

VHS Winter Sports Preview

Wrestling – The Loggers are the defending District Champions and look like they have a very good shot at repeating this season.

Head Coach Chris Barnes has a deep line up that is loaded with experience and talent, along with a solid group of up and coming young wrestlers.

Early in the preseason, Barnes had 25 wrestlers showing up for practice. He appeared thrilled with the large turnout and what that says about his growing program, the interest locally in the sport, and the potential for a really rewarding season for his competitors and Logger fans.

“It’s exciting because the first year I coached I think we finished the District Tournament with just nine kids,” says Barnes. “Last year we finished with 18. A lot has changes in five years. We have a girls team now, we won a District Title, and we have tough wrestlers in almost every weight class. We have a kids club with over 30 wrestlers and a good middle school program. We’ve received great support from the community and local businesses for our fundraising programs, especially our 24 hour workout challenge each summer. We have four individual returning District Champions and a bunch of other kids that placed at District. And we have several returning wrestlers who went to State last year. So, yes, I’m excited!”

For Barnes, there is really just one piece missing – more fans. “We have almost no fan base in this town,



James Watson

which is sad because it’s a good team,” says Barnes. “As a coach, it’s embarrassing for me to look up in the stands and see that our opponents bring more fans than we have. We have a lot of kids in the program and I would like to see more parents show up, and others from the community. We’re going to be a fun team to watch this year. We pin a lot of our opponents, which is fun for the fans. These kids work hard and they deserve to get some recognition.”

Leading the way for the Loggers will be returning District Champions Storm Henson, Kailia Jackson, Mekhi Williams, and Elijah Bozied.

Senior Henson, who had to withdraw from the State Tournament last year after suffering a knee injury, is back and looks to be a favorite to repeat as District Champion at 160 pounds. “Storm is a strong team leader and he’s really starting to ‘flow wrestle,’ where he’s doing things before he even realizes it’s happening himself,” says Barnes.

“He’s countering, and moving, and covering really well. I’m excited to see how far he can go this year.”

Jackson had the distinction last year of being the first female wrestler in Vernonia history to win a District title and go to the state tournament. She is back to defend her title at 106. “Kailia is a great team leader and has been helping out with coaching our kids club,” says Barnes.

Mekhi Williams will look to pick up where he left off last year, after finishing third at State, and should wrestle at 132. “Mekhi will be a big and strong 132 pounder and if he can get a little more strategic, he will be tough to beat,” says Barnes. Bozied will most likely wrestle at 132.

Other wrestlers to watch for this year include Nick Bennett, who finished third at District last year, at 170, and Josh Rice who has not settled on a weight class yet. Both have been practicing, along with Henson, with legendary club coach Roy Pittman in Portland at the Peninsula Wrestling Club, and have made significant improvement over the last year. “Josh Rice, who finished third at District last year, is a very exciting wrestler who is very powerful and athletic. I’m

working with him on his technique and strategy,” says Barnes. “Nick Bennett is tough and has continued to improve each year of his career,” says Barnes.

Jacob Pasko, who qualified for State last year with a second place finish at District, has moved up several weight classes and should wrestle at 120 along with Zach Larke. Josh Sholes, who took third at District last year should wrestle at 126. Hepner Forster, a fourth place finisher last year at District, should be at 152 and James Watson will most likely wrestle at 182. “The exciting thing about Hepner is that he wants to pin everyone he wrestles. It’s just how he thinks and it happens a lot,” says Barnes. “James Watson is taller and thinner this year and he should be a threat at District.” Exchange student Murad Yazanedov looks

big and very strong and will probably wrestle at 195. “I’m really excited about him,” says Barnes.

The Loggers have two home meets this season on Tuesday, December 12 at 5:00 pm and on Tuesday, January 16 at 5:00 pm. They also have tournaments close by at Banks on December 13, the Bill Haggerty Invitational at Nestucca High School on December 16, and the Clatskanie Holiday Tournament on December 30.



Clay Sullivan

continued on page 11

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