The 116th EIWA Championships

EIWA Championships Preview

A Return to Balance in Saucon Valley

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The nation's oldest college wrestling tournament returns to familiar surroundings after consecutive years at first-time hosts. Lehigh University has hosted 24 times, more than any other school; this will be the twelfth time at Stabler Arena. Two years ago the Mountain Hawks broke Cornell's remarkable record of eleven consecutive team titles, then repeated as team champion at Binghamton. Lehigh hopes to defend on their home mats, while challenges may come from several avenues in a year where it's unlikely any team can run away with the title. The Princeton Tigers beat both Lehigh and Cornell (the winners of the last 18 tournaments) in dual meets this season, took down cross-state rival Rutgers for the first time in 30 years, and claimed the Ivy League title. Can the Orange and Black add an EIWA team title to their haul?

Army West Point returns a veteran team that featured several spirited battles for starting positions. Navy moved into contention late in the season, with the return of two top starters to their lineup; they fell by the Dread Criterion C in their season-ending dual loss against Army. Nor can Cornell be ruled out; despite missing three All-Americans due to Olympic redshirt years, the Big Red may still have enough firepower to make a run. If Lehigh or Princeton falter, the competition will be right there to capitalize.

In turn, those teams need to keep an eye in their rearview mirrors. The American Eagles, Bucknell Bison, Harvard Crimson, and Penn Quakers may not be able to grab the top prize, but they give out trophies down to third place and hardware always looks nice in the trophy case.

Honors extend beyond the team and individual titles. Also to be decided are the outstanding wrestler (coaches' vote), most career points (Fletcher Award), and best pinner (Sheridan Award); the coaches select the top coach and the referees honor the most sportsmanlike team. The EIWA tournament received forty-four automatic qualifying bids for the NCAA Championships at Minneapolis in two weeks; at-large selections to be announced the week after conference tourneys will augment the contingent.

The weight-by-weight preview:
A year after this class was led by freshmen the field is populated mostly by veterans. Leading the way is last year's champ, sophomore Patrick Glory, who added an NCAA 6th place to his accomplishments. Last year's runner-up, Cornell's Vitali Arujau, is taking an Olympic redshirt but there's no shortage of competition for Glory; Lehigh's Brandon Paetzell (down from 3rd at 133) and Penn freshman Michael Colaiocco have been in the national top ten much of the year.

Knocking on the door are Army senior Trey Chalifoux and American junior Gage Curry who have both placed 3rd; they have five EIWA medals between them. Navy junior Logan Treaster has been ranked in his first year as a starter; Columbia soph Joe Manchio and Harvard senior Nolan Hellickson are past placewinners. Don't rule out soph Dylan Ryder of Hofstra, who's spent a season building a resume that's finally being noticed.

After missing his first two seasons due to injury Chas Tucker has made up for lost time, with two EIWA finals appearances (a title last year). This season he's ranked top 5, has a 28-0 record, and is looking for his second title and first A/A award. Binghamton soph Zack Trampe, 4th a year ago, missed two months but is wrestling again and might provide the best challenge for the top spot.

Past placewinners are Navy junior Casey Cobb and Penn soph Carmen Ferrante, up from 125. Lehigh junior Nick Farro makes his first EIWA appearance as will freshmen Andrew Wert of Army, Darren Miller of Bucknell, Angelo Rini of Columbia, Michael Jaffe of Harvard, and Justin Hoyle of Hofstra. Any or all of them could stand on the platform on Saturday, as the EIWA welcomes a collection of freshmen who have quietly been flying under the radar so far.

Two-time EIWA and NCAA champ Yianni is another Big Red wrestler focusing on the Olympics, so we'll have to make do. Not a problem, as no fewer than ten former placewinners return in a deep field. Penn soph Doug Zapf moves up from 6th at 133 and has been ranked all year. Moving into the field from a greater distance is American's Sal Profaci, a 5th-year transfer from Michigan; he's a Big 10 and NCAA tournament veteran and looks to challenge for a finals berth. Other finals candidates are Navy junior Cody Trybus, looking for his first EIWA trophy, and Cornell's Noah Baughman, hoping to earn his first trip to NCAAs after placing 3rd and 2nd at 125.

