

## Wrestlers look to stay near the top

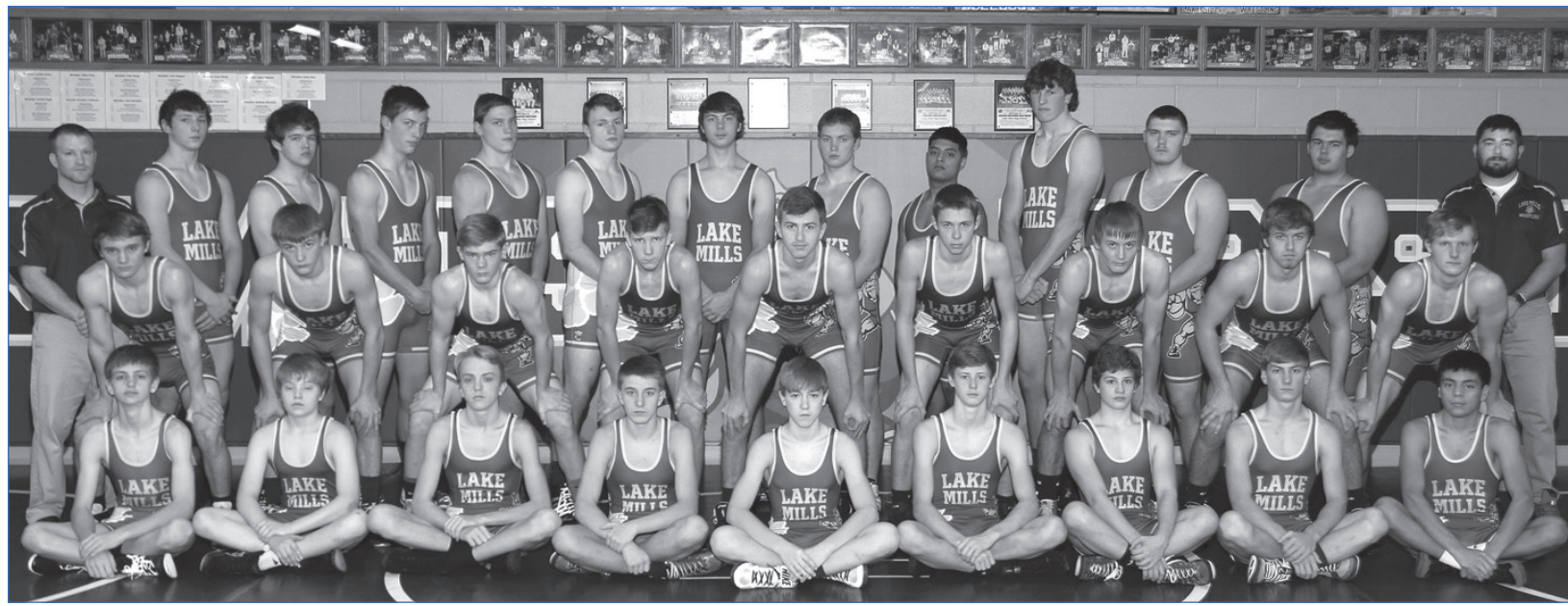


Photo courtesy of Patty Jo Sanderson

Front row (L-R): Jack Ramaker, Chance Levine, Caiden Jones, Ryan Knudtson, Isaac Bergo, Tyler Helgeson, Andrew Womack, Alex Martinson, Jimmy Gallardo. Middle row: Trae Butler, Kyle Beery, Casey Hanson, Caleb Albert, Ashten Love, Carson Rygh, Cael Boehmer, Drae Love, Alex Albert. Back row: Coach Brandenburg, Elijah Wagner, AJ Carter, Brayden Lindeman, Cole Bergo, Dylan Renneker, Zack Wagner, Drake Harnish, Jaime Roa, Gabe Irons, Max Johnson, Brett Tyler, Coach Piper.

The 2017-18 Lake Mills wrestling team is ready to hit the mat after a very exciting season last winter. The Bulldogs placed third in the state duals and eighth in the traditional state tournament.

"Last year's squad took Lake Mills wrestling to a level it hasn't seen in nearly two decades," said Coach Alex Brandenburg. "We finally have gotten to the point where we feel like we can compete with the best teams in the state."

