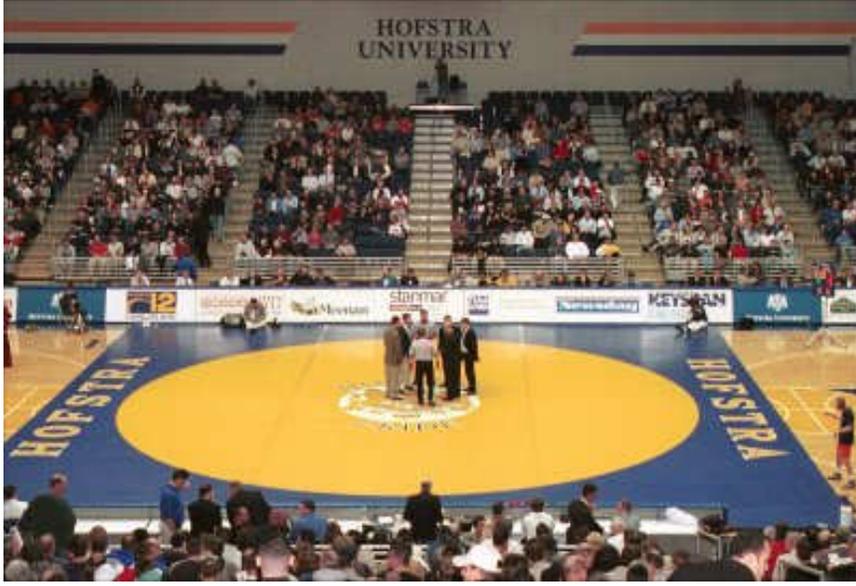


2017-18 HOFSTRA WRESTLING PREVIEW



Entering his fourth season in charge of the Hofstra Wrestling program, Pride Head Wrestling Coach Dennis Papadatos is the most optimistic that he has ever been since he was charged with rebuilding and restocking the program in 2014.

Armed with 17 returnees including all 10 starters—11 if you include the return of red-shirt senior Michael Hughes, the Pride will be looking to make some noise during the 2017-18 season, a year in which Hofstra will host the 2018 Eastern Intercollegiate Wrestling Association (EIWA) Championships at the David S. Mack Sports and Exhibition Complex.

The new season also provides another year of experience for a still relatively young Pride roster that includes two freshmen, four red-shirt freshmen, three sophomores, two red-shirt sophomores, two juniors, five red-shirt juniors and one red-shirt senior.

“While we have some key people returning to the line-up this season and we gained some valuable experience in numerous weight classes last season, we are still young,” Papadatos said. “But I am confident that we will be improved and I am looking for better results in 2017-18.”

For quite possibly the first time in his Hofstra tenure, Papadatos has depth in almost every weight class this season, which is no small feat with a 19-man roster. But that small roster also could wreak havoc should injuries hit the squad.

125

While sophomore Jacob Martin returns to his starting role this season after posting 14 victories, including a fifth-place finish in the New York State Collegiate Championships last season, the 125-lb. weight class is the only weight without a true back-up. Fortunately, Martin showed his durability as freshman, competing in 36 matches. “It is Jacob’s spot and the good news is Jacob is on-par with, arguably, the hardest-worker on the team,” Papadatos says. “He put a very good summer in and has made the biggest improvement of anyone on the team. But not having a back-up, we have to keep him healthy because there are not many times that he will be able to sit out. We are really excited about him heading into the season.”

133

Sophomore Vinny Vespa returns to his starting role at 133-lbs. after a rookie season that saw him win 18 matches and claim fifth-place in the EIWA Championships last March. He would also place second in the New York State Championships and third in the Journeymen-Hofstra Tussle. Vespa will be challenged by red-shirt freshman Garrett Lambert, a three-time Ohio High School place-winner and a Fargo All-American, and true freshman Greg Quintanilla, a three-time district champion from San Antonio, Texas. “While this weight class has three wrestlers battling for the spot, Vinny is our returning starting and just missed out on an NCAA Championship bid last year,” Papadatos stated. “He had a solid freshman season and we expect even better things from Vinny in the future. We also expect Garrett and Greg to challenge Vinny and give him some rest when he needs it.”

141

Red-shirt sophomore Connor Burkert is expected to return to his starting job after posting nine wins last season but could face a strong challenge from red-shirt freshman Charlie Kane, a two-time New England champion who posted a 120-2 scholastic record in Connecticut and possibly a 133 challenger. "Connor is our returning starter in this weight class," Papadatos said. "But we will be minimizing his time and not weighing him in all the time because 141 is a bit of a challenge for him. Charlie Kane is coming out of his red-shirt season and is really solid. I am also sure that we could also see Garrett Lambert move up from 133 to help in this weight class if needed. But based on previous experience and his preseason, Connor is our guy."

