

From: Lipsett, Tanner D tlipsett@purdue.edu
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Tanner Lipsett, Associate Director of Strategic Communications
Purdue University Wrestling
tlipsett@purdue.edu | 765-426-4895

2021 Purdue Wrestling Season Preview

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).

149 POUNDS

The Boilermakers have a deep lot at 149 pounds, headlined by senior Griffin Parriott, who earned Honorable Mention All-America honors last season. Parriott was 16-11 in 2019-20, including a sixth-place finish at the Big Ten Championships and the No. 16 seed at NCAA's. He had a variety of impressive wins and placements taking fourth at the Cliff

...er who has a variety of impressive wins and placements, taking fourth at the Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational and earning four wins over top-20 opponents on the year.

Sophomore Alec White make the move up from 141 pounds, aiming to provide depth and competition at the weight. He's been in-and-out of the lineup over his first two varsity seasons, but was sidelined for the second half of 2020 due to injury.

More able bodies come in the forms of sophomore Ethan Smiley and a pair of true freshman in Trey Kruse and Christian Navida. Smiley didn't compete last season, while Kruse won a 2020 Minnesota high school state championship, going 51-1 on the year at 145 pounds and leading Stillwater High School to a state runner-up finish at the 2020 Minnesota 3A state dual championships. Navida advanced to a pair of California state tournaments, qualifying at 138 as a junior and 145 as a senior, and took sixth at the 2019 Reno Tournament of Champions.

157 POUNDS

The Boilermakers featured one of the nation's best freshman in 2019-20 as Kendall Coleman exploded on to the scene at 157 pounds. He wasted no time attracting national attention, taking out four highly ranked and regarded opponents on his way to the Michigan State Open title, and spent the rest of the season ranked in the top-10 in the country. He posted one of the most outstanding freshman seasons in program history, going 29-8 overall, earning the No. 6 seed at the NCAA Championships and being named NWCA First Team All-America

Coleman is the first Purdue freshman to advance to a Big Ten Championship match since 1947, and the first Boilermaker rookie to lead the team in takedowns since 2010, securing 95 on the year. After winning the Michigan State Open he went on to place fourth at the Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational and take fourth at the Midlands Championships, one of two freshman nationally to place at both prominent tournaments.

Junior Elijah Davis provides some depth for the Boilermakers at the weight with 42 career varsity matches, while freshmen Cooper Noehre and Isaac Riddle look to cut their teeth this season as well.

165 POUNDS

True freshman Gerrit Nijenhuis is a strong candidate for the starting nod after being rated one of the nation's top pound-for-pound high school wrestlers last season. He won back-to-back Pennsylvania high school state titles at 170 and 182 pounds in 2019 and 2020, and finished his senior season ranked No. 2 in the nation at 182 pounds. It's possible that Nijenhuis makes the move up to 174 to compete with Soehnlén, but Ersland is going to let the situation play out and see where some bodies land.

Freshman Hayden Lohrey had an injury shortened season in 2019-20, but showed promise in his appearances in open tournaments, winning the amateur division of the Maryville Kaufman/Brand/Bayly Open. He'll battle for the starting job at 165, but also could show support 174 pounds this season as well.

174 POUNDS

The graduation of All-American Dylan Lydy leaves a substantial hole to fill, but is a challenge that the Boilermakers are anxious to embrace. After a solid start to his freshman season in 2019-20, freshman Emil Soehnlén was forced out of the lineup with a

hamstring injury at the Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational, and then received a medical hardship waiver from the NCAA. The Canton, Ohio native was 9-6 in early action last year, including a runner-up showing at the Michigan State Open and a quarterfinal appearance at CKLV before his injury. His six losses all came to ranked opponents, including five in the top-10.

Junior Tanner Webster picked up a lot of experience last season for the Boilermakers, filling in at 165 pounds after Soehnlen's injury and will give Purdue veteran depth at the weight.

184 POUNDS

While the 2020 offseason has been uncharted territory for most, if not all, wrestlers across the country, some of the Boilermakers' biggest gains were made at 184 pounds, where rising senior Max Lyon picked up where he left off at the 2020 Big Ten Championships. Lyon outwrestled his seed higher than any other individual at the conference championships, taking sixth place as the No. 11 seed at 184 pounds and locking up an automatic bid to NCAA's. He finished 19-15 on the season, including six major decisions, and had notable wins over Illinois' 13th-ranked Zac Braunagel in the season finale and Rutgers' No. 16 Billy Janzer at Big Ten's.

Lyon made the most of his single opportunity to compete since the end of the 2020 season, posting a second-place finish at 86 kg at the USA Wrestling U23 National Freestyle Championships. Lyon took out NWCA All-American Cam Caffey of Michigan State in the semifinals before falling to 2020 No. 1 seed Taylor Lujan of Northern Iowa in the finals.

Freshmen Macartney Parkinson and Mitch Hutmacher add depth at 184, with Parkinson coming from Indiana high school power Mater Dei in Evansville, and Hutmacher comes across the border from Illinois, where he was a two-time state placewinner.

197 POUNDS

Purdue will start 2021 in the same place it did last season at 197 pounds with sophomore Thomas Penola ready to take the mat. The Zionsville, Indiana native opened 2019-20 as the starter at the weight with Christian Brunner prepared to redshirt the season, posting an 8-2 record with a pair of falls. Brunner pulled his redshirt prior to the 2019 Boilermaker Duals, Penola shoved up to heavyweight, and the rest, as they say, is history. Penola built his body up to handle 285 pounds and eventually climbed into the national rankings at heavyweight, finishing 21-14 on the year and qualifying for the national championships. He went 5-4 in Big Ten duals and took seventh at the conference championships, finishing with two major decisions and four falls on the season.

Like Lyon, Penola had a standout performance at the U23 national freestyle championships, taking fourth place at 92 kg and earning significant wins over 2020 All-Americans Nathan Traxler of Stanford and Jay Aiello of Virginia.

Senior Trevor Blue offers the Boilermakers depth at 197 pounds after several open tournament appearances in 2019-20.

285 POUNDS

With Penola dropping back to his natural weight the Boilermakers were going to need a

new face at heavyweight and have several candidates for the job. A familiar face comes in the form of junior Jared Florell, who has ditched the weight cut for a larger, stronger frame. He gave the Boilermakers much needed depth at 184 and 197 last season, filling in for Christian Brunner after his knee injury at Rutgers. He's 14-9 over the last two seasons and aims to earn the full time job this year. Another strong candidate for the starting job is Oregon State transfer Jamarcus Grant. The Portland, Oregon native was 32-32 in two seasons with the Beavers, where he was a fixture of the varsity lineup.

Other faces for the Boilermakers at heavyweight include senior Jairus Perry and freshmen Dorian Keys. Perry competed in several open tournaments for Purdue in 2019-20, placing at the Indianapolis Greyhound Open, while Keys boasts a solid high school career in Indiana that included a state title in 2019.

Tanner D Lipsett
Supervisor of Wrestling Operations /
Associate Director Strategic Communications
Purdue University Athletics
900 John R. Wooden Drive
Mackey Arena - Room 2216
West Lafayette, Ind. 47907
Office: (765) 494-3197
Twitter: @Tanner_Lipsett
www.PurdueSports.com