

They're No. 1

Jay County enters season as the top-ranked team in Class 2A with a focus on championships from sectional to state duals



Jay County High School's Cameron Clark points to the crowd after winning the 138-pound semi-state championship in February. Clark went on to finish seventh in the state. He returns to the Patriots as the fourth-ranked 145-pounder in the preseason poll. Jay County is ranked No. 1 in Class 2A and No. 16 overall and has big goals when it comes to the individual state tournament and team state duals.

By **RAY COONEY**
The Commercial Review

No. 1. There are a lot of ways to describe how good the Patriots are expected to be this year. But that single number really says it all.

Jay County High School's boys wrestling team, which opens the season Tuesday against Centerville, was ranked No. 1 in Class 2A by IndianaMat when preseason polls were released early this month.

On one hand, that ranking is an honor.

On the other, it poses a challenge.

"I know this is coach talk, but I really do feel it. I hate rankings," said JCHS coach Eric Myers. "Especially whenever something like that happens because my favorite thing to do with rankings is to say, 'Hey, look at them. We're better than them. We should be knocking them off.'"

"And whenever something says you're No. 1 ... now people think they're going to knock you off. You have to have the attitude that that's not going to happen."

"There's a lot of tough teams in 2A this year, and we're going to have our work cut out for us, especially with a target on our back like that. But whenever you have good wrestlers, people recognize it."

The Patriots were the runners-up in the Indiana High School Wrestling Coaches Association Class 2A state duals last season. (While wrestling is a single-class sport for the IHSAA — Jay County is ranked 16th in the state overall — the coaches association breaks it down into classes for the purposes of its state duals.)

In addition to its top ranking in the class, JCHS is the No. 2 team overall in the Fort Wayne semi-state — it is contested at Allen County War Memorial Coliseum — behind only defending champion Rochester. It finished sixth in the semi-state last season.

Need more numbers? The Patriots have seven wrestlers ranked in the top 20 in their weight class heading into the season, including two in the top five.

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FRHS grad leads Oilers

The Oilers couldn't keep up with the top-ranked team in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics.

But Val Muhlenkamp was at her best against the best.

Muhlenkamp, a 2020 Fort Recovery High School graduate, led the University of Findlay women's basketball team in scoring Saturday in its 83-45 loss to NAIA No. 1 Grand Valley State.

Muhlenkamp shot 5-of-12 from the field to lead the Oilers (2-2) with a dozen points. (The rest of the Findlay squad hit at just 27.5%.) She also had four rebounds, one steal and one block.

She came off the bench in Friday's 62-46 victory over Davenport, totaling 10 points on 5-of-9 shooting, four rebounds and one block.

Through four games, Muhlenkamp is averaged 6.5 points to go along with 3.8 rebounds. She is 4-of-4 from the free-throw line.

Chloe Will FRHS - 2019

Competed for the Tiffin University women's cross country team, which placed 23rd out of 33 teams Saturday in the NCAA Midwest Regional at Wisconsin-Parkside.

Will was the No. 4 runner for the Dragons as she placed 164th overall. She finished the 6K race in 25 minutes, 25.76 seconds.

Alli Vaughn FRHS - 2021

Scored in double figures for the third consecutive game as the Huntington University women's basketball team lost 74-42 Saturday to Goshen.

Vaughn was the leading scorer for the Foresters (3-5) as she shot 5-of-8 from the field and hit one 3-pointer. She also had four rebounds, one block and one assist. See Collegiate page 6B



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Pictured is the 2022-23 Jay County High school boys basketball team. Front row from left are Parker Nichols, Brady Davis, Abraham Dirksen, Trevin Dunnington, Gradin Swoveland, Bennett Weitzel, Ben Crouch, Liam Garringer, Blake Bogenschutz and Carter Link. Back row are manager Ella Champ, coach Jerry Bomholt, assistant coach Aaron Daniels, Dusty Pearson, Wesley Bihn, assistant coach Doug Arbuckle and managers Mylee Hoffman and Luke Vormohr.

