mason Stewart (104-33) give the Raiders great leadership at the top, and juniors Lawrence Beckman (84-12), Aaron Nestor (67-16) and Stephen Nestor (51-18) do little but add to it.

Dunn, a three-time state place-winner and University of Columbia recruit, and A. Nestor both wrestled in the state finals last season while Stewart, Beckman and S. Nestor are the other returning state place-winners. Kulka and Edwards are returning state qualifiers.

The Raiders expect to get a boost from junior Jon Uhrin, who was 17-15 as a freshman, but missed all of last season with an injury. Sophomores Mike Miller (23-19), Corey Brown (9-5), Ryan Dawes (7-12), Brandon Maun (25-23) and Curtis Reynolds (17-21) all gained considerable experience last season and will be counted on to improve this season.

"We have an exceptional group of kids coming back," Hills said. "Our seniors – and really our juniors, too – have demonstrated tremendous leadership. Our practices have been intense and this team has set some very high goals for themselves. It's my job to make sure they get to where they want to be."

Among the incoming freshmen, Cody Kelly, Sam Fuchs, Kaine Kulka and Will Ringer are all projected starters.

"We also have a very solid group of incoming freshman," Hills said. "Several of these young men will be counted on heavily this year, especially in the lower weights. The reality is they don't have a whole lot of time to get settled in. If we are going to get to where we want to be, they are going to have to be a big part of it."

The remainder of the Raiders' roster includes seniors Josh Tofani, Josh Burns, Robert McPherson, Kyle Landfried and Sam Kulka; juniors Kurt Sensesak and Joe Combine; sophomores Avery Allen, Adrian Best, Rex Cooper, Mike DiGregorio and Cory Shields; and, freshman Tony D'Urso.

NOTES: Dunn and Beckman are both nationally ranked in various high school rankings. ... Dunn led last year's squad in team points (276), Edwards (17) had the most falls and S. Nestor was tops with 132 takedowns. ... Stewart has 56 pins among his 104 career wins. ... Last season, Reynolds won the team points title at the PIAA Championships and finished second in the PIAA Class AA Duals. ... Coach Hills' career coaching record stands at 254-

32-1, while the school's all-time dual-match mark is 566-70-2. ... Early season workouts took place without about 10 team members because of the Raiders' District 10 Class AA championship football team, which advanced deep into the state football playoffs. ... Jason Brown and Ryan Foust, who combined to win 180 career matches, have graduated and will be missed from last year's state championship team.

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.

Tournaments Column - January 5, 2006

Smack dab in the middle of Pennsylvania's Dutch Country, down near the intersection of Gramby and Hershey streets, sits Manheim Central High School. They've been hosting one of the best high school wrestling tournaments in the state of Pennsylvania for the last 36 years.

In 10 years of competing there, the Reynolds Raiders have found the going pretty tough. Entering 2005-06, the Raiders had never placed higher than third as a team and had managed only eight individual champions - four of them coming in a dominating showing in 1992.

In many respects, the tournament is a throwback to wrestling tournaments of an era gone by. Thanks to the sponsorship of the local Lion's Club, event officials say it's one of the few tournaments in the country that does not ask for an entry fee. Other unique aspects of the tournament include the fact the wrestlers are hosted by an incredible group of local wrestling parents and residents, and coaches are put up – at no cost – in a local motel. Then, there are the plates.

Instead of trophies, wrestlers who place in the top three receive handcrafted plates, similar to ones hammered out at Wendell August Forge. The plates are a wonderful keepsake for wrestlers and cost the tournament about \$1500 – per weight class.

MANHEIM XXXVI – The Raiders performed well at this year's Manheim tournament but came up nine points short of their ultimate goal – a team championship. While tourney champs Easton may have heard the second-place Raiders knockin', at the end of the day, they refused to open the door.

The Raiders actually led the event by 8-½ points entering the championship round but saw that lead slip away as the Red Rovers won four of their five finals matches to claim their seventh straight title.

Juniors Steve Nestor (130), Aaron Nestor (140) and Lawrence Beckman (160) all finished second for the Raiders, while Cody Kelly (103), Matt Dunn (145) and Mike Edwards (275) placed third. Other place-winners were Mason Stewart (4th at 135), Corey Brown (5th at 125), Kaine Kulka (6th at 119) and Jon Uhrin (6th at 171).

Edwards received tournament awards for fastest fall (0:20) and most falls in the least amount of time (3, 2:44).

"I think we missed some opportunities where we had a chance to maybe score a few more points," said head coach Brian Hills. "It's disappointing from the standpoint that we didn't win the tournament. It was definitely one of our goals coming into the season."