149

Junior Ryan Burkert, twin brother of Connor, also returns to a starting role at 149 after posting a 20-14 record last season. He placed second at the Lock Haven Classic, third in the New York State Championships and fifth in the Journeymen-Hofstra Tussle. Red-shirt junior Connor Muli is expected to challenge and back-up Burkert after seeing action in 15 matches last season. "We expect Ryan and Connor to battle it out but obviously, Ryan is the odds-on favorite to return to his starting role," Papadatos says. "We hope that Ryan makes another jump this season and gets closer to 30 wins. There have been many times that I felt he could have qualified for the NCAA Championships. I felt he was wrestling well enough and was good enough to be there. So we are hoping that he will make another jump this year. But both wrestlers want to be in the starting line-up for the EIWA Championships at Hofstra in March."

157

The preseason saw red-shirt freshman Ricky Stamm as the expected starter at 157-lbs. this season after red-shirt sophomore and 2016-17 starter Jake Kaminsky moved up to 165 this year. Stamm is coming off a 29-11 season in open competition and has surprised the staff with his continual improvement since his arrival. He finished first in the Mat Town Open, second in the New York State Open Championship and third in the Franklin and Marshall Open while gaining great experience. "Ricky is the only one we have going at 157 to open the season this year," Papadatos said. "I can see someone coming down for 165 or moving up from 149 to fill in the gaps when we need it. He won 29 matches last year as a red-shirt and defeated guys who qualified for nationals and who placed in the conference. He came in last year and got it done. Ricky, who will probably outgrow 157 in the near future, has to control his weight to make things easier on himself. But he is one of the best competitors that I have ever seen and we are very excited about seeing him this season."

165

After surprising many by winning 23 matches as a true freshman starter at 174 last season, sophomore Sage Heller drops down to 165-lbs. this season. Among his many accomplishments last year were a title at the Lock Haven Classic, second-place at the Journeymen-Hofstra Tussle Open Division and third-place in the season-opening Kaloust Bearcat Open. He also took home a bronze medal as part of Team USA at the Maccabiah Games in Israel last summer. Heller will be challenged by red-shirt sophomore Jake Kaminsky, who won 15 matches and placed sixth in the New York State Championships at 157, and freshman Tristan Goering, a former Indiana Greco-Roman scholastic champion. "Sage is the odds-on favorite in a deep weight class," Papadatos states. "We are excited about having two wrestlers in this class who have proven that they can win matches at this level and we are excited to see Tristan's development this season."

174

While Sage Heller dropped from 174 to 165, red-shirt junior Bobby Fehr moved from the starting role at 165 to the expected starting role at 174 this season. But Fehr, who doubled his number of victories from the previous year, will be challenged by red-shirt freshman Anthony Olivieri, a former two-time New Jersey State scholastic place-winner. "Bobby, being the returning starter for two years, is the favorite entering the season but we'll see how it transpires," Papadatos says. "Bobby and Anthony battle in the room but a preseason injury has slowed Olivieri. Don't be surprised if Goering jumps into the fray as well."

184

The 184-lb. weight class is another division where the starter moves up and another starter returns from a red-shirt season. Red-shirt junior Michael Oxley is expected to move up to 197-lbs. after starting at 184 last season leaving the door open for red-shirt junior Cory Damiana to start at 184. Damiana won 14 matches as the starter at 184 two years ago before red-shirting last season. "Cory is a two-year starter at 184 and has shown signs that he can win at a pretty high level," Papadatos stated. "While he has shown great development we are looking for Cory to be more consistent on the mat."

197

Two starters will battle it out at 197-lbs. this season as last year's starter Nezar Haddad will be challenged by last year's starter at 184 in Michael Oxley. Haddad, who won 15 matches for the Pride last year after transferring from conference-foe Drexel, is the preseason odds-on favorite to return to the starting role. Oxley, who won nine matches at 184, will battle and could be a fill-in at two or more weight classes if he doesn't get the starting job. "This is another interesting weight class for us," Papadatos says. "While Nezar has the upper hand heading into the season, I want them to battle and let them figure it out who wants to be the starter."

285

The return of red-shirt senior Michael Hughes is exciting news for Hofstra supporters. The three-year starter for the Pride was an impressive figure on the open tournament circuit last season as he posted a 29-2 record and titles in the New York State Championship Open Division, the Mat Town Open, the Wilkes Open and the National Collegiate Open. In addition, he took fifth-place at the difficult Southern Scuffle setting himself up for his big final season. Hughes will be looking to return to the NCAA Championships after a visit in 2016 after placing third in the EIWA that year. Junior Omar Haddad, who moved up from 197 to 285 and won nine matches last year, will back-up Hughes. "We are all excited to see Michael Hughes return to the line-up this season," Papadatos says. "Our plan is to red-shirt Omar and save him for 2018-19. We want to do our best to get Michael on the podium in March."