

The formative years (1956-57 through 1971-72)

The formative years capped and recapped

The first sixteen seasons of the program are being termed the formative years. The intramural season of 1956-57 (at the end of which the team did participate in a section tournament) and the first fourteen varsity seasons are covered in the initial publication "Newport Wrestling." The 1971-72 season is included in this time-period because it was the last season coached by Coach Kline; following this season there were a series of coaches who had wrestled for Newport during the formative years.

The records used for the annual and other statistics of the first 15 sessions are those in the initial 1971 publication, supplemented in part by subsequent newspaper research and information in tournament programs. The records in the 1971 publication were taken from the official dual meet scorebooks, annual dual meet wrestling programs, contemporaneous team statistics for several seasons, tournament programs and personal knowledge. The records for the 1971-72 season were taken from the official dual meet scorebook, contemporaneous team statistics for the season, tournament programs and personal knowledge. There are some minor discrepancies in records from the 1971 publication and those in Newport school yearbooks.

1971-72

The team again won the Tri-Valley League in 1971-72, going undefeated at 6-0. For the second year in a row losses were suffered to Harrisburg-area powerhouses Cedar Cliff and Mechanicsburg. Some records show the team's overall record at 12-2, but the official result of the match with Penn Highlands was a defeat, resulting in a record of 11-3. Coach Kline lodged a protest due to a bad refereeing call in the 180 pound match, and the Penn Highlands' coach even confirmed after the match that our wrestler should have won, but the official score stood - Penn Highlands 23, Newport 21.

The postseason in 1972 also had a twist. Due to a conflict on gym use at host New Oxford, the section tournament was scheduled for the weekend before all other sections were to be held. Preliminary and quarter-final matches were held, but Saturday's wrestling was postponed when a large snow storm hit. The semi-finals and finals were rescheduled for the next Tuesday, but that too was cancelled due to poor road conditions. The final day of the tournament was finally held on Friday. But all turned out well when five section champions were crowned and another team title taken.

Even better than the section results, sophomore Andy Zook and seniors Mark Peters and Lon Barrick won District 3 titles in 1972. This is the last time the team has placed three in the finals. Mark went on to win a regional title, but fell in the state semi-finals 11-8 to the defending champ who went on to win another title.

In retrospect, the 1971-72 team had two wrestlers who won or went on to win four section titles (Andy Zook and freshman Boyd Britcher) and two with three titles (Lon Barrick

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and fellow senior Bil Cressler), not something that had happened before or has since. The only other four-time section champs have been Clyde Cressler (Class of 1961) and Adam Smith (2001); and the only other three-time section champs have been Vance Miller (1962), Sherm Hostler, (1966), and Damian Jones (1993). So four of the nine wrestlers all-time who had more than two section titles were all on one team (two seniors and two underclassman).

1957-58 through 1971-72 recapped

Dual meets

The team's dual meet record during its first 15-year formative period was a fantastic 176 wins, 23 losses and 2 ties. Two teams ran the table with undefeated seasons - 1963-64 (14-0) and 1966-67 (12-0); while seven other teams suffered only one defeat. Newport was not in a league its first season, but won 13 league titles in the following 14 seasons. Championships were gained in the Section III League in 1958-59; the Blue Mountain League from the 1959-60 through 1965-66; and the Tri-Valley League from 1966-67 through 1968-69 (with 1967-68 being a co-championship), and again in 1970-71 and 1971-72. The team was undefeated for its entire 7 years in the Blue Mountain League, with an incredible record of 50-0-1. Its league record for the 14 years was 102 wins, two losses and one tie.

Post-season

The team performed equally well in the post-season, quickly establishing itself as a team to be reckoned with at section and district tournaments in 1958 and remaining a presence throughout the period. Sectional team titles were won 12 times: Section III in 1958 and 1959; the Blue Mountain League Section from 1960 through 1966; and the Independent Section from 1970 through 1972. Sixty-six section champions were crowned over the 15 years, with six champions twice in the Blue Mountain League Section (1961 and 1964) and seven champions twice in the Independent Section (1970 and 1971).

Although official team scoring was not maintained at the District 3 tournament from 1956 through 1981, mythical team scoring has been developed based on scoring systems used for section tournaments during this time. There were also some years where official team scoring was not maintained at section tournaments. Mythical team scoring has also been developed in these situations, based again on scoring systems used for other section tournaments during this time.

