

State Tournament Preview

By

Brian E. Preece

The history of Utah prep wrestling is that the sport has been dominated by dynasties. Of all the prep sports Utah sponsors, this is the sport that has the least ebb and flow. Whether it is Millard in 2-A, Wasatch (and now Delta) in 3-A, or Viewmont in 5-A, this decade has had its own dynastic elements. Even in 4-A the decade has been dominated by Mountain Crest or Box Elder though Spanish Fork and recently Payson have interrupted either the Blue and Orange or Purple from winning the trophy. Mountain Crest has won three state titles in the last five years with Box Elder right there. In 1-A the first five years were dominated by Wayne but now Altamont, Duchesne and Monticello have come on strong and perhaps the state's smallest classification will see the most turnover as we head toward the future—perhaps.

When dynasties come to and end it is because of a variety of factors. Most often it is because the dynastic power slips. It can often come because of a retirement of a coach (like Dennis Preece in Uintah or Darold Henry in Pleasant Grove). Those dynasties were so strong that each program has maintained a high level of performance since their legendary coaches have left winning some state titles and contending in many years, but perhaps without the gloss of the glory years. But sometimes a dynastic power can make a seamless transition, which has seemed to have occurred with Bart Thompson to Brandon Ripplinger (Viewmont), Marshall Sheriff to Blake Turner (Millard) or even in the past with Don Neff to David Chavis (Brighton). Sometimes dynasties reemerge like Delta, because past tradition links with a rising star young coach (Josh Wright) and the stars realign for a return to dominance. I don't see anyone threatening Delta for years unless it's Wasatch, which returns to past coach Wade Discher. Wasatch is a unique dynasty as it was started by Steve Sanderson but then continued on with Discher, and then short stints by Chris Blair and Ben Vombaur and then a return of Sanderson who now passes the torch back again to Discher.

4-A is a curious case because Box Elder and Mountain Crest have pushed each other to great heights. I've heard both of their head coaches say to me that they are grateful that they have had each other to push each other. And these programs have been the most consistent challengers for the top spot. Mountain Crest won three straight titles from 2006-08 while the Bees

were second those years but squeezing in a pair of state titles earlier in the decade. Spanish Fork won a pair of back to back titles before being shifted off to 5-A and then Payson broke through last year. In this case the process is more gradual and an emerging program keeps getting better and better while the dynastic power(s) actually stay at a high level but are overtaken over time. This might (might being the operative word) be taking place in 4-A as again Mountain Crest and Box Elder are still top level programs. Now Payson looks like they have all the elements of a dynasty--great wrestlers, great coaches and great youth programs. But Mountain Crest and Box Elder aren't going away. If Payson is going to become a dynastic power, it is because they rose to the occasion and earned it not because Box Elder or Mountain Crest slipped. In fact these two schools seem to be better than ever. Then if that weren't enough for Box Elder and Mountain Crest to worry about, there is Maple Mountain and its own young talent and superb youth programs lurking. This is why I personally find 4-A the most interesting division because I see four or five programs fighting it out the next decade while the other classifications are likely to be entrenched in some form of dynastic domination.

If South Summit wants to supplant Millard in 2-A, they will have to bring their "A" game because the Eagles are flying high. Delta isn't going anywhere fast so it will take somebody like a Wasatch perhaps to raise their game to that level, hoping for Delta slippage is like hoping for me to get less opinionated.

In 1-A there seems to be a bit more ebb and flow. With former 2-A schools like Duchesne, Altamont and Monticello now 1-A, Wayne's hammerlock on the division has come to a screeching halt. Altamont looks to win its second title in three years and with the Foy family producing great wrestlers, Altamont might become a dynastic power in 1-A.

So the questions are: will dynasties rule the roost into the future or will new powers rise up and challenge the old guard? And specifically will that start this year?

5-A: I actually think Viewmont is vulnerable. They have two pretty much sure titlists with Danner Kjar and Mitch Rasmussen and plenty of depth but the separation they had versus the rest of the 5-A field is much less this year. In 5-A star power goes a lot further than any other division. JV qualifiers are much less and the number of qualifiers each school has versus others is more equitable thus you will have a more compressed field of teams. When you have that, a team with star power but perhaps lacking depth can make a run. Think of the Fremont Five who nearly pushed toward a trophy last

year. This year I think four teams can actually challenge Viewmont. They are in no particular order West Jordan (though the Jags rely on depth), Bingham (star power in Moss, Martell, Lobdell and those two big boys), Layton (star power) Pleasant Grove (another team who hopes their depth might challenge Viewmont—the PG Vikings have 18 qualifiers) and traditional Region One Power Weber (who combines a bit of both).

1. Viewmont
2. Bingham
3. Weber
4. West Jordan
5. Pleasant Grove
6. Layton
7. Skyline
8. Alta
9. Hunter
10. Davis

4-A: See related story for in-depth analysis and why I predict Payson to win its second straight title. Are the Lions an emerging dynasty? They seem to have emerged as a serious threat to Mountain Crest and Box Elder, and for years to come. They aren't a passing fad. Then there is Maple Mountain hoping to make serious noise in the near future, whispers of greatness will aired this year and Uintah, consistently good, hopes that they can get back to the top, the Utes being shut out of the gold trophy for over a decade.

3-A: Delta is bad (when I say bad I mean very, very good)! I saw them first hand last week qualify all 27 wrestlers they brought to the 3-A Southern Divisional. They are too legit to quit! Wasatch is a strong second and I see Hurricane's star power edging Region 9 rival Canyon View out for fourth place while Morgan finishes fifth edging out Northern Divisional rival Carbon.

1. Delta
2. Wasatch
3. Hurricane
4. Canyon View
5. Morgan
6. Carbon
7. Cedar City

8. Juab
9. Desert Hills
10. Bear River

2-A: South Summit is making progress but Millard is still the king. They are likely to be king in the final Preece Power Poll. If Payson or Delta would like to be at the top they need to take care of business and hope that Wildcats make some of their own. North Sevier should take third battling it out with Beaver, North Summit and Enterprise.

1. Millard
2. South Summit
3. North Sevier
4. Beaver
5. North Summit
6. Enterprise

1-A: Altamont might become the next 1-A juggernaut as Wayne was for much of the 1980's and 1990's. Monticello and Duchesne are likely to battle it out for second while Rich and Wayne battle to stay in the Top 5 with Panguitch.

1. Altamont
2. Duchesne
3. Monticello
4. Wayne
5. Rich
6. Panguitch