Other likely medalists have won them in the past. That includes Army soph Corey Shie, 4th; Binghamton's Anthony Sparacio, 3rd; Franklin & Marshall's Wil Gil, 5th and an NCAA alternate last year; Lehigh's Ryan Pomrinca, 6th; Princeton's Marshall Keller, 8th; Bucknell's David Campbell, 8th at 133 as a freshman in 2018; Hofstra junior Vinny Vespa, 5th at 133 three years ago; and Sacred Heart's Gerard Daley, 7th at 125 back in 2016. If you want to root for someone lacking a medal, try Brown senior Jimmy Pawelski or Harvard junior Lukus Stricker, both with wins over some former placers. Any way you cut it, the blood round will be brutal as some good wrestlers will leave empty-handed.
looking to claim his first title. Laying his own claim is American junior Kizhan Clarke; 7th at 157 a year ago, he's down at his natural weight, 32-5, and has been ranked top ten much of the season.

Army soph PJ Ogunsanya, 6th last year, returns hoping to add to his collection of trophies. Juniors Hunter Richard of Cornell and Matt Kolonia of Bucknell, as well as soph Jimmy Hoffman of Lehigh, want to begin their collections. Then there are the freshmen, led at this weight by Ricky Cabanillas of Brown, Reece Heller of Hofstra, Rhise Royster of EIWA newcomer Long Island University, and Penn's Lucas Revano. You can match some names with faces on the medals stand come Saturday.

157 NCAA bids: 3
Defending Champion: Josh Humphreys, Lehigh
Returning Champion: Anthony Artalona (149)

Last year three excellent EIWA freshmen debuted in the middle weights. Penn's Anthony Artalona won at 149, Lehigh's Josh Humphreys won at 157, and Princeton's Quincy Monday placed 3rd at 157 after high rankings much of the year. Who will be the top seed? Possibly none of the above, as Army soph Markus Hartman, who missed the fun a year ago, has come into his own and holds wins over Artalona and Monday. While we're discussing potential finalists let's not forget that there's another in this field: Harvard's Hunter Ladnier was 2nd three years ago and has never looked better than he has recently, winning 10 of his last 11 duals.

Past placewinner? Drexel's Parker Kropman was 7th three years ago at 149. Surprising freshmen? Columbia's Kyle Mosher dropped from 165 mid-year and has won 12 of 15 since; add in Bucknell's Jaden Fisher, who moved up from 149 early. Other medal contenders? Brown's Jack Bokina, Cornell's Adam Santoro, and Hofstra's Holden Heller can all win a few in a row.

165 NCAA bids: 6
Defending Champion: Tanner Skidgel, Navy

Wide open a year ago, this class saw neither top seed make it to the finals. Champ Tanner Skidgel of Navy and runner-up Cael McCormick of Army proved that their title matchup was no fluke; both have been ranked high all year. Skidgel missed time in the spring but returned to edge McCormick in the Star Dual. Seeking their own way to the finals are Bucknell's Zach Hartman, a freshman runnerup at 157 a year ago, and top Harvard freshman Philip Conigliaro, ranked behind only the Midshipman.

Drexel senior Ebed Jarrell has placed twice (4th last year) and wouldn't mind another trip to NCAAs. Hofstra junior Ricky Stamm was 7th last year at 174 and he'd like to see what the big show is like too. Next in line are Princeton's soph Grant Cuomo and two veterans, F&M's Emmett LiCastri and Sacred Heart's Brandon Levesque. Cornell's entry was undecided at press time; Lehigh hopes that freshman Brian Meyer gets a boost from the home mats. LIU enters Ohio State transfer Ryan Ferro.

