

**2019 Illinois Best Weekly
IHSA Individual State Final Preview
Sponsored by:**

**Illinois Coaches and Officials Association
Midwest Nationals Wrestling Tournament**

Prepared by Rob Sherrill



Luffman, Johnson try to win third titles; 23 state champs return

By Rob Sherrill

Three months of preliminaries are over. The weekend every Illinois high school wrestling fan has been looking forward to has arrived.

Starting Thursday at noon, you'll be watching the individual state championships inside wrestling's most tradition-filled arena, the State Farm Center in Champaign.

This year's tournament includes an important enhancement that coaches have been requesting for years: the adoption of a complete double-elimination format. The one-and-done scenarios that were part of previous state tournaments are now history; every wrestler who loses a match gets a wrestleback in 2019. This improvement brings Illinois closer to being in step with the rest of the nation. Only Indiana, Minnesota and Wisconsin now do not have complete double elimination in their state tournaments.

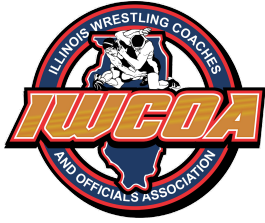
Senior Luke Luffman (285) of Urbana in 2A and junior Cameron Johnson (126) of Aurora Christian in 1A are trying for their third state championships. They are among a record 23 wrestlers who are trying to repeat as champions in 2019.

Luffman, a University of Illinois recruit, moved up a weight class after winning the past two seasons at 220 pounds. If Johnson, who won at 120 pounds last season and at 106 in 2017, is successful, he could become the 17th Illinois wrestler to win a fourth state title in 2020. Johnson is one of two juniors in Aurora Christian's lineup who are defending champions. His workout partner, Noah Villarreal (132), was the champion at 126 last year.

Winning a third state title proved not to be easy last year. Five wrestlers entered the State Farm Center last year looking to become three-time state champions, and only one, Real Woods of Lombard Montini in 3A, left with a third title in hand.

Ten of the 23 trying to win a second title will compete in the 3A classification, along with seven such wrestlers in 2A and six in 1A.

Three weight classes, 113 and 126 pounds in 3A and 285 pounds in 1A, include two returning champions.



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In 3A, the 113-pound class includes the wrestlers who won the 106-pound titles the previous two seasons: junior Jacob Rundell of Oak Park-River Forest (2018) and senior Jacob Lindsey of New Lenox Providence (2017). Lindsey was unable to defend his title in 2018 due to injury. The two have not met this season. The 126-pound class includes the wrestlers who squared off for the 120-pound title last year, seniors Anthony Molton of Lockport and Travis Ford-Melton of Chicago Heights Marian Catholic. Molton won that match, 7-4 in the overtime tie-breaker. The loaded weight class also includes junior Dylan Ragusin of Montini, a two-time state runnerup. To repeat, Molton, an Old Dominion University recruit, would likely have to beat Ragusin in the semifinals and Purdue University commitment Ford-Melton in the final, a pair of wrestlers he has lost to this season.

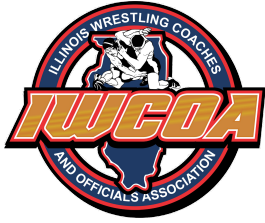
Seniors Ian Kuehl of Lena-Winslow/Stockton and Logan Lee of Orion highlight what is a loaded heavyweight class in 1A. Kuehl was the champion at 285 in 2018, and Lee, a University of Iowa football recruit, was the 220-pound champion in 2017. He did not place in the 2018 state tournament. The two met for the first time in the Byron sectional semifinals, with Lee winning a 6-4 decision.

Montini is looking to crown an individual champion for the 20th consecutive year, and should accomplish the feat with a pair of senior state champions returning: Jake Stiles (152) and Peter Christensen (195), committed to Oklahoma and Wisconsin, respectively. If senior Abe Assad (182) of Carol Stream Glenbard North is able to repeat at 182, it will be the 13th year in a row a Panther wrestler has won a state title.

However, that weight class got more interesting after Jon Halvorsen of Park Ridge Maine South edged University of Iowa recruit Assad, 2-1 in the finals of the Conant sectional. The win helped Halvorsen avenge a 14-6 loss in the finals of the Conant Tournament the first week of the season and snapped Assad's 90-match winning streak over two seasons.