In the 15 formative years Newport placed in the top five at 12 District 3 tournaments, winning two mythical titles (1961 and 1969), two mythical runner-up finishes (1968 and 1972), and three thirds (1958, 1963 and 1964). The team took 18 individual titles and had 13 runner-ups. There was at least one Newport wrestler in the finals all 15 years, with champions in 12 of the years. Twice Newport crowned three champions (1961 and 1972).

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The only other team to have more District 3 champions than Newport during this 15-year period was established powerhouse Manheim Central with 35. Lower Dauphin was third to Newport with 15 champions; and next came Mechanicsburg (11), Cedar Cliff and Manheim Township (8), and Cumberland Valley (7). Interestingly, Mechanicsburg, Cumberland Valley and Newport all had their first district champs at the 1958 tournament. Mechanicsburg and Cumberland Valley appear to have had their first varsity teams in the 1955-1956 season. Manheim participated in the first District 3 tournament in 1936; splitting into Central and Township in the 1950-51 season. Lower Dauphin did not have wrestling until it formed out of Hershey High School in 1961, but Hershey also participated in the first 1936 tournament. Cedar Cliff did not form until 1960, but New Cumberland had a wrestling program at least since the 1956-57 season.

Newport had 10 individual regional champions from 1957 to 1972, when there were only four regions sending participants to the four-wrestler per weight class state tournament. Five of those champions reached the state finals (Sherm Hostler three times; Steve Peters; and Bruce Jones). And one won a state title (Sherm in 1964).

Fourteen of the 20 Newport wrestlers that have won District 3 titles through the 2019-20 season achieved this feat during the 15-year formative years: Clyde Cressler twice; Vance Miller; Hayes Kline; Clyde Neidigh; Jim Heisey; Sherm Hostler three times; Steve Peters; Hodge Little; Lee Dobyns; Bruce Jones twice; Darry Campbell; Mark Peters; Lon Barrick; and Andy Zook. Seven of the 12 Newporters that have won regional titles did so during these first years: Clyde Neidigh; Clyde Cressler; Sherm Hostler three times; Steve Peters; Bruce Jones twice; Darry Campbell; and Mark Peters. And 3 of the 7 wrestlers to reach the state finals from Newport made it there during this time period: Sherm Hostler three times; Steve Peters; and Bruce Jones.

In 1963 Newport won the mythical state team title as reflected in “The History of the PIAA State Wrestling Championships” when it was the only team to have two finalists. This unofficially gave Newport 24 points, to second place Trinity (of District 7) and Sugar Valley (now part of District 6’s Central Mountain) with 18 points. The only other two District 3 teams to win mythical, unofficial state team titles before team scoring was initiated in 1976 were Manheim Central in 1958 and Lower Dauphin in 1973.

“The History of the PIAA State Wrestling Championships” had this to say about Sherm Hostler’s 1964 title: “The 103-pound title bout featured a pair of former state runner-ups from 1963 opposite one another. Newport sophomore Sherm Hostler (22-1) picked up his high school’s first state crown with an impressive 11-5 win over Erie Strong Vincent senior Terry Magoon (23-1). In the semi-finals, Hostler, runner-up at 95 to Shamokin’s Bill Welker, blanked North Allegheny junior Lee Stevenson (15-1) 3-0, while Magoon, second to Neshaminy’s Greg McBride, dominated Wilkes-Barre GAR’s Mike Koury (17-1), 8-1.”

The News-Sun and Patriot-News reported the blow-by-blow, with color commentary. Sherm was taken down in the first period with a head and heel, one of Sherm’s favorite moves,

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and then turned for a three-point near fall out of a Navy ride. Sherm escaped near the end of the period and put Magoon on his back with a pancake, but the whistle blew before back points were awarded. The second period was all Sherm's, scoring a reversal, a two-point predicament, and a three-point near fall. In the third Hostler "demonstrated the smoothest bit of riding in the entire tournament," holding his opponent down through the period and picking up a riding time point with an advantage of 3:53 to 1:52. "Sherm, who raises and trains roller pigeons for a hobby, never looked better as he switched and gave the fans a sample of some of the finest balance and poise seen here in a 103-pound bout in years. He received a tremendous ovation when he walked to the table to accept his trophy."

At the end of the match Sherm remarked: "We did it! We did it! I'm a state champ." Coach Whistler observed that Sherm proved a point for the younger boys. "No matter what the situation or how difficult it appears, if you do not give up or quit there is always that chance you can still come out on top - if you have the courage."

