

Ten storylines heading into Division III Championships

1. Qualifiers for new programs – Ferrum gets first qualifier, Alma gets first since reinstatement

This was a big year for a two teams that are not well-known on the national stage. Alma College has their first NCAA qualifier since reinstating the program in 2011. Jamie Jakes finished third at the Midwest Regional at 174 pounds to give head coach Todd Hibbs his first qualifier since he left Olivet. Also getting on the board for the first time is Ferrum College. Ferrum is in their first year as an NCAA program after competing as a club team last year. Logan Meister was the 8th seed at the East Region but overcame a loss to #2 ranked Brandon Jones of NYU in the quarters to fight all the way back to 3rd.

2. Returning champion Biscacha fails to qualify

Devin Biscacha of Springfield College surprised everyone with his run to a championship a year ago. After a third place finish at the Northeast Regional, he defeated the number 2, 3, 4, and 6 seeds on his way to an unlikely title at 157. This year, however, he will not be back to defend his championship. In a very tough Northeast Regional, he came in 4th place after getting pinned in the consolation finals by Everet Desilets of Johnson & Wales. He is not the only defending champion who will not be able to repeat this year, as Greg Sanders of Concordia University Wisconsin was felled by a season ending injury earlier this season.

3. 2012 All-Americans who didn't place last year: Bewak, Giorgio, Keeter, Bistis, Giaramita

There are a few wrestlers looking for some redemption this season after missing out on the podium last year. Paul Bewak of Johns Hopkins and Nate Giorgio of Coast Guard were each All-Americans at 125 in 2012, and while both qualified last year, both were eliminated on Friday. They both have made it back this year, though Giorgio has moved up to 133. Another set of wrestlers were All-Americans in 2012 but did not even wrestle in the NCAA tournament last season. Cortland teammates Brian Bistis and Joseph Giaramita each finished 8th in 2012. Bistis was at 141, while Giaramita was at 285. Bistis returns at 141 as the #3 ranked wrestler while Giaramita is #3 at 197. Will Keeter of Augsburg was 3rd in the same 141 bracket where Bistis placed 8th, and he is back after a year's absence looking for the podium again at 149.

4. Lefever brothers all qualify

Wabash has a strong team this year, but they would not be nearly as strong without a trio of brothers from Fort Wayne, Indiana. Reece, Connor, and Riley Lefever all made it through the Midwest Region at 157, 174, and 184 respectively. Reece was an All-American with a seventh place finish last year, and he was third in the region. Connor did not qualify last season, but he won the Midwest at 174 this year. The best of the three may be the youngest, as freshman Riley has stormed to a 37-0 record and a #1 ranking at 184 in his first college season. If Wabash manages a trophy in Cedar Rapids, these three will have played a prominent role.

5. Former D1 wrestlers Jones, Prater, Fava, Hartenstine, Carr

It is not uncommon for some former Division I wrestlers to find their way to Division III for one reason or another. What is less common is for three of them to be challenging for a title at the same weight class. Mark Hartenstine of Wilkes is back for his second year at Wilkes and is looking for his first All-American award. He spent time at both Maryland and Campbell before coming back to Pennsylvania. He defeated former Rider wrestler Vinny Fava, now at Delaware Valley, in the semifinals of the East Regional, and both will be in Cedar Rapids. Joining them is Elmhurst's Ryan Prater. The 2007 high school graduate took some time off after starting at Illinois before resurfacing at Elmhurst and earning a #2 ranking heading into the tournament. Other former Division I wrestlers of note include 141 lb. Brandon Jones of NYU who finished 5th last year at 133 after transferring from Iowa State as well as Washington and Jefferson's 165 lb. Nick Carr who transferred in at the semester after stops at Kent State and Division II Seton Hill.

6. There and back again Rice at Buffalo

He is not your typical Division I transfer, though Jaydon Rice did come to Hunter after spending the first semester at Buffalo. What is different about Rice is that he also wrestled for Hunter last season, finishing 4th in the East Regional at 125 to just miss a trip to Cedar Rapids. He then left and went to Buffalo under new coach John Stutzman. He decided Buffalo was not for him and returned to Hunter, where his 3rd place finish at the regional earned him a spot in the 133 field this year.

7. Trinity returns with a pair of qualifiers after 8 years away

Trinity College has not had a national qualifier since 2006, and the Bantams only defeated one team in a dual meet this season. However, new head coach Marques Gales has a pair of qualifiers in his first season at the helm. Petros Hologitas was the #3 seed and upset the #2 seed on his way to a 2nd place finish at 197, but Kyle McGuire at 285 was the real surprise. The unseeded junior defeated the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 7th seeds on his way to a region championship without surrendering a takedown in the tournament. That is definitely peaking at the right time.

8. Anderson, Kulchytskyy, and Johnson going for 3 in a row

Three wrestlers are looking to ascend the top of the podium for a third consecutive year. Chad Johnson of Augsburg has been as dominant as any Division III wrestler in the past three years. He has not lost a match to a Division III opponent since his freshman year. Since then, he has won a pair of 285 championships and is an overwhelming favorite to win again this year. He is about as close to a sure there can be in this year's tournament. Nazar Kulchytskyy, however, is in position to argue with that sentiment. The Oshkosh wrestler has won titles the past two years as well, and earned the d3wrestle.com Wrestler of the Year Award last season. He is hoping to wrap a 2013 win at 165 lbs. with titles at 157 in 2012 and 2014. Finally, there is Kenny Anderson of Wartburg. Anderson only wrestled the second half of this season and struggled with injuries. He lost two a pair of wrestlers in his conference during the regular season, but bounced back to win the Central Regional, putting himself in great position for a third championship and his second at 133.

9. Wartburg goes for unprecedented 4th in a row

No team has won four straight championships since Division III hosted its first tournament in 1974. Wartburg is favored to become the first team to get that elusive fourth title. Augsburg won three in a row from 200-2002 but had to settle for a runner-up finish in 2003. Augsburg and Wartburg have been trading the championship back and forth since 1995. With a win in Cedar Rapids, new head coach Eric Keller will win his first as the sole head coach, Wartburg will become the first team to win four in a row, and they will tie Augsburg for the most Division III championships with 11. There is a lot at stake for the Knights.

10. Kulchytskyy dec. Dylan Ness – 2009 Northern Plains regional

In the spring of 2009, a pair of high school wrestlers squared off in the Northern Plains regional in a Junior level freestyle match. One was Dylan Ness, a well-known prep wrestler and the defending Cadet National champion. The other was an unknown wrestler who had recently moved to Wisconsin from the Ukraine. Nazar Kulchytskyy came out on top in that match and started to get some attention. Ness went on to the University of Minnesota. He has been a two-time All-American and entered the 2014 Big Ten Tournament as the #6 ranked wrestler at 157 lbs. Kulchytskyy surprised some when he surfaced at Oshkosh, but his career has been everything one would expect from a wrestler with such a high profile win. The wrestlers from that random 2009 offseason matchup have taken divergent paths. Ness is more in the public eye as a Division I wrestler, but Kulchytskyy has been a dominant force outside the limelight as he looks to finish his career as a three time champ.