Seniors Noah Surtin (120) of Edwardsville and Trevor Chumbley (145) of Aurora Marmion Academy and junior Fabian Lopez (132) of DeKalb are the other 3A wrestlers looking to repeat in 2019. Surtin, a University of Missouri recruit, survived a wild 11-10 victory over Matt Ramos of Lockport, committed to the University of Minnesota, as the top two wrestlers at the weight class met in the finals of the Joliet Central sectional. Northwestern University recruit Chumbley saw his stock rise significantly with a 7-4 win over Joshua Saunders of St. Louis (Mo.) Christian Brothers College, a member of both the U.S. Cadet and Junior World teams in 2018, in the Granite City Tournament final. As for Lopez, he'll have to navigate a loaded 132-pound class – starting with a first-round match against two-time state placewinner Domenic Zaccone of Stagg – to repeat.

Luffman is one of five seniors trying for a second title in 2A. Two others are also Old Dominion recruits: Nick Termini (145) of Burlington Central and Alex Cramer (170) of Grayslake Central. Termini is



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back at the same weight class he won in 2018, while Cramer has moved up a weight after winning at 160 last year. Riley Palm (138) of Mundelein Carmel is also back at the same weight class he won a year ago. Meanwhile, Jace Punke (195) of Washington will accomplish a first if he is successful. The state champion at 285 pounds as a junior, Punke would become the first wrestler in Illinois history to win a second title two weight classes lower than his first title. It will be Punke's first state tournament at 195 since his freshman year, when he finished sixth.

The other two returning champions in 2A are sophomores Dean Hamiti (126) of Joliet Catholic Academy and Dylan Connell (160) of Woodstock Marian Central Catholic. Hamiti was the champion at 106 last season, while Connell won at 152 in 2018.

Joining Johnson, Villarreal, Kuehl and Lee as returning champions in 1A are junior Paul Keane (120) of Peotone and sophomore Brandon Hoselton (195) of Fairbury Prairie Central. Keane is up a weight class from his title run at 113 a year ago, and Hoselton returns at the same weight.

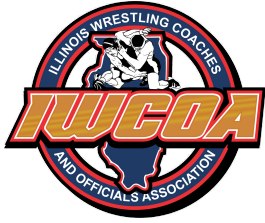
Following is a more in-depth look at the field in each class.

Class 3A

Competing in the top-heavy Bolingbrook sectional, Montini, looking to repeat as dual-team state champion after winning its first 3A title a year ago, advanced 10 to the state tournament, matching DeKalb in 3A and Oak Forest in 2A for the most state qualifiers among all schools in Illinois. Five wrestlers ranked No. 1 after the regional competed at Bolingbrook, tops among 3A sectionals. In addition to Montini's 10 qualifiers, Chicago Mount Carmel advanced eight to the State Farm Center and Marmion Academy seven, with Montini and Marmion Academy each crowning five sectional champions. Chicago Marist qualified five from Bolingbrook.

A dozen schools advanced five or more to state. As Montini and Marmion Academy did at Bolingbrook, DeKalb and Oak Park-River Forest led the way at the Conant sectional. DeKalb edged Oak Park-River Forest, 10-9 in state qualifiers, but the Huskies earned the edge in sectional champions, 5-4. Maine South advanced five from Conant. For the second year in a row, Huntley led the Barrington sectional, this time with a school-record eight qualifiers. Host Barrington and Warren each qualified five. Moline was the surprise leader at Joliet Central with a sectional-best six state qualifiers, followed by Yorkville, which advanced five.

The potential Molton-Ford-Melton showdown at 120 is the only possible finals rematch. Due to the rugged schedules so many of today's stars wrestle, only five 3A wrestlers enter the state tournament undefeated, three fewer than last year. Two are from Warren: senior Sawyer Nash (39-0) at 106 and sophomore Joel Vandervere (9-0) at 126. Third in state last season, Vandervere made his season debut



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the final week of the season after recovering from an off-season injury. At 195, senior Blah Dahnweih (42-0) of DeKalb, a University of North Carolina recruit, could put that mark on the line against state champion Christensen. Stiles (43-0) and senior Ramin Abraham (48-0) of Evanston are unbeaten at 152 and 220, respectively.

Class 2A

The state's deepest sectional, at Geneseo, took a bite out of three-time defending dual-team state champion Washington. The Panthers, who led all 2A schools in state qualifiers the past two seasons, advanced seven to the State Farm Center. Coal City, up from the state's smallest classification for the first time, edged Washington with eight state qualifiers to lead the sectional. The Panthers did lead all schools with four champions. Freeport capped its best season in recent history with five qualifiers.