Patriot-News Big 12 all-star team

Newport's position as a presence in the Harrisburg area was reflected in the first two Big 12 all-star team published by the Patriot-News during the 1970-71 and 1971-72 seasons. Sports writer Skip Hutter consulted both scholastic and collegiate coaches to come up with the list of schoolboy wrestlers considered to be the best in the greater Harrisburg area at their weight as of early January. Although some choices were unanimous, Skip recognized that some excellent competitors lost out by a vote or two with selection difficult due to so many fine prospects at some weights.

Newport had two selections for the 1970-71 team - Brooks Smith (103 lbs.) and Bil Cressler (120 lbs.). Lower Dauphin was the only other team to have two members on that first team. Three Buffaloes made the 1971-72 team - Andy Zook (95 lbs.), Mark Peters (103 lbs.) and Bil Cressler (127 lbs.). Lower Dauphin out did Newport this second year, however, with four selections. Cedar Cliff was the only other team with multiple members, having two. It was revealed that the panel of selectors consisted of 10 scholastic and collegiate coaches. Undoubtedly, numerous Newport wrestlers would have been selected for this all-star team in years preceding its establishment.

Christmas tournaments and scrimmages

The strength of the Newport teams during the formative years was enhanced by the teams they scrimmaged and the Christmas tournaments attended. As early as the 1962-63 season a scrimmage was held with Lower Dauphin. By the late 1960s scrimmages were being held with two of the premier teams of the Harrisburg area - Cumberland Valley in addition to Lower Dauphin. The later matchup was a tri-team event at Milton Hershey, which was a presence on the national prep school scene at the time. Swimming in the indoor pool at the end of the practice was always a highlight.

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Christmas tournaments were a relatively new event when Newport entered its first tournament at State College during the holidays of 1965. Competition from District 6 powerhouse State College, Lower Dauphin and Warren was stiff, but Sherm Hostler took home the outstanding wrestler trophy. The next Christmas the team traveled to Clearfield, the team with the most PIAA state champs ever, and took home second place to the host, out-pointing West York and Franklin. Hodge Little was awarded the outstanding wrestler trophy. Newport stayed closer to home in 1967, trailing Cumberland Valley and host Lower Dauphin in another four-team tournament. 1968 saw the team travel again to Clearfield, besting Carnegie High School but trailing the host team and Reynolds.

Starting in the 1969-70 season Newport attended the eight-team Boiling Springs Tournament, placing tie for second with Mechanicsburg in 1969, with Manheim Central being the champion; fifth in 1970 behind Mechanicsburg, Cumberland Valley, Bellefonte and Bedford; and second to Clearfield in 1971, besting all four teams that had placed in front of it in 1970. There were teams from four or five different districts in each of these tournaments. Brooks Smith was selected the outstanding wrestler at the 1969 tournament and Bil Cressler in 1970. That's four wrestlers to be awarded the OW trophy in the first seven tournaments the team attended.

Future wrestling coaches and referees

The formative years saw the most wrestlers of any time period in Newport history who became wrestling coaches or referees. Most were mentioned in the original 1971 publication: head coaches Earl Heisey, Gene Hale, Ned Soult, Al Jensen and Clyde Neidigh; assistant coaches Steve Peters, Mike Shull, Mike Smith, Chuck Blattenberger and Marlin Hetrick; and referees Luther Fleisher and Jerry Robinson. After 1971, Steve Peters (Susquenita), Mike Smith (Newport) and Paul Britcher (Newport) became head coaches; Larry Reigle became a referee; and Vance Miller (Halifax) and Al Cressler (Susquehanna Township and Littlestown) became assistant coaches.

Future collegiate wrestlers

There were also many who wrestled for Newport during the formative years who went on to wrestle to some extent in college. They included: Kermit Harry (Class of 1957; Lycoming); Gene Hale ('59; Shippensburg); Earl Heisey ('59; Lock Haven); Clyde Cressler ('61; Shippensburg); Clyde Neidigh ('62; Shippensburg); Vance Miller '62; Millersville); Jim Campbell ('63; Bloomsburg); Dave Jones ('64; Bloomsburg); Steve Peters ('64; Bloomsburg); Mike Smith ('65; Bloomsburg); Sherm Hostler ('66); Mike Shull ('67; Bloomsburg); Paul Britcher ('69; Clarion); Al Cressler ('69; West Point); Bruce Jones ('69; Bloomsburg); Lon Barrick ('72; Millersville); Bil Cressler ('72; Bucknell); and Mark Peters ('72; St. Francis).

