

d3wrestle.com Empire Collegiate Wrestling Conference Preview

SUNY Cortland leads the charge in the Empire Conference as the defending champions and #5 ranked team nationally. Cortland boasts 4 individuals ranked in the top 10 by d3wrestle.com, and most of their lineup should have a reasonable shot to make the conference finals.

The 8 team conference should produce plenty of challengers both from the three other nationally ranked teams and some strong individuals throughout. #18 Ithaca has a strong young team including returning national qualifier Willy Horwath. The Bombers should be able to mount a significant challenge for the team title. In addition #24 SUNY Brockport, led by multiple All American Shaheim Bradshaw looks to maintain the status of perennial powerhouse. The conference also welcomes newcomers in #26 Messiah and a Lycoming team that had been in the rankings most of the season.

Five champions return to the conference. Both Leblancs from Cortland are up a weight from last year and McNally (RIT), Bradshaw (Brockport), and Hiffa (Oneonta) round out the defending champions.

125 lbs.

The Favorite: Walker Faison, Lycoming

Top Challengers: Peppy Cabrera, Cortland; Mike McNally, RIT; Jon Gregory, Ithaca

A second semester transfer from Michigan State, Faison is undefeated against D.III competition this year including a big win over Baatar from St. Johns. While he's our favorite, he's by no means a lock. McNally is the defending Empire champ at the weight and came a point away from All American status a year ago, however Cabrera has defeated McNally this season. Gregory could be a darkhorse in the weight boasting a 24-7 record on the year.

133 lbs.

The Favorite: Dave Colagiovanni, Cortland

Top Challengers: Josh Cragg, Messiah; Chad Winowich, Ithaca, Andrew Lewis, Lycoming

A year ago Colagiovanni qualified to the national tournament at 125. This season he enjoys a record of 21-5 and has not lost in the conference. Cragg suffered a first semester loss to the Cortland grappler, but has come on strong in the second half, including wins over the other top challengers.

141 lbs.

The Favorite: Willy Horwath, Ithaca

Top Challengers: Joe Widrick, Cortland; Luke Baum, RIT; Derrick Smith, Oswego

This weight is one of the most evenly matched weights in the conference with four individuals capable of winning. Horwath established himself as the front runner early on with the tournament win at Ithaca. He has wins over Baum and Widrick this season. Baum and Smith qualified to nationals a year ago, however neither were able to place. Baum spent the first part of the year wrestling 149 while Smith was inactive most of the season. Smith has come on strong late, however, defeating Widrick since returning to the lineup. Widrick is just a freshman but wasted no time in making a mark with finals appearances at Ithaca and the Petrofes tournament. He has victories this season over national qualifiers Hall (Muhlenberg) and Batista (Whitewater).

149 lbs.

The Favorite: Paul LeBlanc, Cortland

Top Challengers: Craig Gin, Messiah; Blaine Woszczak, Ithaca

LeBlanc is the clear favorite at the weight with victories over both contenders. The 2X national qualifier and 2006 All American has enjoyed moving up a weight with a 22-1 season record. Craig Gin has enjoyed moving down from 157 last year. The junior has experienced a bit of a breakthrough this season with wins over top contenders from several other conferences including Mauseth of Lacrosse, Mizer from Heidelberg, and Croswell of Elizabethtown. It should be a great semi final match between Gin and Woszczak with a lot at stake. Just a freshman Woszczak has accrued 29 wins this season and should be considered a serious threat to qualify to the nationals.

157 lbs.

The Favorite: Nathan Bachman, RIT

Top Challengers: Mike Bressler, Messiah; John Paxos, Ithaca; Will Brodfuehrer/Tyler Sick, Cortland; Mike Cole, Brockport

For the second straight year this weight looks to be a wide open battle of inexperience in the Empire Conference. Bachman is the top returning wrestler having finished 3rd in the Empire a year ago. This season Bachman is 30-10 with wins over Sick and Sanko. Bressler is just a freshman, but has battled to a 25-12 record this season, including wins over Sick and Cole in the conference. Paxos seems to have earned the starting spot after spending most of the year behind Woszczak at 149. He has wrestled to a 23-10 record and could be a darkhorse in the weight. Others to watch will be Cole and whoever represents Cortland.

