

By Randy Whalen

The Lockport Township boys wrestling program always expects big things.

This season is no exception. Come February, the Porters have two goals. Get as many individuals as possible to state and wrestle in the team state finals.

Even with a new head coach and losing one of the top wrestlers in the nation, they were able to do that last season. The Porters placed third in Class 3A for the second straight season, their fifth top-four finish in the past eight completed seasons. There were no actual state finals in 2021 because of COVID.

"We have a lot of young guys in the lineup," Lockport coach Jameson Oster said. "We have just two seniors, a handful of juniors, a lot of sophomores, and some freshmen. We're young, but we're experienced.

"We have (sophomores) Justin Wardlow and Morgan Turner as two returning state placers, so we have some good building blocks. The goal is always to win a state trophy."

Last season, Wardlow exploded on the scene as a freshman and placed second in the individual Class 3A state tournament at 120 pounds.

But it was just an adventure for him to get there. as he broke his elbow in the third period of the state semifinal but continued to go and held on for a 6-5 victory over Teddy Flores from Maine South.

With that win, he became the first Porter freshman to advance to the state championship match. But due to his injury, Wardlow couldn't wrestle for the title and medical forfeited to senior Massey Odiotti from Loyola Academy, who became the first state champion in that school's history.

"My goal is to be a state champion," Wardlow said. "I just have to believe in myself and believe that it will happen. I just have to do the same thing. Go out every day, have fun, believe in God and myself, and believe good things will happen.

"As a team, we expect great things and another trophy."

Turner is an interesting story, to say the least. As a girl wrestling at Bremen High School as a freshman Turner made history at the 2023 Illinois High School Association Individual Boys Wrestling State Finals. She became the first female wrestler in IHSA history to place in the boys' tourney. Turner placed third at 106 pounds in Class 2A.

At Lockport this season, Turner is looking for a state championship at 106 pounds. Although she was in the girls' division at the recent Dan Gable Donnybrook, where she won her 105-pound weight class title. Not only that but she was named the Outstanding Wrestler for the Donnybrook which is a premier high school boys and girls wrestling tournament.

The 40-plus boys division and 42-plus girls division tourney was held between Nov. 30 and Dec. 3. It included the best high school teams from the Midwest competing in an individual tournament at Xstream Arena in Coralville, Iowa.

But Turner will be with the Porter boys team the rest of the way.

"Morgan will be wrestling on the boys' team for the rest of the year, including the state series," Oster said. "She is one of the wrestlers who have helped us to a pretty good start to the season. We've had lots of new faces on varsity getting their first matches/wins on varsity."

There are only two seniors on the team—Wojtek Chrobak at heavyweight and Cyrus Czyz at 220 pounds.

The Porters got off to a good start. As usual, they don't back down from anyone, and the first competition was a triangular meet on Wednesday, Nov. 22 at Marmion Academy in Aurora.

There, Lockport defeated Marion Central Catholic 72-6 to open the season. In that bout, freshman Jaedon Calderon (at 145), junior Durango Valles (182), Chrobak (heavyweight), and junior Timothy O'Connor (113) all got pins. A half dozen forfeit wins accounted for 36 more points. Those were by junior Dominic Vukobratovich (120), sophomore Isaac Zimmerman (126), sophomore Naseem Jaber (152), junior Edward Rasp (160), sophomore Nuh Abukhudair (195), and Czyz (220).

Also with wins for the Porters were junior Liam Zimmerman (17-0 tech fall at 132), Wardlow (15-6 major at 138), and Turner (13-7 at 106).

But Lockport then fell to Marmion 42-30. It was a rematch of last season's state semifinal match, which the Cadets won 36-30. Marmion went on to lose to first-time state champion St Charles East 28-24 in the title match.

In this early season matchup, the Porter points all came via pin or forfeit. Liam Zimmerman (132) won by forfeit. Jaber (152), junior Drew Silzer (170), Valles (182 in 17 seconds), and O'Connor (113) all had pins.

