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ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Ouachita Baptist University Wrestling Coach Kevin Ward has announced the signing of six student-athletes to National Letters of Intent in preparation for Ouachita's inaugural season of collegiate wrestling.

Joining the team will be Dexter Carter and Ben Cline, both from Little Rock; C.J. Hays of St. Paul, Minn.; and three Oklahoma wrestlers, Josh Myers of Cushing, Okla.; Brantley Pyle of Piedmont, Okla.; and Jake Simpson of Tuttle, Okla.

"I am extremely excited about our first recruiting class at OBU," Coach Ward said. "To sign this caliber of student-athletes in the late signing period is really exciting. They are all talented wrestlers and strong students who will be able to step in and help out our team right away."

Dexter Carter is one of two recruits from Arkansas, graduating from Little Rock Catholic High School in Little Rock. Carter was the state champion in the 160-pound division as a senior, while earning runner-up honors as a junior. He will compete in the 157-pound division at Ouachita.

Ben Cline comes to Ouachita from Little Rock Central High School after winning the state title in the 135-pound division during his senior year. Cline was a runner-up during his junior season, while compiling a 85-6 record at the prep level. He will compete in the 133-pound division.

"Ben Cline and Dexter Carter are my first signees from Arkansas and will be the first of many," Ward stated. "Both of these seniors have shown commitment to the sport by wrestling all summer and traveling as far as Fargo, N.D., to compete in tournaments. They are two of the top wrestlers in the state, and I am pleased that they have decided to continue their careers at OBU."

C.J. Hays will travel the furthest of the six recruits, coming to Arkadelphia from Woodbury High School in St. Paul, Minn. Hays, a three-time state qualifier, earned a fourth-place finish during his senior season, finishing the season with a 42-2 record. He is projected to compete in the 184-pound division.

"I look to C.J. to step in and be a leader on this team right away," Ward said. "He is committed to becoming a national champion, and his work ethic is unbelievable."

Josh Myers will come to Ouachita as one of three Oklahoma athletes after graduating from Cushing High School, where he was a state champion during his junior season, while earning runner-up during his senior year. He is projected to compete in the 141/149 pound division on the collegiate level.

"Josh Myers brings a ton of talent and wrestling experience," Ward said. "He was a three-time state placer in Oklahoma and a state champion. I look to Josh to be able to step in and be competitive from the start."

Coming to campus from Piedmont High School will be Brantley Pyle, who earned state champion honors in the 135-pound division during his senior season. Pyle is projected to compete in the 141/149-pound division.

"What's exciting about Brantley is how raw he is," Ward said. "He doesn't have as much experience as many guys, but he has a ton of room to develop. He has a strong work ethic and I expect him to make huge strides in his first couple of years here at OBU."

Jake Simpson will report to campus after graduating from Tuttle High School, where he wrestled in the 189-pound division, finishing fourth overall in the state as a senior. Simpson finished his senior season

with a 39-6 record and finished third in the state as a junior. He expects to compete in the 165/174-pound division in college.

"Jake Simpson is a guy who had to wrestle his senior year up one weight class and comes from a top-notch high school in Tuttle, Okla., and he already knows what serious wrestling is all about," Ward said. "He is a strong student as the valedictorian of his high school, and I look to him to be a model student-athlete for our team."

Ouachita's NCAA Division II men's wrestling team will begin its first season this fall under the direction of Coach Ward.

Ward, age 27, holds a bachelor of arts degree in sociology and a master of science degree in health and human performance and exercise science from Oklahoma State University.

While wrestling at OSU, Ward was a two-time NCAA qualifier and 2005 Big 12 champion. He also was a member of four national championship teams. He was named a three-time Academic All-American by the National Wrestling Coaches Association and named three times to the 1st Team Academic All-Big 12. He also was named to the OSU President's Honor Roll and Dean's Honor Roll.

With the addition of both men's wrestling and women's golf this fall, the total number of Division II athletic teams at Ouachita will expand to 16. This marks the first time that Ouachita has expanded its athletic options since 2000 when the university joined the Gulf South Conference and added men's soccer and women's softball.

"The most exciting thing to me is the challenge of building a team from scratch," Ward said. "We have amazing support here from the administration and student body, so we have a solid foundation to build from. As a coach, I get to recruit the type of student-athletes that I think will fit in well at OBU. This means kids of strong character who will represent our team and the school well. I'm excited about making history here at OBU, which is something we get to do with every single match we wrestle."

-By Alan Greenwood, OBU Sports Information Director

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