

## **Strong Dragon wrestling team hosting 3 tourneys this season**

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

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Looking to be strong contenders in 2A wrestling for the 2009-10 season, HHS wrestlers will give the hometown crowd plenty of opportunities to watch their progress.

As per tradition, Holyoke will host the Larry Stroh Memorial Invitational Saturday, Dec. 12.

The bonus spectator opportunities this season include the LPAA league tourney Thursday, Jan. 7 and the regional tournament Friday and Saturday, Feb. 12-13, both of which will be held in Holyoke.

In addition, HHS will host a triangular with Burlington and Sterling Thursday, Feb. 4. HHS will only wrestle Burlington, but the two visiting teams will also wrestle each other.

Six Dragons return to the mats with experience and success in previous state tournaments, and will be looking to improve their records.

Senior Chad Stroh, Holyoke's only two-time state champion, is looking to make it three this season, as he competes at 135 or 140 lbs.

Senior Luke Garrett took fourth at state in 2009, and looks promising as he competes at 160 or 171.

Senior Cade Garrison, a returning letterwinner from Montrose, joins the team this year, and will compete at 152 or 160 for the Dragons. He qualified for the 4A state tournament at 152 pounds last season, but was injured in his third-place regional match and was unable to compete at state.

Juniors Skyler Dittmer (130 lbs.) and Brian Strong (135 or 140) and sophomore Mark Edmonds (112) all earned medals on the state mats last year and look to be strong contenders in their weight divisions.

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In 2009 state competition, Edmonds and Dittmer both placed third and Strong finished sixth.

Also joining the team is returning letterwinner Casey Sage, a junior, looking to compete at 171 or 189 lbs.

Other team members and their weight divisions for competition are juniors Francisco Diaz (125), and Frank Diaz (103); and freshmen Spencer Kotch (140 or 145), Ben Martinez (160) and Leo Ortiz (130 or 135).

Coach Duane Stroh is extremely excited about this year's wrestling team and its potential.

"The morale and energy level in the room is at a different energy level this year," said the coach. "Every one of them believes we'll be a top contender in 2A."

Stroh expressed pride in the number of returning letterwinners and state placers on the Dragon team. "This is a special bunch of kids," he added.

Coach Stroh is also pleased that pre-season "On the Mat" rankings have Holyoke ranked second as a team, and six individuals (Chad Stroh, Luke Garrett, Mark Edmonds, Skyler Dittmer, Brian Strong and Cade Garrison) are ranked within the top five.

HHS has a tough schedule this year, with only tournaments and the local triangular on the calendar. Stroh said he wants the team to see the toughest competition during the season to help them improve.

Last year, the Abraham Lincoln tourney was the toughest, and Stroh said there will be several this year which are even tougher.

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The Jan. 29-30 Garden City, Kan. tourney will be the toughest, said Stroh, and the UNC tournament in Greeley will also feature stiff competition.

Stroh and the team members look forward to the challenge as they begin what they believe will be a successful season.

Stroh begins his third year as head coach for the Dragons. He will be assisted by Dusty McConnell and volunteer coaches Jack Garrison, Levi Garrett and Jeremy Dirks.

This is McConnell's third year as the official HHS assistant. Dirks was a college All-American wrestler and Garrett an HHS standout.

Coach Stroh appreciates all of his assistants and is excited to welcome Garrison to the coaching staff this year. He noted Garrison has invaluable coaching experience, at the high school and collegiate levels. He was a collegiate national champion, as well.

Team managers are students Mariah Struckmeyer, Caitlyn Kramer and Jessica Pell.

Eleven Dragons gained valuable early-season experience at Broomfield Saturday morning, Nov. 28. "They all wrestled fantastically well," said coach Stroh.

Twenty-three teams attended the Saturday event. For two and a half hours, wrestlers found kids their own weight and wrestled as hard as they could for three two-minute periods.

Eight matches were wrestled per mat, with no refs and no score-keeping. Stroh said this was good for what he calls his green kids who are new to HS wrestling, as they dissolved some first-of-the-season jitters. It was equally valuable for the more experienced wrestlers to meet some quality, top-ranked 4A and 5A competition.

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Each Dragon had at least 10 matches, with some wrestling as many as 20, Stroh added. They're now ready to get the official season under way.

This Saturday, Dec. 5, the team will travel to Granby for the Middle Park Invitational.