Patriot puzzle

JCHS has a lot of pieces to work with this season

By RAY COONEY
The Commercial Review

Coach Jerry Bomholt has more options.

It's a matter of how they will fit together.

As the Jay County High School boys basketball team prepares to open its season Friday at Richmond — the originally scheduled opener Tuesday at Bishop Luers was postponed because of the Knights' deep run in the football state tournament — its coach is looking at a long list of players who could factor in around his three returning starters.

"It's an interesting situation for a coach," said Bomholt. "The thing is with this group is they present me ... with a puzzle. This year we have a lot of pieces of

the puzzle. Last year there were a limited amount of pieces and they were easy to fit together. This year, because we have so many more options, because of

our depth ... the puzzle is a little tougher."

That said, the first piece is easy to place. No matter what the lineup, it's Dusty Pearson.

'This year we have a lot of pieces of the puzzle. Last year there were a limited amount of pieces and they were easy to fit together.'

'This year, because we have so many more options, because of our depth ... the puzzle is a little tougher.'

—JCHS coach Jerry Bomholt

The senior is the team's top returning scorer at eight points per game — he trailed only 2022 graduate Ethan Dirksen (15.9) last season — while

shooting 47% from the field. At 6 feet, 6 inches, he was the team's top rebounder at 7.2 per game.

See **Puzzle** page 5B



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Pictured is the 2022-23 Jay County High School boys swim team. Front row from left are Max Klopenfenstein, Peyton Yowell, Nick Lyons, Wyatt Kunkler, Joshua Monroe and Kamdyn Carter. Middle row are manager Osmar Gonzalez, Joseph Dow, Kolby Baldwin and managers Thomas Charles and Natali Mindorashvili. Back row are manager Yosha Monse, Grayson Swoveland, Matthew Fisher, Brasen Glassford, David Keen and Lincoln Clamme.

Building process

Young Patriots looking at improvement, building culture

By RAY COONEY
The Commercial Review

The Patriots have a handful of swimmers heading into their final season.

They have a bunch with no high school experience at all.

There is — almost — no in between.

As the Jay County High School boys swim team prepares to start its season — its first meet is against Bluffton — it does so with a roster heavily weighted by freshmen.

“This is probably the hardest-working group I’ve had in a while as far as their day-to-day training,” said Slavik. “They’re work-

ing hard and I’m hoping it pays off at the end. But we’re young. Holy smokes, we’re young. It’s a new experience for most of these kids. I think they’re ready for it, but it’ll be a trial by fire once we get the season kicked off.”

Three seniors — Josh Monroe, Wyatt Kunkler and Kolby Baldwin — are back to lead the Patriots. They have one junior, Joseph Dow. Everyone else on the roster is a freshman.

Monroe is the only returning JCHS athlete who competed in an individual championship race at the 2022 sectional meet. He finished in fourth place

in the 100-yard breaststroke. (He was also 11th in the 200 individual medley.)

Breaststroke projects as his speciality again this year with his other event likely to be either the individual medley.

“Josh has been a hard-working kid his whole career,” said Slavik. “I think he’s got an upside potential certainly in the breaststroke event. He’s built a lot of strength in the offseason and we’re hoping we can get him in one of those top spots in the (sectional) breaststroke.”

Kunkler was 11th in the sectional in the in the 200 freestyle and 16th in the

100 freestyle. Baldwin and Dow were both part of the Patriots’ seventh-place 400 freestyle relay team, but neither advanced to a championship or consolation final in an individual sectional event last season.

Slavik said he sees Kunkler transitioning from the middle distance freestyle to focusing more on the sprints. Baldwin will likely be in similar positions with Dow focusing more on the distance freestyle events.

“(Dow’s) speed and his offseason training has been pretty tremendous,” said Slavik. “I’m looking for big things out of Joe.”