GIVE THE MAN A HAND – Congratulations to Mike Edwards for joining the Reynolds elite as the 18th member of the 100 win club.

Edwards' milestone win came in the home dual match with Derry Area, and was extra special because it was a first-period fall.

Next up for the Century Club is likely Beckman, a junior, who got win No. 98 in the Manheim semifinals. Aaron Nestor also will likely reach 100 wins this season.

Dunn and Stewart both reached 100 wins during their junior seasons. Stewart looks like he may break the record for most career matches wrestled (Jason Brown, 177), while Dunn looks primed to shatter the record for most career wins (Justin Nestor, 153).

NESTOR NAILS DOWN 100 AT PITT – Speaking of Justin Nestor, the 2001 RHS graduate recently joined the 100-win club at the University of Pittsburgh.

A three-time state champ while at RHS, Nestor claimed his 100th win in the match for 7th place at the Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational. Nestor, a three-time NCAA Division I national qualifier, also ranks among Pitt's all-time pin leaders (3rd with 31).

"Justin brings a solid work ethic to our wrestling room. He's a great wrestler, and I'm not surprised he's achieved this," said Pitt Head Coach Rande Stottlemeyer. "There's plenty more to come from him."

Nestor is part of a strong Reynolds wrestling tradition at Pitt as another former Raider – Mark Bodo – also surpassed 100 career wins there.

Here is a quick look at Pitt's all-time win leaders: 1. Pat Santoro 167, 2. Rob Loper 131, 3. Carl Frohofer 123, 4. John Withrow 122, 5. Scott Hovan 117, 6. J.J. Fasnacht 114, 7. Chad Jesko 111, 7. Mike Ziska 111, 9. Bryan Matusic 107, 9. Ron Tarquinio 107, 11. Mark Bodo 106, 12. Justin Nestor 100.

ARE YOU READY FOR SOME WRESTLING? – Mike Edwards said trying to get ready for wrestling season with just three days of practice was one of the hardest things – athletically - he has ever done.

“It has been incredibly difficult,” Edwards says. “In football, I played both offense and defense and hardly ever left the field. I felt like I was in good shape. I don’t ever remember getting tired during football. I could run around the field all day and still feel good in the fourth quarter.”

“But wrestling is so much different. My first couple of matches, I was tired after the first period. As far as wrestling goes, I still don’t feel like I’m in very good shape, but I think it’s starting to come,” Edwards said.

Sophomore Corey Brown echoed Edwards’ sentiments and said he finally started feeling like he had a rhythm going at Manheim.

“The conditioning is a lot different. It’s not so much about technique or learning the moves over again, it’s a lot more about conditioning,” Brown said.

Other Raider wrestlers who also were part of the Raiders’ football team were Ryan Dawes, Will Ringer, Mike Miller, Jon Uhrin, Corey Shields, Rex Cooper, Joe Combine and Kyle Landfried. Another Raider, freshman Patrick Dangrow, is a member of the junior high squad.

The Raiders lost to state champions South Park in the PIAA Class AA West Finals on Dec. 3.

THE MAN OF IRON? – Dunn became the Raiders’ first-ever champion at the ASICS Ironman tournament on Dec. 10 and helped his team to an eighth place finish. That finish, in turn, helped Reynolds to a No. 10 national ranking by “Amateur Wrestling News.” It is believed to be the highest ranking ever for a Mercer County team.

Other place-winners at this year’s Ironman were Steve Nestor (7th), Beckman (4th) and Edwards (4th).

On the downside, senior Paul Kulka was lost to an injury during the Ironman tournament. He is expected to return sometime in the next two or three weeks, possibly in time for the Ultimate Duals.

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST – It was an experience to remember, but truth be told, a majority of Reynolds wrestlers asked about it, said they didn’t care all that much for the highly touted Beast of the East tournament at the University of Delaware.

As a team, the Raiders made a strong showing, placing 12th out of the 83 teams entered, with Dunn, Beckman and Aaron Nestor all placing in their weight classes.

Team members complained about a lack of seating for wrestlers, saying they spent a majority of the day standing around. There also were no shower facilities, and a general unorganized feel.

From where they were standing, the coaching staff had a little bit different perspective.

“I will say it was a demanding tournament,” said assistant coach Casey Taylor. “We spent about 16 hours there on Saturday. Went back to the hotel, slept for a couple hours and basically got up and did it all over again the next day. On top of that, we had to drive home after the second day. We didn’t get back to the school until about 3:30 a.m. Monday morning,” Taylor said.

As far as the quality of the tournament, Taylor said, “Once you advanced to the quarterfinals, basically every match after that was like a state finals match. It’s a very difficult tournament - tougher than Ironman because there is so much more depth.”