It was quite a nice start to the season for Valles, who is in his second varsity season after being at Stagg as a freshman.

"I didn't wrestle in the individual postseason last year but I was 32-12 and placed third in the (SouthWest Suburban Blue Division) Conference at 152 pounds," Valles said. "This season I'm expecting a state medal.

"I've been waiting for the opportunity to get back on the mat since last season. Last (February) I did get the opportunity to wrestle for the team at the dual team state and got a big win (a 15-5 major at 160) in the third-place match against Yorkville (a 45-16 Lockport win). We have a lot of sophomores and juniors and the next two years we are going to have a strong, young team."

Then on Saturday, Nov. 25, the Porters competed at the Minooka Quad Meet. There they went undefeated with a trio of dominating wins. Lockport had eight pins in a 58-15 win over Moline. Those were by Turner (106), O'Connor (113), Isaac Zimmerman (126), Liam Zimmerman (130), Wardlow (138), Valles (175), Czyz (215), and Chrobak (heavyweight). Vukobratovich (120), had an 11-2 major decision, while Calderon (144) had a 10-3 win, and freshman Anthony Diorio (150) registered a 6-4 victory.

In a 70-9 win over McNamara, Lockport had six forfeit wins. Those were by O'Connor (113), Liam Zimmerman (132), Calderon (144), Jabar (150), Czyz (215), Turner (106). The Porters added five pins: Isaac Zimmerman (126), Wardlow (138), Silzer (165), Abukhudair (195), and Chrobak (heavyweight) had those, while Valles (175) registered a 20-6 major decision.

There were also an impressive five Porter pins in a 48-19 win over host Minooka. Those were by Isaac Zimmerman (126), Liam Zimmerman (132), Calderon (144), Chrobak (heavyweight), and O'Connor (113). Vales (175) had a 21-6 tech fall, while Turner (106) had a 22-12 major decision. Wardlow (138) and Jaber (150) both had 7-4 wins, and Czyz (215) won by a 9-5 count for Lockport.

In addition to Turner winning on the girls' side and getting the Outstanding Wrestler Award at 105 pounds, the Porters had a trio of other placers at the prestigious Donnybrook Tournament. They were O'Connor (8th at 113), Liam Zimmerman (8th at 132), and Wardlow (5th at 138).

The SWSC Blue competition opens this week on Thursday, Dec. 7 at 5 PM in the fieldhouse with Lockport hosting Bolingbrook. Last season, the Porters won the conference for the seventh time since it was created, nearly 20 years ago, but for the first time since the 2019-20 season.

Last year, Oster replaced his older brother Josh as head coach. It was a crazy season as senior Braydon Thompson, who won the 170-pound Class 3A State Championship in 2022 with an undefeated record and was the top-ranked 182-pounder in the country decided to leave midseason to compete at Stillwater High School in Oklahoma for his final semester of high school.

But undaunted, Lockport regrouped to win the conference, place third in the state in Class 3A, and have a trio of individual state runner-up finishes. Logan Kaminski (138) and Logan Swaw (160) who were both seniors then, joined Wardlow with second-place finishes.

The Porters' success wouldn't be possible without top coaching. Not only with Oster, who is the most decorated wrestler in Porter's history placing fourth (112), first (119), second (125), and third (130) in the largest school class between 2008-11, but with the assistant coaches too. Many of them are volunteer coaches.

The assistants are, Doug Chesna, Mike Mucha, Dan Swan, Jim Ranney, and Josh Zimmerman. The volunteer assistants are Abdullah Assaf, Ron Farina, Colin Holler, Dave Mackey, Rob Melgoza, Josh Oster, and Drake Rossi.

"We had an interesting year last year," Jameson Oster said of his first season as head coach. "But I just have a great coaching staff. Everyone has college experience, is versed in different styles, and are really great teachers of the sport."