Qualifying for state duals for the third straight year will be one of the main goals, but placing third or higher will be the main goal. Most of the starting line-up returns from last year, but placing in the top three again will be tough task. Class 1A has the strongest core of top five dual teams it has seen in years. "If we can stay healthy and get our kids spread out to certain weights, I think we could have an even stronger dual line-up than last year," Brandenburg said. "The difficult part about getting third or better will be that Lisbon, Don Bosco, Denver, and Missouri Valley return almost everyone."

Lake Mills will enter the season trying to win the 16-team Top of Iowa Conference Tournament for the second consecutive year. The Bulldogs used a solid line-up from top to bottom last season to win the TIC Tournament for the first time.

"Although our main goal was a top three finish in the state duals, it was exciting to accomplish our other team goal of winning the TIC tourney," noted Brandenburg. "Winning the conference tournament got the momentum going and helped us the next two weeks to win Sectionals and Districts."

As for the schedule, the majority of the Bulldogs toughest meets will be before break. They attend the Battle of Waterloo, square off against some north central Iowa powers, and have the annual battles with Blue Earth Area and Maple River. The record may have a few dings come break time, but the experience gained from the tough competition should pay dividends come postseason time.

As previously mentioned, Lake Mills returns most of its starting line-up. A quartet of Bulldog state place winners will lead the charge. Senior, Gabe Irons (52-8) placed eighth. Juniors, Caiden Jones (52-5) and Cael Boehmer (37-15) placed fifth and eighth, respectively. Tyler Helgeson (48-12) got eighth as a freshman. The senior class has plenty more to offer as Cole Bergo (37-17), Alex Martinson (34-18), Brett Tyler (7-5), Drae Love (16-16 in '16), and Alex Albert (15-22) all have multiple varsity letters. The junior class supplies district qualifier Kyle Beery (35-19) and Max Johnson (26-16) to go along with its two place-winners. The final two returning letterwinners are sophomores, Ashten Love (27-19) and Drake Harnish (13-5). Besides the letterwinners, the Bulldogs have numerous returnees, who were dominant in junior varsity matches. Lake Mills also sports one of the strongest freshmen classes it has ever had.

The coaching staff will be similar to last year. Alex Brandenburg, Mike Piper, Jamie Ham, and Brad Helgeson return to help guide the Bulldog wrestlers. "I am excited to have these three guys to help lead this team," Brandenburg said. "They know what it takes for kids to be great wrestlers and teammates, and they do a great job teaching these skills."

**Roster:** 106-Jack Ramaker, Fr.; Chance Levine, So.; 113-Caiden Jones, Jr.; Isaac Bergo, Fr.; 120-Tyler Helgeson, So.; Ryan Knudtson, So.; Andrew Womack, Fr.; 126-Alex Martinson, Sr.; Jimmy Gallardo, So.; Dalton Thorson, Fr.; Trae Butler, So.; Caleb Albert, Fr.; 132-Kyle Beery, Jr.; Casey Hanson, Fr.; 138-Ashten Love, So.; Carson Rygh, So.; 145-Cael Boehmer, Jr.; 152-Drae Love, Sr.; Alex Albert, Sr.; Brayden Lindeman, Fr.; 160-Elijah Wagner, Fr.; AJ Carter, So.; Riley Kirschbaum, Fr.; 170-Cole Bergo, Sr.; Zack Wagner, Jr.; Dylan Renneker, Jr.; 182-Drake Harnish, So.; Jaime Roa, Jr.; 195-Gabe Irons, Sr.; 220-Max Johnson, Jr.; 285-Brett Tyler, Sr.

## Young team hopes to grow quickly

Coming off a 14-9 season, the Bulldogs will rely on a heavy mix of youth to meet their goals and to match the success they enjoyed last season.

"This is the youngest team I've had in my coaching career," noted Head Coach Kyle Menke. "We have 30 boys in our program, and 23 are either sophomores or freshmen."

Not to say that the cupboard of experience is totally bare, as the Bulldogs will return six letterwinners from last year in: Trevor Hanna, Grant Fjelstad, Anthony Naser, Tommy Kaktis, Chett Helming, and Colby Groe. Menke noted that thus far, the experienced players have been setting the right tone in practice.

"Our seniors have done a great job of leading by example in the early-season practices," he noted. In particular, Menke pointed to a trio of experienced players to form the nucleus of his leadership circle and on-court production. "Trevor Hanna is our most experienced player, and we're looking forward to seeing what he can accomplish as a senior point guard," Menke noted. "We're also expecting increased production this year from Grant Fjelstad, Anthony Naser, and Brady Heigel."