174 NCAA bids: 4
Defending Champion: Jordan Kutler, Lehigh
Former Champion: Brandon Womack, Cornell (165, 2017)

Lehigh senior Jordan Kutler heads the first of two weights with two former champions and All-Americans. A two-time champ and A/A, he's ranked in the top three. Cornell's Brandon Womack, 2nd and 3rd the past two seasons, was the 165 champion and an A/A three years ago; he's missed two months but is back just in time. Three-time placewinner Ben Harvey, Army, would like to make the finals, as would Navy senior Spencer Carey, 4th last year in his first tournament. If that sounds familiar it's because it's essentially the same intro as last year when those four were the top seeds.

Other past placewinners are senior Kevin Parker, Princeton, 7th last year at 184, and Sage Heller, Hofstra, 8th in 2018. Drexel freshman Michael O'Malley has recent wins over Carey and Parker.
freshman Lennox Wolak also shows promise. Bucknell's Mitch Hartman and Sacred Heart's Joe Accousti have been winning their share and could challenge for spots on the podium.

184 NCAA bids: 4 Past Champion: Max Dean, Cornell

This is the third weight impacted by Olympic redshirts, as champ and NCAA 2nd Max Dean is MIA. Binghamton soph Lou DePrez, 3rd last year, has been tops five much of the year and has the inside track for one finals spot. Likely to head the opposite half of the bracket is Lehigh's Chris Weiler, 6th at 197 two years ago. Weiler has beaten DePrez and several others in the bracket. Those who could challenge for the finals are American junior Tanner Harvey, 4th last year, and Army senior Noah Stewart, 6th.

Travis Stefanik of Princeton was 6th at 174 a year ago. He recently upset a 13th-ranked Rutgers rival. Cornell freshman Jonathan Loew has a win against Weiler. Sacred Heart's Kyle Davis has crafted a successful season. Columbia's Joe Franzese won his team's starting job and could challenge for a place.

197 NCAA bids: 6 Defending Champion: Patrick Brucki, Princeton
Former Champion: Ben Darmstadt, Cornell (2018)

Ben Darmstadt of Cornell and Princeton's Patrick Brucki head the second weight with two former champions and All-Americans. Darmstadt missed last season with a lower back injury but, if his 13 falls are any indication, his recovery was successful. Among his 11 wins at 197 was a decision over Brucki. Not to say that the Tiger has had a quiet season; both men are ranked in the top 5.

Lehigh's John Jakobsen (5th) and Bucknell's Drew Phipps (6th, 8th) are the other past placewinners. Jakobsen has a win over Phipps; Penn's Cole Urbas has a default win over Jakobsen; Drexel's Bryan McLaughlin has a win over Urbas; Phipps has wins over Urbas, Brown, and McLaughlin; Navy's Jake Koser has wins over Jakobsen, Phipps, McLaughlin, and Brown (and somehow has struggled to be noticed for the rankings). Koser and Urbas are the freshmen in the group. If any of them falter look for Brown's Nino Bastianelli, Columbia's Sam Wustefeld, or Hofstra's Trey Rogers to challenge. This is another weight where the blood round will be cruel.

285 NCAA bids: 3 Defending Champion: Jordan Wood, Lehigh

Jordan Wood is the two-time defending champion and returning NCAA 4th, and may not draw the top seed. Harvard freshman (that word again) Yaraslau Slavikouski broke into the rankings in mid-November and just kept climbing. He ended the season with 12 straight wins and has more quality wins than Wood. The two haven't met, setting up a terrific finals clash if they can both make it that far. There's never been a 4-time EIWA heavyweight champion; Wood is halfway home but the final two could be the hardest.

Which is not to say that the rest of the field is going to concede the finals. Army's Ben Sullivan, 6th last year, has been ranked all season and Joe Doyle of Binghamton took 5th place. Zachary Knighton-Ward of Hofstra, Ben Goldin of Penn, and Cornell's Brendan Furman have been in and out of rankings. Beyond them look for American's Niko Camacho, Sacred Heart's Connor Fredericks, F&M's Vincenzo Pelusi, and Drexel's Sean O'Malley to battle for spots on the final podium of the tournament.

For those planning ahead, the 117th EIWA tournament will return to Newman Arena at Cornell University the weekend of March 5-7, 2021.