“I call it the tournament of attrition,” Hills said. “It’s a tournament of survival. I had a couple of kids ask me why we went. But I told them, ‘Hey, you want to be the best, then you have to wrestle the best.’”

The Beast featured 11 mats of wrestling action which may seem like a lot, but it’s all relative. The Tournament of Champions in Columbus, Ohio, for example, boasts wrestling on 26 mats. Several Raiders, including Dunn, have participated in that off-season tournament. The state tournament in Hershey uses eight mats.

FOR THE LOVE OF TEAM AND COUNTRY – Senior Kyle Landfried, who came out for the wrestling team because he wanted to get in shape for a stint in the military after high school, was pressed into duty at Manheim.

Landfried weighed in at 189 pounds after playing football at about 220. He lost much of that weight in the final week leading up to the tournament.

“He had about a week’s notice and that wasn’t much time to get his weight down,” Hills said. “I think it showed a real commitment on Kyle’s part just to make weight. We’re real proud of him for the dedication he showed to the team.”

Start of Post Season Column - February 2, 2006

To the surprise of probably no one, the Reynolds Raiders have been selected as the No. 1 seed for the District 10 Class AA Dual Match Championships which will be wrestled on Thursday, Feb. 2 at Edinboro University of Pa.

Greenville, which has already lost twice to the Raiders this season, is the No. 2 seed. This year's selection marks a record eighth consecutive year that the Raiders have been picked for the duals. They will be looking for their fifth D-10 title, and their second straight.

The winner of the D-10 tournament advances to Hershey where they will be seeded into the quarterfinal round of the PIAA Dual Match Championships. The second place finisher will have a wrestle-in match for a state tournament berth with the No. 2 team from District 7, which will likely be either Burrell or Mt. Pleasant.

Reynolds sports an overall record of 11-3 in past D-10 duals competition, with all three losses coming to Fort LeBoeuf in title matches. The Raiders have never finished worse than second at the duals, and have never lost a semifinal round match.

DUNN BREAKS RECORD - Raider standout Matt Dunn (see photo, left) recently broke the school and Mercer County records for most career wins and is wrestling like he has every intention of making sure it's not the last record he breaks.

Dunn, a senior, broke Justin Nestor's school and county record of 153 wins while competing at the Ultimate Duals in Brookville.

Dunn was 40-1 as a freshman, 43-4 as a sophomore and 41-3 as a junior. Heading into the D-10 duals, he is 34-3 this season.

The District 10 record for most wins is held by Doug Stanford of Meadville (173) and the current state record is owned by Matt Fisk, a freshman starter at nationally-ranked Lehigh University. A 2005 graduate of Wyalusing High School, Fisk went 175-9 in high school and was a two-time PIAA Class AA state champion.

Dunn (158-11) would appear to have a shot of reaching Fisk's mark, but at least two other Pennsylvania wrestlers – Ashtin Primus of Connellsville and Donnie Ament of Mt. Pleasant - are also eyeing the state record. Dunn can boast of a win over Ament earlier this season.

One record Dunn will not break is Chuck Coryea's school record of a 95.45 career winning percentage. Coryea, a 1972 graduate, had a high school record of 63-3-1.

UNDEFEATED REGULAR SEASON – For a third straight year, Reynolds has finished the regular season with an undefeated dual match record, closing the current campaign at 14-0.

That means this year's senior class has only lost one regular season dual match in 52 tries, that coming their freshman season to eventual state champion Juniata (36-19). Since that loss, the Raiders have won 46 consecutive dual matches in the regular season. (The school record is 60 straight wins.)

Furthermore, in their last 67 regular season bouts, the Raiders are an impressive 66-1.

KULKA RETURNS – It hasn't exactly been a storybook senior season for Raider Paul Kulka (see photo, left), but his recent return to the starting lineup is a testament to his strength and desire.

This past summer, Kulka was seriously injured in an ATV accident and spent about four weeks with his jaw wired shut. Luckily, Kulka had just enough time to recoup before the start of the wrestling season, but then almost immediately suffered another blow when he broke his ankle at the Ironman Tournament on Dec. 10.

Kulka returned to the lineup for Senior Night against Grove City and registered a 7-1 victory over Branden Jones.

He wrestled on light duty at Brookville but was in the lineup as the Raiders posted their biggest win of the season – a 45-14 dusting of Mt. Pleasant, which had been the state's No. 1 ranked Class AA team.

ULTIMATE DUALS SHOWDOWN – Speaking of the Ultimate Duals, much of the hype surrounding this year's event was the match-up between the state's two top-ranked Class AA teams in Reynolds and Mt. Pleasant.

