

Wrestling: Big Ten Championships Preview - Heinselman and Koontz



This weekend, Ohio State wrestling will send 10 wrestlers to Lincoln, Neb., to compete for individual titles and a team championship at the Big Ten tournament. Sammy Sasso and Carson Kharchla lead the charge as No. 1 overall seeds in their respective classes.

The Buckeyes took ninth in the 2021 Big Ten Championships with 69 1/2 points — well behind champion Iowa, who won the event with 159.5 points. Sasso won an individual title at 149 pounds, while Ethan Smith, Kaleb Romero and Tate Orndorff finished in the top-five for their weights.

Ohio State (5-3) enters the tournament fifth in the Big Ten standings behind Penn State, Iowa, Michigan and Wisconsin, looking to secure its first conference championship since the 2017-18 season. The Buckeye wrestlers will need strong performances from each weight class to accomplish their goal, starting with 125-pound wrestler Malik Heinselman to 285-pound heavyweight Tate Orndorff.

Before the team competes this weekend, Buckeye Sports Bulletin details each Ohio State wrestler's season and their path to winning an individual title.

125 - MALIK HEINSELMAN

After a breakout junior season, Heinselman continued to impress his coaches in 2021-22. His consistency as the lead-off man provides Ohio State with a significant boost seen throughout the remaining nine weight classes.

"He's wrestling extremely well," Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan said of Heinselman. "He's a 4.0 GPA student in finance and extremely disciplined. He's had a couple of great wins this year. Malik's better than he was last year, and last year he got to the podium, so we are very excited about his potential this weekend."

Heinselman finished the regular season with a 16-3 record, with his only losses coming to then-No. 1 Nick Suriano of Michigan, then-No. 9 Drew Mildebrant of Penn State in duals, and then-No. 26 Brandon Kaylor of Oregon State at the Cliff Keen Invitational. Heinselman claimed two major decisions with his victories, one technical fall and one pin.

The Big Ten named Heinselman the No. 4 seed after Suriano, Mildebrant and Eric Barnett of Wisconsin. Last season, the Castle Rock, Colo., native, defeated Barnett to reach the semi-finals at the conference championships, where he ultimately fell to Devin Schroder of Purdue, 10-0.

"I thought Malik should have been the No. 3 seed," Ryan said. "We don't know how far away he was from the third seed based on points. The Big Ten operates on a points system to rank the wrestlers, so we don't know if he was close enough to share our case at the Big Ten meeting. If you're not close enough, you don't get to say anything. We thought he should've been higher, but he should be great this weekend."

133 - DYLAN KOONTZ

Koontz struggled to provide points for Ohio State this season, finishing the 2021-22 season with a 4-9 record and 1-6 mark in duals. His minus-37 point differential in duals points to Koontz's lack of offense as the redshirt junior has been on his heels for most of his Big Ten matches.

Still, the Plover, Wisc., native, won three times in tournament duals, securing one major decision and two decisions. He holds a career record of 31-24 at Ohio State and has proven that he can win significant matches for the Buckeyes. However, he has a long road in front of him to try and win a title at 133.

The Big Ten named Koontz the No. 14 seed in his class, which places him last out of all qualifying wrestlers for the conference tournament. He is the lowest-seeded Buckeye on the championship roster.

"It's going to be a real challenge," Ryan said of Koontz running the gauntlet. "He will have to wrestle extremely well and probably steal a spot. I think the other weight classes could make it with an off weekend, except for maybe 157. Those other eight classes will go to nationals because the system is really good. The system looks at your body of work during the season as well as your tournament performance.

"With Koontz and Hepner, they're going to have to steal a spot with a wild card bid. They'll have to steal a spot. They know the task is tall, but I think they're up for the task."