See **Building** page 6B

2022-23 schedule

Date	Opponent	Time
Tuesday, Nov. 29	Bluffton	5:30 p.m.
Thursday, Dec. 1	Anderson	6 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 3	Celina Sprints	11 a.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 6	Oak Hill	6 p.m.
Thursday, Dec. 8	Norwell	6 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 10	Norwell Invitational	9 a.m.
Monday, Dec. 12	South Adams	5:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 13	Delta	6 p.m.
Monday, Dec. 19	Adams Central	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 3	Bellmont	6 p.m.
Thursday, Jan. 5	Celina/Coldwater	6 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 6	JCHS Invitational	6 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 7	JCHS Invitational	9 a.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 10	Yorktown	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 17	Muncie Central	6 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 20	ACAC	5:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 24	Blackford/Burris	6 p.m.
Thursday, Jan. 26	Marion	6 p.m.

Home meets in bold



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Pictured is the 2022-23 Jay County High School boys wrestling team. Front row from left are AJ Heskett, Dominick Bright, Syllas Wenk, Matthew Schmidt, Hayden Richman, Garrett Bennett and Christian Wittkamp. Second row are Quentin Mackey, Joaquin Johnson, Daidrick Retz, Taye Curtis, Cody Rowles, Griffin Byrum, Carter Barton and Ethan Reiley. Third row are Trace Smith, Alan Ortiz, Tony Wood, Jacob Robinson, Cameron Clark, Daniel Moore, Tyler Cummings, Juaquin Flores and Alejandro Ruiz. Back row are assistant coaches Tyler Leonhard and Bruce Wood, Cole Carpenter, Landon Mills-Blowers, Rhysin Blowers, Brice Coys, Benson Ward, Conner Specht, Bryce Wenk, A.J. Myers, Trey Nichols, assistant coach Brad Rosman and coach Eric Myers.

No. 1 ...

Continued from page 1B
Junior Cameron Clark returns after a 2022 tournament run that included a semi-state championship and a seventh-place state medal. (He became just the third Patriot sophomore to reach the podium at the state finals.)

He had battled multiple ankle injuries through his sophomore season but got stronger through the IHSAA tournament series. He said he felt he was being doubted through his recovery before erasing any questions about his ability by pinning 10th-ranked Julius Gerencser of Daleville in the semi-state semifinal and topping No. 11 Dillon Tuttle 7-2 to win the semi-state.

"That run that he had

2022-23 schedule		
Date	Opponent	Time
Tuesday, Nov. 29	Centerville	6:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 3	Franklin Invitational	9 a.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 6	Four-team meet	6 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 9	ACAC Duals	6 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 10	ACAC Duals	9 a.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 13	Norwell	6 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 17	Carroll Invitational	9 a.m.
Friday, Dec. 23	ECIC	9 a.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 3	Coldwater	6:30 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 7	IHSWCA State	9 a.m.
Thursday, Jan. 12	Homestead	6:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 20	ACAC Tournament	6 p.m.
Home meets in bold		

last year was pretty great," said Myers. "He just stayed in it. Sectional runner-up, regional runner-up and then had an opportunity and seized it at semi-state,

and as a result placed at the state finals. It was a pretty great year for him."

Clark enters the season ranked fourth at 145 pounds.

"He's one of those kids that's a little bit like a sponge," added Myers. "He just keeps soaking more and more in. He just keeps improving. Every time I see him I feel like he gets stronger. He's constantly working on getting better at wrestling."

Tony Wood, a state qualifier each of the last two seasons, is the other top-five wrestler for JCHS heading into the season as he is ranked fifth at 138 pounds. He won sectional and regional titles at 126 pounds last season and was the semi-state runner-up.

His season came up one victory short of a state medal as he fell 7-4 loss to Ka'Mari'Yon Nelson of Castle in the opening

round of the tournament at Gainbridge Fieldhouse.

"Tony's a kid who just loves wrestling," said Myers of the junior who went 37-3 a year ago. "He comes into the room, he watches wrestling, he watches technique. He shows a lot of technique from things that he's learned from all the camps that he's went to. He's just a student of wrestling. It's fun to have a kid like that."

