

Pirates ready to tackle impressive tourney field

The official name of the event has changed, but the competition is still expected to be top-notch. Wrestling fans taking in this weekend's Toshiba Business Solutions Midwest Wrestling Classic (formerly the Cliff Keen Classic) at KCI Expo Center will see some of the premier high school wrestlers in not only the KC metro area, but also from outstanding programs across the country.

In all, 24 teams from nine different states will take part in the event Dec. 14-15, including the champion from last year's inaugural tournament, Ponca City (Oklahoma) and Platte County. The Pirates, winners of the last three Class 2 state titles and six of the last eight, finished sixth last year.

Platte County head coach Phil Dorman said the tourney is one of the top gatherings of high school wrestling talent in the Midwest.

"This tournament is nails," Dorman said. "The 135-pound weight class will have four three-time state champs in it. We did really well last year and even with not being full strength, I think our guys can compete and push for another top 10 finish."

Also in the field are Blue Springs, which finished third last year, Omaha (Neb.) Skutt, which took fourth place and Creston (Iowa), which came in fifth. Rounding out the field will be Park Hill, Park Hill South, Oak Grove, Raymore-Peculiar, Kearney, Farmington, Ft. Zumwalt West, Granite City (Ill.), Oak Park-River Forrest (Ill.), Dodgeville (Wis.), Del City (Okla.), Norman North (Okla.), Perry (Okla.), Omaha Creighton Prep (Neb.), Hayfield (Iowa), Collins Hill (Ga.), Arkansas City (Kan.), Goddard (Kan.) and Hutchinson (Kan.).

Returning Platte County wrestlers who medaled in the tourney last year include senior 152-pounder Tyler St. Louis, who came in third and suffered his only loss in a 46-1 season, Jared Burns, who came in sixth at 103 and Collin Wittmeyer, who finished seventh at 160.

Dorman said the biggest challenge for his team will be to field a full lineup amidst a rash of injuries. Already coping with the loss of junior Joe Pace — who won the state title at 160 pounds last year, then suffered a severe knee injury playing football in September — senior 130-pounder Kendall Burns is sidelined until after the holidays and 119-pound sophomore Joey McLain will not wrestle this weekend.

"We are pretty banged up," he said. "We get healthy in one weight and get hurt in another. Hopefully in early January, we can put together the lineup we will see at the end of the season."

Wrestling will begin Friday night at the Expo Center and continue throughout the day Saturday. Various clinics and exhibitions will also be held during the weekend.

After coming in fourth in the season-opening Park Hill Duals Tournament, Platte County notched a solid 54-18 victory over Park Hill South in the Pirates' home opener last week. Senior Eric Barmann started the rout with a 22-2 technical fall win over Adam Parker at 135 pounds, followed by Ethan McLean's pin of Michael Bark at 145 pounds. Platte County also got pinfall wins from Jared Burns, 112, Chris Evans, 130, Wittmeyer, 171 and Jerome Spearman, 215.

Turnovers seal Jays' fate in KCI championship

The West Platte boys basketball team suffered its first misstep of the new season Friday night, shooting itself in the foot with turnovers that allowed Lawson to escape Dearborn with a KCI Conference tournament championship.

The Bluejays had a 27-24 lead at halftime, but then turnover after turnover in the second half allowed the Cardinals to score on easy fast break opportunities without worrying about shooting accuracy. West Platte

had 25 turnovers in the game, 15 of which came in the second half and kept the Cardinals out of reaching distance.

“During one stretch Lawson went 1-of-15 from the floor and we lost our concentration on offense, which caused us to be careless with the ball,” West Platte Zane Tanner said. “We turned the ball over way too much even though we weren’t really getting pressured that much.”

The Jays were down by three points going into the fourth quarter and pulled to within four points with less than two minutes to play, but gave up a three-point play with a foul on a fast break with about 1:35 left and eventually lost 60-51. Kyle Elder led West Platte with 20 points and 10 rebounds, Tyler Grindstaff had 13 points, six assists and four steals, and Erick Roe had 11 points despite shooting 3-of-12 from the field. While Tanner said his team was disappointed in not winning the tournament, it was too early in the season for major concern.

“We’ll work on staying on task all the time and staying focused in practice,” Tanner said. “But you don’t win championships in November or December and we played some good competition, which is what we wanted.

“I’m proud of the way the boys played to get to the championship game. So far when our energy is up, we play very well — we just have to keep it for a full game.”

The Bluejays advanced to the finals with a 70-52 semifinal win over Mid-Buchanan, outscoring the Dragons 34-23 in the first half. Roe and Elder had their best games of the season offensively, with Roe scoring 28 points, including three three-pointers, and Elder adding 22 points.

Lady Panthers claim KCI title

The North Platte girls basketball team continued its charge through the early part of the season with a 59-53 win over Lawson in the KCI Conference tournament championship game Dec. 7 in Dearborn.

While the Lady Panthers did allow a 14-point lead to evaporate to a three-point advantage at one time in the second half, North Platte was never seriously threatened by Lawson and ran its record to 5-0, while the Lady Cardinals dropped to 4-1. North Platte had a 32-23 advantage at halftime, then held off Lawson despite being outscored in the final period and being out-rebounded 45-37 for the entire game.

“I thought we had a real good first half and did a good job against their half court trap,” North Platte coach Roger Giger said. “We had some turnovers late that we need to clean up, but overall it was a good win for us at this point of the season.”

Bailee Testorff led North Platte with 23 points and 18 rebounds, with 14 boards coming on the defensive end of the court. Addie Buckler had 16 points, six assists and five steals, and Dakota Hellyer also reached double figures in scoring with 12 points while adding six assists and two steals. The Lady Panthers made 21-of-53 field goals in the game, while Lawson was 23-of-69.

Giger said it was the ability to spread the ball around that fueled his team’s success throughout the tournament.

“We had a great team effort and Cheyenne (Martin) and Addie really stepped up when Bailee didn’t play in the semis,” Giger said. “We’ve consistently had three or four players in double figures in scoring, and it’s been different girls each time.”

The North Platte girls were scheduled to play at St. Joseph Christian Dec. 11 and will start their KCI Conference schedule with a home game against East Buchanan Dec. 14.