In what was expected to be a close match, Reynolds got big wins early from Lawrence Beckman (160), Jon Uhrin (171) and Mike Miller (189) and never looked back in knocking off the Vikings for a third straight time. Reynolds beat Mt. Pleasant twice last season, including a state semifinals match-up.

Still ranked No. 1 and No. 2 in the state, but with roles reversed, it is likely the two squads could meet again at the state duals should both teams advance on schedule.

While in Brookville, Reynolds also posted wins over defending state champion Northern Lehigh (37-19), LaPlata, Md. (52-12) and host Brookville (59-9). In a revamped formula, Reynolds then beat Greenville (42-13) in the Ultimate Duals semifinals before dethroning Mount Pleasant in the championship bout.

REYNOLDS WRESTLING ON THE INTERNET – A tradition that dated back about 40 years was broken this season when Greenville radio station WEXC/WGRP opted not to broadcast high school wrestling matches. To local wrestling fans it was a blow.

But thanks to the efforts of Steve Williams (Greenville) and Dan Albaugh (Waterford), wrestling has made a big comeback on the airwaves of western Pennsylvania. The dynamic duo of Williams and Albaugh wasted little time complaining, but instead got busy and did something about it, peddling their favorite sport to other western Pa. radio stations. They got a bite when Cool 101.7 in Linesville agreed to give it a shot.

Reynolds matches have already been carried on the station several times, including broadcasts from the Ultimate Duals.

What's really exciting is that the station is part of the MSA Sports Network which broadcasts the matches across the internet so that wrestling fans around the country – dare I say the world - can listen to the matches live.

NESTOR NEARING 100 – Junior Aaron Nestor (see photo, left) should become the next Raider to join the "100 Win Club."

Nestor should get win No. 100 at Sections and would become the 20th Raider to accomplish the feat.

In a cool side note, his older brother Justin recorded his 100th career win earlier this season at the University of Pittsburgh. Unlike his older brother, Aaron will have more than a full season remaining to pad his numbers.

Other current team members with more than 100 wins include Dunn, Mason Stewart, Mike Edwards and Lawrence Beckman.

Beckman recently picked up career win No. 100 at Tool City and was one of five Raiders to win individual titles. Reynolds won the event for a record fourth straight season.

A SHORT HISTORY OF LOSING – Losing is something that doesn't get talked much about at Reynolds. Here's why:

Last loss: Last year's state finals dual match vs. Northern Lehigh (35-22).

Last regular season loss: 2002-03 vs. Juniata (36-19)

Last loss to a District 10 school: 2003-04 vs. Fort LeBoeuf in the D-10 Finals (32-29)

Last loss to a Mercer county school: 1996-97 vs. Commodore Perry (28-24).

Last loss at home: 1992-93 vs. Meadville (30-24).

Last time lost two straight: 1999-00 (Northern Lehigh, Ridgway at Ultimate Duals)

Last time lost three straight: 1983-84 (only time). Last time lost four

straight: Never happened. Last losing season: Never had one.

AA State Team Champions - February 15, 2006

The hardware from the PIAA Class AA Dual Match Championships has come home to a trophy case near you.

For Reynolds head coach Brian Hills, his wrestlers and staff, winning the state duals title has proved to be a challenging task. It took the Raiders five trips to Hershey – and two to the finals - before they were able to return home golden.

“This is a great accomplishment for our team. Winning the duals was certainly one of our goals,” Hills said. “This is a unique and special trophy, unlike any other, because it is a true team award. Every one of our wrestlers, from the top of our roster to the bottom has contributed to this championship in one way or another.

“I think this group has shown great resolve over the course of the season. We had a little bit of a slow start coming out of the gate and had some adversity to overcome because of the extended football season. I don’t think this team really hit its stride until the first of the year.

“To be completely honest, I don’t feel like this team has reached its full potential yet,” Hills said. “They are still getting better. I think their best wrestling may still be ahead of them (in the post-season).”

Thanks to a passionate effort from an undersized, but talented senior class, the Raiders capped a perfect 19-0 season with a 38-19 win over Northern Lehigh in the state championship bout Saturday night at Hershey’s Giant Center.

It was a rematch of the state championship match of one year ago, a 35-22 defeat that left an unsavory taste in the Raiders’ mouth for the last 365 days.

“There’s no doubt we remembered what happened last season and we knew we had to wrestle well to win. In circumstances like this, we try to look to our seniors to be our leaders,” Hills said. “Mason (Stewart) and Matt (Dunn) set the tone for us early with pins. (Mike) Edwards picked up a major decision and Paul (Kulka) had a real gutsy effort in beating Andrew Arnold, who is state ranked. Our seniors did exactly what I hoped they would do.”