All of the Patriots' seven semi-state qualifiers from last season are back, with Cody Rowles, Bryce Wenk, Ethan Reiley, Daniel Moore and Taye Curtis joining Clark and Wood. All of them are state-ranked.

Rowles and Wenk are both ranked 11th, the former at 126 pounds and the

latter at 182. Moore is ranked 17th at 106, with Reiley and Curtis ranked 20th at 120 and 132, respectively.

Wenk was just a few heartbeats away from a state berth last season, leading 8-3 over Trey Tobias of NorthWood in the "ticket round." But he gave up a takedown and three-point near fall in the final 10 seconds to lose by one.

"Bryce Wenk, he's a beast," said Myers. "He should have went to the state finals last year. He had a bad 20 seconds there. It's one that hurts everybody's heart a little bit. We're hoping that he can recover there and take that next step."

See No. 1 page 5B



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Puzzle ...

Continued from page 2B
Though he'll do it in a different way than Dirksen, who often initiated the JCHS offense, he'll be looked upon to be the leader.

"Dusty always hesitated. Dusty was always of the mental opinion that if he missed a shot, he probably ought not take another one," said Bomholt. "And now, hopefully we've gotten to the point ... that he's going to look for his shot every time."

"He might be, percentage wise, our best 3-point shooter. He's our best offensive player. He's our best shot-blocker. You can go right down the list with things he can do."

The other returning starters for the Patriots are point guard Josh Dowlen and post player Bennett Weitzel. They averaged an identical 6.96 points last season, each finishing the year with 181 in 26 games. Weitzel was third on the team in rebounds behind Pearson and Dirksen with 5.2 per

2022-23 schedule		
Date	Opponent	Time
Saturday, Nov. 26	Richmond	6 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 2	Woodlan	6 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 3	Fort Recovery	6 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 10	New Castle	6 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 16	Delta	6 p.m.
Thursday, Dec. 22	Baron Shootout	noon
Friday, Dec. 30	Muncie Central	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 3	Bishop Luers	6 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 7	Adams Central	6:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 10	ACAC Tournament	6 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 20	South Adams	6 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 21	Hagerstown	noon
Friday, Jan. 27	Bluffton	6 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 28	Blackford	6 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 2	Southern Wells	6 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 10	Heritage	6 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 11	Yorktown	2:30 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 17	Norwell	6 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 21	Winchester	6 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 24	Bellmont	6 p.m.
Home games in bold		

game while Dowlen averaged 1.6 assists and 2.2 steals.

It will be Dowlen's responsibility to handle the bulk of the duties at point guard following the graduation of Gavin Muhlenkamp (6.1 points, 3.2 assists in 2021-22).

"The energy level that he supplies," said Bomholt to start the list of what Dowlen means to the Patriots. "He's one of the most unselfish kids that I've ever been around. But he's really worked on his offense, really worked on his shot."

He's worked hard on getting to the rim."

Two other Jay County players return — seniors Blake Bogenschutz and Brady Davis — are back after seeing action in at least 20 games a year ago. Bogenschutz's 24 3-pointers were second on the team to Dirksen's 53. They will be in the mix at the wing positions along with senior Carter Link, who is new to the team this season, and junior Abraham Dirksen.

"All four of those kids give you something different," Bomholt said. "But I've got to find the one that gives us the most things to give us the best chance."

Additional puzzle pieces at the post position include juniors Wesley Bihn and Trevin Dunnington.

In all, Bomholt has 16 on his varsity/JV roster. His plan, he said, is that anyone who isn't a starter or first man off the bench at a position will see junior varsity minutes to help their development.

The Patriots lost nearly half of their points per game to graduation — Dirksen, Muhlenkamp and Trenton Alexander averaged 24.3 of the Patriots' 51.4 — but their coach isn't worried about their scoring output.

"I think we'll be OK offensively," said Bomholt. "But defensively, we've not been able in my first two years — even though we've been decent defensively — to develop the mentality ... that if somebody scores on me, they're not getting another one. ..."

"We're starting to understand. ... So far in practice, they've taken it to heart."

