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Subject: 2021 Purdue Wrestling Season Preview: 125-141
Date: January 8, 2021 at 2:10 PM
To: undisclosed-recipients;



For Immediate Release:

Friday, January 8, 2021

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2021 Purdue Wrestling Season Preview: 125-141

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. - After one of the best campaigns in program history in 2019-20, the Purdue wrestling team aims to continue its ascent on the NCAA scene in 2021. The Boilermakers return a pair of NWCA First Team All-Americans, six national qualifiers and eight starters from last year's historic squad, and head coach Tony Ersland has his sights set on more outstanding achievements this year.

The Boilermakers announced their 2021 schedule last week, which will consist entirely of Big Ten Conference competition. The slate features a pair of home duals, three duals on the road and a pair of conference tri-duals. The 2021 Big Ten Championships is scheduled for March 6-7 at Penn State University, while the NCAA Championships is on the docket for March 18-20 at the Enterprise Center in St. Louis.

While the COVID-10 pandemic cancelled the 2020 NCAA Championships, and has significantly impacted the 2020-21 season, the Boilermakers have been hard at work preparing for another run on the national scene. Before the intrusion Purdue managed to post its best Big Ten finish since 1992, taking fifth at the conference tournament at Rutgers with 83 points, and advancing a pair of individuals to the finals. They qualified eight individuals for the NCAA Championships, where four Boilermakers earned top-six seeds at their respective weight classes.

The Boilermakers had just one opportunity to compete through the rest of 2020 as 10 individuals weighed in for the USA Wrestling U23 and UWW Junior National freestyle championships in Omaha in November. Four individuals earned places on the podium, including a national finalist at 86 kg in the U23 division.

125 POUNDS

The bottom of the Boilermaker lineup will feature a familiar and extremely welcome face in 2020 NWCA All-American Devin Schroder. The Grand Rapids, Michigan native had a breakout junior season, posting a 26-5 overall record with four major decision, nine technical falls and a pair of falls. He was the Big Ten runner up at 125 pounds and earned the No. 5 seed at the NCAA Championships, in addition to a second-place finish at the 2019 Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational. He's established himself as one of the top lightweights in program history, currently ranking 16th all-time at Purdue in win percentage (.725) and third in back points at 390, including 156 last season, good for the No. 6 single-season total all-time for the Boilermakers.

While Schroder's top game is both feared and respected by everyone he walks out to face on the mat, it was his wrestling from the neutral position that saw the biggest gains

face on the mat, it was his wrestling from the neutral position that saw the biggest gains in 2019-20. While putting up a career-most 49 takedowns in 31 matches, he relinquished only 16 takedowns to his opponents. He led the Boilermakers with 299 total points and 63 dual team points on the season.

Providing support at the lowest weight class will be sophomore Nate Cummings and freshman Kooper Loehr. While posting a 6-9 overall record on the year, Cummings spent a bulk of the season on the travel squad and had a pair of place-winning performances at open tournaments. Loehr redshirted the 2019-20 season and finished up his season with a third-place effort at the Indianapolis Greyhound Open.

133 POUNDS

Purdue features another returning starter at 133 pounds as sophomore Travis Ford-Melton aims to improve on his true freshman campaign. After starting the 2019-20 season in redshirt status, Ford-Melton joined the varsity lineup at the 2019 Boilermaker Duals and went 14-14 on the year. The Monee, Illinois native had three major decisions and four falls in his rookie campaign and took third in the freshman/sophomore division of the Michigan State Open.

True freshman Jacob Rundell has his sights set on a Boilermaker career at 125 pounds, but is likely to spend his inaugural season at 133 to provide depth and support. Rundell is a two-time Illinois high school state championship finalist, winning the 2018 title at 106 pounds, and was a consensus top-100 ranked recruit coming out of Oak Park & Forest River High School. With the 2020-21 COVID eligibility extension waiver a possibility for all the Boilermaker student athletes, Rundell has a real possibility to see varsity action alongside Ford-Melton at 133 pounds this season.

141 POUNDS

The 2019-20 continuity holds suit for the Boilermakers at 141 pounds with the return of 2020 NCAA qualifier Parker Filius. The rising junior had one of the biggest turnarounds in the nation from 2018-19 to 2019-20, dropping from 149 pounds and posting a 19-10 overall record. He took eighth at the Big Ten Championships, earning an automatic bid to nationals for the first time, and put together a 5-4 record in Big Ten duals.

Filius played a key role in two of Purdue's biggest dual wins on the season, earning a 4-2 sudden victory over JoJo Aragona to seal the Boilermakers' 20-18 come-from-behind victory at No. 22 Rutgers, and knocking off No. 13 Dylan Duncan of Illinois in an 18-14 win on the road over the Fighting Illini.

Fellow junior and Montana native Bjorn Schroeder adds extra depth and experience at 141, posting an 8-7 sophomore campaign that included five falls and a third-place finish at the Indianapolis Greyhound Open. Freshman Michael Leveille comes off redshirt this year as well, putting together a solid rookie campaign that included placewinning performances at Indianapolis (fifth), the Purple Raider Open (third) and the Maryville Kaufman/Bayly/Brand Open (fourth).

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