He added, that with so many inexperienced players, "The key to this season will be finding the right combination of players who can play with consistency on both ends of the court." He added. "We have good overall team quickness and some young, skilled post players. I am hoping this will be a team that makes great improvement throughout the course of the season."

As usual, Menke pointed to Garner-Hayfield/Ventura, Forest City and Bishop Garrigan as TIC favorites, and he hopes that his young squad can compete with these favorites, and improve over the course of the season.

| NUMBER | NAME              | HEIGHT | POSITION | GRADE |
|--------|-------------------|--------|----------|-------|
| 1      | Trevor Hanna      | 5'11   | Guard    | 12    |
| 2      | Kristin Alexander | 5'8    | Guard    | 9     |
| 3      | Colby Groe        | 5'11   | Guard    | 10    |
| 4      | Jamie Underwood   | 6'1    | Forward  | 12    |
| 5      | Jackson Rice      | 5'10   | Guard    | 10    |
| 12     | Grant Fjelstad    | 5'11   | Guard    | 12    |
| 15     | Nick Raaen        | 5'11   | Guard    | 12    |
| 20     | Bennett Eaton     | 5'11   | Guard    | 10    |
| 21     | Tommy Kaktis      | 6'3    | Forward  | 11    |
| 22     | Jace Johnson      | 6'0    | Forward  | 11    |
| 23     | Brady Heigel      | 5'10   | Guard    | 12    |
| 24     | Chett Helming     | 6'4    | Forward  | 10    |
| 25     | Garrett Hanna     | 5'10   | Guard    | 10    |
| 30     | Mason Fritz       | 6'2    | Guard    | 10    |
| 32     | Anthony Naser     | 6'1    | Forward  | 12    |
| 33     | Blake Storby      | 6'2    | Forward  | 10    |
| 44     | Caleb Bacon       | 6'0    | Forward  | 9     |
| 45     | DaShawn Linnen    | 6'1    | Forward  | 9     |

Head Coach: Kyle Menke

Assistant Coaches: Brady Kurtz, Dan Rice

Managers: Aaron Mathahs, Eli Menke, Gabe Rogstad, Logan Bacon, Alex Mannes, Joe Young



Photo courtesy of Patty Jo Sanderson

Front row (L-R): Nick Raaen, Colby Groe, Jackson Rice, Garrett Hanna, Bennett Eaton, Jace Johnson, Grant Fjelstad, Brady Heigel, Trevor Hanna. Back row: Coach Brady Kurtz, Coach Kyle Menke, DaShawn Linnen, Blake Storby, Chett Helming, Tommy Kaktis, Mason Fritz, Caleb Bacon, Anthony Naser, Jamie Underwood, Coach Dan Rice

## Bulldogs look to replace some big guns

Although he has six returning letterwinners on his roster, Coach Thad Evans realizes, that to fulfill their potential, his team must fill scoring and rebounding voids left by the graduation of Jewell Gasteiger and Lexi Groe.

"How we can fill the experience we lost from two seniors that were the third high scorer in school history (Gasteiger) and all-time Bulldog leading rebounder (Groe) will determine how good we can be," he said. But, he is excited about the potential he has among returning players and newcomers to do just that.

Returning letterwinners include: guard, Laura Knudtson; forward, Becca Evans; guard, Teah Kesler; guard, Jade Gasteiger; guard, Audrey Caspersen; and, guard, Jessa Gasteiger. Hannah Hanson and Faith Cox also bring playing experience to the table.

Looking at the upcoming year, Evans said, "We have the potential to compete with anyone on our schedule with a very solid core of returning players." He feels that how his team adjusts to their new roles will be key in their success. "The early part of the season will be interesting, as we settle into new roles and figure out what kind of team we are going to be this year."

Evans listed Forest City, North Union and West Hancock as the preseason favorites in the TIC West.

Pictured front row (L-R): Breanna Mary, Kristyn Throne, Jade Gasteiger, Laura Knudtson, Faith Cox and Jessa Gasteiger. Back row: Coach Patterson, Audrey Caspersen, Teah Kesler, Becca Evans, Hannah Hanson and Coach Evans.

Photo courtesy of Lory Groe

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