



# WYOMING

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## Cowboy Wrestling Opens Official Practices

**LARAMIE, Wyo. (Oct. 10, 2018)** – The Wyoming wrestling team opened up official practices for the 2018-19 season on Wednesday.

“It’s exciting to watch them wrestle live, which we haven’t gotten to see much of” head coach Mark Branch said. “With the new NCAA rules, we have gotten a chance to do some more skillwork than normal. We just kind of stuck with what we’ve done—the basics—and just kind of built on it. We’re in a teaching mode, but it’s fun with all of the youth on this team to watch them wrestle...Right now, I like what I’m seeing. It’s exciting to set our minds, because when you get into these official practices, your mind starts thinking about competition. It’s right around the corner, and these guys know it so you don’t have to tell them. The energy today was great.

The Cowboys return three NCAA qualifiers from a season ago in which Wyoming went 13-3 overall in dual action and 7-2 in Big 12 competition. The team’s 13 dual wins were the fourth-most in a season in program history, while the .813 winning percentage marks the sixth-best for a single season.

Among the returners is redshirt sophomore Montorie Bridges, who is coming off his first career All-America honor last season at 133 pounds. Other returning 2018 NCAA qualifiers include 165-pounder Branson Ashworth and 149-pounder Sam Turner.

The Cowboys are faced with replacing key former wrestlers Bryce Meredith and Archie Colgan this season. Both Meredith and Colgan became the first individual Big 12 Champions in Wyoming history last season, helping the Pokes to a fourth-place finish at the event. Branch was named Big 12 Coach of the Year as well.

“Replacing the example Bryce set during his career will be tough, but I’m not as worried about it because we do have other guys that are consistent,” Branch said. “Branson has been consistent, Montorie has been consistent, and over the last couple of years because of Bryce you’ve started to see that rub off. We’ve seen Sam Turner be consistent in this preseason too which has been awesome. That’s something that he hasn’t had and I think if he can be consistent with his energy and competitiveness that he’ll go to another level as well.

“You see it in preseason stuff, too. Yesterday, we did about a seven-mile run and halfway through it, Branson and Sam were a good half mile ahead of the pack, which is awesome to see. It’s great, not only to see guys separating themselves, but being that example. We’ve seen some of those guys, and then there are guys like Casey Randles, who is a redshirt freshman, but he’s been a consistent grinder. We have it. Bryce is hard to replace in so many ways, but we have plenty of examples of guys that are going to give you 100 percent every day.”

At the 2018 NCAA Championships, Meredith was able to claim national runner-up at 141 pounds for the second time in his career while Bridges earned All-America honors as well. As a team, Wyoming tallied its best finish under branch as the Cowboys placed 17th. It was the 20th top-25 finish and third in a row for the Brown and Gold.

The Cowboys are a younger team this season, with 19 members of the 2018-19 roster being either a freshman or sophomore.

“The thing that I notice with our young guys is that they’re competitive,” Branch said. “I haven’t seen one of them drop their head even if they’re on the losing end. That’s encouraging and something that we need to keep reinforcing that they maintain. No matter if you’re winning or losing, always maintain the fight.”

The Cowboys are set to open the 2018-19 season on Nov. 3 when they host the Cowboy Open in the War Memorial Fieldhouse.

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