It was Kulka’s win that sealed the title for the Raiders, giving them an insurmountable 34-15 lead with just two bouts remaining.

Hills was quick to note that senior Josh Tofani, who didn’t wrestle against Northern Lehigh, drew a couple of tough assignments over the weekend, and did his job by not giving up any big bonus points.

Stewart (135), Dunn (145), Edwards (275), juniors Lawrence Beckman (160), Steve Nestor (130) and Aaron Nestor (140) and freshman Cody Kelly (103) were all undefeated in five post season dual matches.

In Friday night’s quarterfinals, Reynolds defeated District 11 runner-up Northwestern Lehigh, 42-12, and then topped District 7 champion Mount Pleasant, 33-16, in Saturday morning’s semifinals.

Mount Pleasant ended up placing third and Northwestern Lehigh fourth, so the Raiders left little room for questions in defeating the second, third and fourth place teams – twice this season. Reynolds also beat the three place-winners at the Brookville Ultimate Duals.

“The reality is we don’t have time to sit back and reflect on any of this just yet,” Hills said. “We enjoyed it over the weekend – the boosters club and our fans threw a great party for us when we got back to the school, but we’ve got to get ready for the individual tournaments which begin this weekend. There will be plenty of time after the season to sit back and enjoy all of this.

“It certainly is special, not only because it is a first for the school and District 10, but it’s something we have been striving for. Our season is far from over, we’ve still got a few more goals we would like to accomplish,” Hills said.

WELCOME HOME – Members of the Reynolds Wrestling Boosters Club and the “Reynolds Road Crew” were instrumental in welcoming the Raiders back to the area Saturday night.

A throng of fans and about eight fire trucks from local fire departments met the Raiders at Eckley's on Mercer Road and ushered them through the Reynolds development and ultimately back to the high school parking lot where the wrestlers performed several victory chants they had worked on during their four-hour ride home.

With apologies to Disney World, the team ended up at the Reynolds VFW for a celebration of soda pop and chicken wings. They arrived at the Vets at about 9:30 p.m., just in time to settle in and watch a 10 p.m. tape-delayed broadcast of their state championship victory on PCN.

BACK TO BACK - Reynolds won the District 10 Championship with relative ease, topping Harbor Creek, 59-7 and then Greenville, 56-10.

It was the Raiders' second straight D10 title, their third in the last four years, and the fifth in the tournament's eight years of existence. This year's two wins improved the Raiders' all-time mark at the District Duals to 13-3.

STAY OFF YOUR BACK – One of the keys to Reynolds' success this season has been the team's ability to stay off their back and give up few bonus points.

In the 19 dual matches, the Raiders gave up just six falls. Considering the level of the competition, that is a pretty impressive statistic and makes it hard for any team to keep pace with the Raiders.

By contrast, Reynolds had seven falls in dual matches against Lakeview and Slippery Rock, nine against Sharon and 10 vs. Derry Twp.

UPDATED SENIOR STATS – This year's senior class finishes with some outstanding dual match numbers to reflect on. In the past four years, they are an impressive 63-4.

When you break that number down, the squad has been nearly unbeatable in the regular season, winning 51 of 52 matches, while going 12-3 in the post season. That includes a second-place showing at last year's state duals, and this year's championship.

NOTES – This season's 19 wins sets a new school record, breaking the old mark of 18 set just last year. This was the 16th undefeated season in the Raiders' history. ... Aaron Nestor has 99 career wins heading into the Section tournament. He looks to join his brothers Jason and Justin as members of the RHS 100 Win Club. ... The 19 points scored by Northern Lehigh in the state finals is the most scored against Reynolds all season. The Dawgs also scored 19 (37-19) vs. the Raiders at the Ultimate Duals. ... Dunn already has 39 wins this season and will likely shatter Beckman's school record of 45 wins in a season, set just last year. Dunn's career mark stands at 163-11. He is on pace to break the state record for most wins, but so are several other Pa. wrestlers. ... Speaking of Dunn, in the post-season he will look to become the school's first-ever, four-time Northwest Regional champion and just the second, four-time state place-winner. ... Brian Hills' coaching record now stands at 273-32-1.

... The Raiders are 585-70-2 in all-time dual matches. ... Edwards and Dunn will be looking for their fourth Section titles this weekend. Stewart and juniors A.Nestor and Beckman are seeking their third. ... Dunn will also be after a fourth D10 title. ... The Raiders have won 11 straight Section titles, five straight District 10 titles and four straight Northwest Regional team titles.