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Top achievers

In conclusion, following is a list of top achievers among those wrestlers that graduated during the formative years. All district champs, district runner-ups, and wrestlers with multiple section titles are included - that makes 25. This group includes most wrestlers that had the best dual meet and over-all records, but not all. Two others have been included who had phenomenal dual meet and over-all records, but simply did not get two post-season titles - Rich Dobyns and Brooks Smith, whose details below speak for themselves. Those that won one section title are also noted. Other very good and successful wrestlers are not on this list due to having to draw the line somewhere. The list is arranged based on post-season titles, with those having the same number listed chronologically.

- Sherm Hostler (Class of 1966) - state champ; 2-time state runner-up; 3-time region champ; 3-time district champ; 3-time section champ, 1-time runner-up; over-all record 79-6; dual meet record 50-3; undefeated 14-0 dual meet season in 1965-66; 22-match and 25-match dual meet win streaks; overall season records of 22-1 in 1963-64 and 24-1 in 1965-66; most dual meet team points in 1965-66; 1-time Christmas tournament champ and outstanding wrestler; 40 overall falls and 27 dual meet falls.
- Bruce Jones (Class of 1969) - state runner-up; 2-time region champ; 2-time district champ; 2-time section champ; over-all record 49-4-1; dual meet record 29-1-1; two undefeated dual meet seasons, 12-0 in 1967-68 and 13-0-1 in 1968-69; 29-match dual meet undefeated streak; overall season records of 21-1 in 1967-68 and 23-1-1 in 1968-69; most dual meet team points in 1967-68 and 1968-69; 2-time Christmas tournament champ; 23 overall falls and 18 dual meet falls. Bruce and his brother Dave (see below) were the second set of brothers to both reach the District 3 finals for Newport.
- Steve Peters (Class of 1964) - state runner-up; region champ; district champ and district runner-up; 2-time section champ, 1-time runner-up; over-all record 61-6-2; dual meet record 45-2-2; three undefeated dual meet seasons, 12-0-1 in 1961-62, 14-0 in 1962-63, and 13-0 in 1963-64; 42-match dual meet undefeated streak; overall season records of 14-1-1 in 1961-62, 22-1 in 1962-63 and 18-1 in 1963-64; most dual meet team points in 1962-63 and 1963-64; 29 overall falls and 27 dual meet falls.
- Clyde Cressler (Class of 1961) - region champ; 2-time district champ and district runner-up; 4-time section champ, over-all record 60-10; dual meet record 41-5; undefeated 13-0 dual meet season in 1960-61; overall season record of 19-1 in 1960-61; 24 overall falls and 19 dual meet falls.
- Darry Campbell (Class of 1971) - region champ; district champ and district runner-up; 2-time section champ, 1-time runner-up; overall record 54-19 (53-12 in his final three years); dual meet record 36-12 (35-6 in his final three seasons); 18 overall falls and 13 dual meet falls.

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- Mark Peters (Class of 1972) - region champ; district champ; 2-time section champ; overall record 36-9-1; dual meet record 22-7-1; 1-time Christmas tournament champ; 10 overall falls and 7 dual meet falls. Mark and his cousin Steve (see above) were the first relatives to both win regional titles for Newport.
- Clyde Neidigh (Class of 1962) - region champ; district champ; section champ and section runner-up; over-all record 51-5; dual meet record 43-2; 2 undefeated dual meet seasons, 13-0 in both 1960-61 and 1961-62; 32-match dual meet win streak; overall season records of 19-1 in 1960-61 and 13-1 in 1961-62; most dual meet team points in 1960-61 and 1961-62; 28 overall falls and 26 dual meet falls.
- Vance Miller (Class of 1962) - district champ and district runner-up; 3-time section champ; over-all record 46-6; dual meet record 34-1; 2 undefeated dual meet seasons, 12-0 in 1960-61 and 13-0 in 1961-62; 32-match dual meet win streak; overall season record of 14-1 in 1960-61; 17 overall falls and 14 dual meet falls.
- Hodge Little (Class of 1968) - district champ and district runner-up; 2-time section champ; over-all record 46-11-1; dual meet record 30-7-1; undefeated 11-0-1 dual meet season in 1967-68; 1-time Christmas tournament champ and outstanding wrestler; 21 overall falls and 16 dual meet falls.
- Lee Dobyns (Class of 1969) - district champ and district runner-up; 2-time section champ; over-all record 36-8; dual meet record 23-4; 10 overall falls and 7 dual meet falls.
- Lon Barrick (Class of 1972) - district champ; 3-time section champ, 1-time runner-up; over-all record 74-15-1; dual meet record 48-7-1; 1-time Christmas tournament champ; 24 overall falls and 18 dual meet falls. Lon is also a cousin of Steve and Mark Peters; so when Lon won a District 3 title Steve, Mark and him because the first and so far only set of three relatives to gain district titles.
- Hayes Kline (Class of 1960) - district champ; 2-time section champ; overall record 38-6; dual meet record 30-3; undefeated 13-0 dual meet season in 1959-60; overall season record of 18-1 in 1959-60; 11 overall falls and 10 dual meet falls.
- Jim Heisey (Class of 1961) - district champ; section champ and runner-up; over-all record 40-11-1; dual meet record 34-7-1; 11 overall falls and 10 dual meet falls. Jim and his brother Earl (see below) were the first set of brothers to both reach the District 3 finals for Newport.
- Larry Frey (Class of 1961) - district runner-up; 2-time section champ and runner-up; overall record 39-14-2 (37-7-1 in his final three years); dual meet record 32-9-2 (29-3-1 in his final three years); undefeated 13-0 dual meet season in 1959-60; 24-match dual meet undefeated streak; most dual meet team points in 1959-60; 12 overall falls and 11 dual meet falls.