After back-to-back seven-win seasons and six consecutive first-round tournament exits, Jay County made a big leap last season. It set a new school record with 21 wins — the previous mark of 20 was set by the 2005-06 Class 3A state runner-up squad and matched by the 2012-13 team — put together a 10-

game winning streak, won the Allen County Athletic Conference regular-season and tournament titles, and advanced to the sectional final.

Having beaten their championship opponent by 15 points less than a month earlier, the Patriots seemed primed to bring home the trophy for the first time in a decade. But Yorktown got hot from 3-point range and walked away with the title.

The target for Jay County is to claim the championship that escaped it last year. And with a new tournament format — there is now a one-game regional followed by a two-game semi-state — Bomholt believes even more is within reach.

"For us, I think we have enough athletic ability that there's no reason we can't look at winning a sectional and winning a regional," he said, "especially with the way it's set up this year ... I think that's what they want."

No. 1 ...

Continued from page 4B
Rowles seemed like a strong bet to make the state finals, entering the semi-state ranked 11th and with just one loss against him. But he struggled in his ticket round match, falling behind 8-0 en route to an 8-4 loss to Wyatt Davis of Rochester.

"Cody Rowles had a dominant season, just ran into a tough matchup in the ticket round," Myers said. "So we hope to get him over that hump."

"Cody is just aggressive. He usually takes the match to somebody, which sets somebody on their heels ... It kind of changes up their plan. His ability to throw also is something that really helps him out."

With the state-ranked wrestlers filling out the lower weight classes — Syllas Wenk will step in at

113 or drop to 106 if Moore moves up — Myers said he expects to have some competition at 152 and 160. Those wrestlers include freshman Jacob Robinson, sophomore transfer Christian Witkamp, senior Trey Nichols, Landon Mills-Blowers and Benson Ward.

AJ Myers and Joaquin Flores are expected to be in the 170-to-195 range, filling in around Wenk. Freshman Alan Ortiz, a middle school state champion last season, will be at 220 pounds with Conner Specht at heavyweight.

Why is the lineup so strong top to bottom?

"It's a group of kids that started wrestling together when they were young," said Myers. "They have a lot of parent involvement, dads that have wrestled and dads that coach. Whenever they're not

at the wrestling room here, they're probably listening to wrestling stories or wrestling with their dads, getting extra practices in. That along with them being friends, that helps out a lot too."

The goals are many for the Patriots, who will host the IHSW-CA Class 2A Team State Duals a day after hosting an Indiana High School Girls Wrestling regional. The list starts with showing off in front of their home fans with a team state duals title after finishes as runners-up a year ago.

"That's gonna be pretty exciting ... being able to host it here in this gym," said Myers. "Hopefully we can get a good crowd here to support the wrestling team and we can put on a little bit of a show for them."

"We wrestled pretty well up

until the finals last year to be runner-up," he added. "We kind of got it handed to us in the finals. So I'm hoping those guys learned from that and it makes them a little bit more hungry and they're ready to compete and win."

"I think that's the only goal there is to win team state."

They also want to push for championships in the sectional and regional tournaments — they are both also at Jay County — send a massive contingent to semi-state and have a chance to bring home multiple state medals.

None of that will be easy for the Patriots. Defending Class 2A state champion Belmont is a top contender again — the Braves are ranked third heading into the season — and No. 2 Western and No. 4 Delta will be prime challengers.

After winning the Allen County Athletic Conference Duals last season and finishing as the ACAC Tournament runners-up to Adams Central, Jay County will again have to deal with the Jets — they are ranked No. 2 in Class 1A — along with Class 1A No. 7 Bluffton.

Adams Central, Bluffton, Belmont and Class 2 A No. 7 Norwell are all sectional rivals and Delta is part of the regional group.

"We haven't won a sectional since 2018," said Myers. "We haven't won a regional since 1988. We won a semi-state in 1982."

"So I feel like we've got to aim pretty high. We should be in the running to win all three of those. And if things go right, then you can look at getting some placers and seeing how you can do (at state)."

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