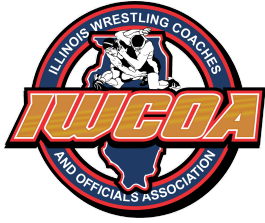
As was the case in 3A, a dozen schools earned five or more state qualifiers. Marian Central Catholic, which, along with Edwardsville, was one of the only two schools in Illinois to complete an undefeated dual-meet season, matched Coal City by advancing eight state qualifiers out of the Antioch sectional. Host Antioch was just a step behind with seven, followed by Crystal Lake Prairie Ridge (six) and Carmel (five).

But it was Oak Forest that took 2A overall honors, advancing 10 to the State Farm Center through the DeLaSalle sectional. Lemont and LaGrange Park Nazareth Academy advanced six. At Mahomet-Seymour, Mattoon and Troy Triad each advanced five to Champaign.

Five other 2A wrestlers join state champions Termini (46-0), Cramer (43-0) and Luffman (29-0) in bringing unbeaten records to the State Farm Center. A pair of Coal City wrestlers, senior Alex Friddle (45-0) at 132 and junior Daniel Jezik (20-0) at 182, both were 1A finalists in 2018 and own a combined five 1A state medals. Also unbeaten entering the state meet: senior Leo Mushinsky (42-0) of Peoria Notre Dame at 152, junior Mitch Hutmacher (37-0) of Chatham Glenwood at 170 and senior Jacob Bullock (30-0) of Cahokia, an Old Dominion recruit, at 220.

Class 1A

For the second time in its three years as a program, Aurora Christian led all 1A teams by qualifying eight wrestlers through the loaded Byron sectional. Auburn matched the Eagles by qualifying eight through the Petersburg Porta sectional – a site where no other school could amass more than half that total. How tough was the Porta sectional? Tough enough to eliminate defending state champion



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Monte Gregory of El Paso-Gridley. The senior was a casualty of a loaded 113-pound weight class. A total of 11 schools advanced at least five wrestlers to the State Center.

Not only did the Byron sectional have five No. 1 wrestlers, tops among 1A sectionals, but the sectional included 61 wrestlers ranked in the top 10 at their weight classes – 40 percent of the classification and by far the most of any of the state's 12 sectionals. That total included six top-10 wrestlers at Johnson's weight class – 126 – and five of the top 10 at six other weight classes. Lena-Winslow/Stockton and Dakota, which each advanced five to Champaign, were the only other schools able to accumulate that many qualifiers.

Belleville Althoff, which didn't advance to the dual-team state series, was next with seven qualifiers, which topped the Carterville sectional. Tolono Unity advanced six. So, like the Joliet Central sectional in 3A, the top two schools at Carterville will be nowhere to be found when the dual-team state series resumes. Prairie Central advanced six to the State Farm Center to lead the Pontiac sectional. Four other schools advanced five: Chicago Phoenix Military Academy, Kankakee Bishop McNamara, Lisle and Wilmington.

Three championship finals could match undefeated wrestlers. At 160 and at 195, unbeatens from Prairie Central and Port Byron Riverdale could face each other. At 160, sophomore Logan Deacetis (47-0), up four weight classes from his state qualifying berth in 2018, could face junior Trysten Altensey (21-0). At 195, defending state champion Hoselton (45-0) could face Bryan Caves (34-0) in a battle of sophomore standouts. Altensey and Caves both finished sixth in state in 2018. The third potential showdown between unbeatens could take place at 220 between seniors Dale Allen (34-0) of Carlyle, making his first state tournament appearance, and Eli Pannell (35-0) of Fulton, fifth in state a year ago.

Overall, 1A tops all classification with nine unbeatens. At 126, sophomore Ethen Doty (41-0) of Savanna West Carroll, who beat Johnson 9-5 in the Byron sectional final, could again get the chance to put it on the line against the two-time defending champion. The other unbeatens: junior Gabe Spencer (45-0) of Heyworth at 120 and senior Ezra Elliott (37-0) of Hoopeston Area at 138.

*Rob Sherrill is the author of **Tales From the Mat: Illinois High School Wrestling at 75**. He is the administrator of the iwcoa.net state individual and team rankings. He has covered wrestling in Illinois for nearly 40 years for a variety of publications, including the Chicago Sun-Times, and has published **The Illinois Best Weekly** for 35 seasons. Also a high school wrestling analyst at the national level, Sherrill is the National High School Editor for WIN magazine. Order his newest publication, **Beyond Tales From the Mat**, at www.centermatpress.com*