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- Gene Hale (Class of 1959) - district runner-up; 2-time section champ; overall record 26-8-1; dual meet record 17-6-1; most dual meet team points in 1958-59; 13 overall and dual meet falls.
- Dave Jones (Class of 1964) - district runner-up; 2-time section champ; overall record 33-11-2; dual meet record 23-8-2; 15 overall falls and 13 dual meet falls.
- Chuck Blattenberger (Class of 1965) - district runner-up; 2-time section champ; overall record 30-7-2; dual meet record 22-5-2; 11 overall falls and 9 dual meet falls.
- Earl Heisey (Class of 1959) - district runner-up; section champ and runner-up; overall record 27-7-1; dual meet record 18-5-1; 4 overall falls and 4 dual meet falls.
- Jim Campbell (Class of 1963) - district runner-up; section champ; overall record 33-6; dual meet record 28-3; 13 overall falls and 13 dual meet falls.
- Paul Britcher (Class of 1969) - district runner-up; section runner-up; overall record 26-8-1; dual meet record 17-6-1; 7 overall falls and 7 dual meet falls.
- Bil Cressler (Class of 1972) - 3-time section champ; over-all record 55-8-1; dual meet record 37-4-1; undefeated 13-0-1 dual meet season in 1970-71; 32-match dual meet undefeated streak; overall season record of 20-1-1 in 1970-71; 2-time Christmas tournament champ and 1-time outstanding wrestler; 22 overall falls and 17 dual meet falls.
- Mike Shull (Class of 1967) - 2-time section champ, 2-time runner-up; overall record 64-9; dual meet record 49-5; undefeated 12-0 dual meet season in 1966-67; overall season record of 16-1 in 1966-67; 2-time Christmas tournament champ; 28 overall falls and 25 dual meet falls.
- Ed Casner (Class of 1959) - 2-time section champ; overall record 25-6-1; dual meet record 18-4-1; 13 overall falls and 11 dual meet falls.
- Gary Wright (Class of 1964) - 2-time section champ; overall record 23-4-1; dual meet record 17-2-1; overall season record of 9-1 in 1962-63; 9 overall falls and 7 dual meet falls.
- Charlie Smith (Class of 1967) - 2-time section champ; overall record 34-6; dual meet record 26-2; undefeated 12-0 dual meet season in 1966-67; most dual meet team points in 1966-67; 23 overall falls and 18 dual meet falls.
- Rich Dobyns (Class of 1971) - section champ and runner-up; overall record 40-7-2; dual meet record 32-1-2; two undefeated dual meet seasons, 12-0-2 in 1969-70 and 14-0 in 1970-71; 34-match dual meet undefeated streak; 17 overall falls and 15 dual meet falls.

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- Brooks Smith (Class of 1972) - section champ and runner-up; overall record 54-4; dual meet record 38-2; undefeated 12-0 dual meet and overall 15-0 season in 1969-70; most dual meet team points in 1969-70, 1970-71 and 1971-72; 4-time Christmas tournament champ and 1-time outstanding wrestler; 37 overall falls and 29 dual meet falls.
- The following wrestlers also won section titles during the formative years: Jack Moretz ('60) in 1960; Ron Taylor ('63) in 1960; Glenn Kline ('61) in 1961; Luther Fleisher ('62) in 1962; Ed Spaller ('64) in 1964; Craig Lowe '67) in 1966; Bill Fleisher ('66) in 1966; Norm Shull ('71) in 1970; Dean Peters ('72) in 1970; Eugene Jones ('70) in 1970; and Edgar Miller ('71) in 1971.