165 lbs.

The Favorite: Shaheim Bradshaw, Brockport

Top Challengers: Chris Dahlheimer, Lycoming; Trent Zempel, Messiah; Zach Bogardus, Cortland

This weight is very deep and very talented. Leading the way is Shaheim Bradshaw; the senior is already a 3X All American finishing 4th last season. Bradshaw has been beaten once in the conference however by Ballard of Oneonta. Dahlheimer has only wrestled for the second semester, but has an 11-1 mark including a win over Zempel and a nationally ranked opponent in Nagel of Whitewater. Zempel has wrestled to a 31-6 record this year and has come on strong of late in action that has included a 3rd place finish at Wheaton where he defeated Nagle of Whitewater, national qualifier Cruickshank of Olivet and narrowly lost to #1 ranked Palmer of Lacrosse 8-7. Bogardus is a returning national qualifier and has a win this year over Zempel and Ballard. He has however faltered at times during the second semester with a loss to Nagel of Whitewater and a recent loss to Dale of Ithaca. The top four should lead the way, but there won't be any easy matches at this weight as Mills, Oswego; Dale, Ithaca; Wake, RIT; and Ballard, Oneonta are all very tough wrestlers.

174 lbs.

The Favorite: Eric Van Patten, Brockport

Top Challengers: Cory Barber, Cortland; David Priest, Ithaca; Jason Wake, Oneonta; David Jones, Messiah

Van Patten is the favorite and has not lost in conference this season, but the weight is deep and talented. Leading the challengers should be Barber of Cortland who is 21-6 on the year. Barber has split with both Wake and Priest and both of those wrestlers have one point wins over Jones. All in all, we could be in for a series of dog fights throughout the tournament. Outside of the conference, all of the competitors have experienced some success. Wake has a number of tournament victories under his belt, taking home early season finals appearances at the King's tournament and Oneonta. Priest has enjoyed a strong freshman campaign earning a 22-12 record, a top 4 finish at Ithaca and 5th place finish at the New York States. Jones finished fourth at a tough Wheaton tournament beating two top wrestlers from the Great Lakes in Schroeder of North Central and Boltz of Wheaton. He also has split four matches with Fitch of Muhlenberg who has beaten Wake.

184 lbs.

The Favorite: Treavor LeBlanc, Cortland

Top Challengers: Matt McHugh, Messiah; Josh Lancaster, Brockport

The gap is wide when considering All American LeBlanc and the rest of the field. LeBlanc finished 7th in the nation at 174 a year ago and the rest of the field doesn't have a lot of varsity experience before this season. McHugh has had spots of strong wrestling this season, but only has a 12-19 record. Similarly Lancaster hasn't been in the lineup much, but seems to be a top performer late in the year.

197 lbs.

The Favorite: Matt Miller, Lycoming

Top Challenger: Brett Giehl, Cortland

Similar to the last weight, 197 is a little on the thin side and should be a two man race for the title. Miller has spent the entire season in the national rankings and currently sits 8th by d3wrestle.com. Giehl is a former national qualifier at Brockport, but has only wrestled 12 matches since transferring in and could be a bit undersized at the weight.

285 lbs.

The Favorite: Trevor Hiffa, Oneonta

Top Challenger: Jake Taylor, Oswego

Hiffa has spent the better part of the year ranked #1 in the nation. Still rankings can be deceiving as last season Taylor was the number 1 seed in the conference only to lose to Hiffa in the finals. Hiffa went on to finish 4th in the NCAA D.III tournament. Both of these wrestlers have plenty of national caliber ability and could find themselves representing the conference at the championships this season as well.