

2008 ARKANSAS HIGH SCHOOL WRESTLING TOURNAMENT

Roll call at Stephens

Judo, cheer spur Central standouts

BY NICK WALKER ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Two years ago you'd have had a difficult time convincing Little Rock Central's Aaron Butler and Brandon McCuien that they'd be state wrestling champions.

Neither had ever set foot on a wrestling mat, much less put on a singlet and headgear.

"I was always known as a kid that's really strong for my size, and I kind of like to slam people, so I thought I'd give it a try," said McCuien, the top-seeded wrestler in the 119-pound division heading into this weekend's state wrestling meet at the Jack Stephens Center in Little Rock.

Butler, top-seeded at 171 pounds, comes from a judo background and showed off those skills when he squared off against a much larger athlete in practice.

"First time I locked up with someone it was with a lineman — like a 260-pound lineman, and I took him down," Butler said.

Neither Butler nor McCuien has looked back since taking up the sport last year, and they enter the state meet with undefeated records. Butler (22-0) and McCuien (19-0) will be joined by hundreds of other wrestlers, some of whom began at a young age out of state and then moved into Arkansas to join those who picked up the sport in the past two years when Arkansas schools readopted it.

McCuien fits in the latter category. He specialized in cheerleading before taking up wrestling, and his tumbling ability was put on display when his name was announced after winning the state title last year in Bentonville.

"He just did his flips and landed right where the other kids were standing," Central assistant coach Robin Cline said. "Everyone sat there for a second and then they just erupted into cheering."

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Butler and McCuien come from diverse backgrounds.

Butler, 6-0, 171, has traveled as far as Japan to compete in judo.

McCuien, 5-6, 119, has competed in cheerleading since he was 8.

McCuien credits a lot of his success as a person and a wrestler to his mentor, Little Rock Athletic Club owner Pat Riley Jr.

Riley said he met McCuien when McCuien was in the second grade at Jefferson Elementary. He became McCuien's tutor and eventually his friend and mentor.

McCuien was living in an alcohol treatment center with his mother when he met Riley. McCuien and his mother eventually moved into a home on Main Street in Little Rock, but she relapsed and McCuien was on his own.

"Through his cheerleading, he's met a lot of nice families that have taken him in for a while," Riley said.

McCuien is living with Steve and Sarah Daugherty, whose son Michael coached McCuien in cheerleading at Cheer City United in Little Rock. The Daughertys have been McCuien's legal guardians for the past three years.

"It's been fun to see his development," Sarah Daugherty said. "When he first started, he had no idea what he was doing. But, he would watch every match and try to learn something. No matter how good he gets, he knows he always has room for improvement."

Central Coach Shawn Hickey said he thinks the bond between Butler and McCuien shows the power of wrestling.

"It's not something that I necessarily think about or something that I think the kids are aware of, but if it weren't for wrestling, a lot of these guys wouldn't have ever crossed paths," Hickey said.

Central assistant coach Clay Gilliland was impressed with Butler and McCuien from the first time they showed up.

"Aaron, because of his background in judo, had great control of his body," said Gilliland, who was head coach last year. "And Brandon is just a phenomenal athlete. I felt like each of them had the tools to be successful."

Gilliland, who wrestled at Tulane and is now a financial adviser for Smith Barney, handed the team off to Hickey.

Hickey, a pharmaceutical representative for Pfizer, wrestled at Southwest Missouri State before transferring to Southern Illinois-Edwardsville.

"I've been around wrestling for a long time, and I've never seen someone with the raw, natural ability that Brandon has," Hickey said.

Hickey said Butler has more of a "funk" style of wrestling. Funk wrestling is an aggressive style known for its unorthodox nature and the ability it gives a wrestler to adjust to his opponent.

EARLY ON

McCuien, Butler and the rest of the Tigers showed up for their first wrestling tournament in Brinkley last year with just two practices under their belts.

"We didn't even have singlets," McCuien said at a recent practice. "Our first tournament, we were wearing what we're wearing now — T-shirts and shorts. We looked weird."

Lack of wrestling experience nearly cost McCuien his first match.

McCuien needed a takedown in the final 30 seconds to win. "I really didn't know that much about it, but they were telling me that I needed a takedown," McCuien said. "I went in there with everything that I had and I just tried to slam him. I came in first." Butler did nothing but judo moves in his first tournament. "I threw every opponent I had and I came in third," Butler said.

HERE ON OUT

Winning state championships in Arkansas was just the first step for Butler and McCuien. They attended a wrestling camp at Oklahoma State this past summer and had their eyes opened up to the level of competition outside the state.

"I've been whapped once," McCuien said. "Some kid from New Jersey. It didn't even take him that long."

Both plan on wrestling in college next year. Butler hopes to wrestle at Neosho Community College in Chanute, Kan. McCuien is thinking about going to St. Louis Community College-Meramec, a junior college in St. Louis.

That's why both look forward to going to the Brute/Adidas Nationals in Kansas City, Mo., on April 4-6.

"At nationals, I'm worried about everybody," McCuien said. "Their moms, sisters, everybody."

Butler agreed.

"We won't even be seeded for that," Butler said.

Schedule of events

Jack Stephens Center Little Rock

TODAY

WEIGH IN Noon-3 p.m. OPENING CEREMONIES 3:30 p.m. AFTERNOON/EVENING SESSIONS 3:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m. 1A-4A mats 1, 2, 3 5A-7A mats 4, 5, 6

SATURDAY 9: A.M.-4: 30 P.M.

CONSOLATION (1ST-2ND ROUNDS) 1A-4A on mats 1, 2, 3; 5A-7A on mats 4, 5, 6 CHAMPIONSHIP SEMIFINALS 1A-4A on mats 1, 2; 5A-7A on mats 5, 6 CONSOLATION QUARTERFINALS 1A-4A on mat 3 during championship semifinals, then mats 1, 2 and 3; 5A-7A on mat 4 during championship semifinals, then mats 4, 5, 6 CONSOLATION SEMIFINALS 1A-4A on mats 1, 2, 3; 5A-7A on mats 4, 5, 6

SATURDAY 6: 30 P.M.-10: 30 P.M. CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS 1A-4A on mat 2; 5A-7A on mat 5 3RD-PLACE MATCH 1A-4A on mat 1; 5A-7A on mat 6 5TH-PLACE MATCH 1A-4A on mat 3; 5A-7A on mat 4 TICKET INFORMATION

\$8 for full day or \$5 per session, \$5 programs, free parking Top seeds at a glance

5A-7A

103

1, Jon Reasoner (Russellville)

CLASS Sophomore RECORD 10-2 NOTABLE 1st at Arkansas School for Blind, 1st CAC (103)

2, Chavin Scales (Cabot)

CLASS Freshman RECORD 13-1

3, Tanner Mann (LR Central)

CLASS Freshman RECORD 19-5

112

1, Caleb Bourland (Bentonville) CLASS Junior RECORD 13-2 NOTABLE Injured much of the season.

Moved in from Indiana. 2, Nolen Moyer (Fayetteville) CLASS Senior RECORD 20-3

3, Glenn Becker (LR Central)

CLASS Sophomore RECORD 21-3

119

1, Brandon McCuien (LR Central)

CLASS Senior RECORD 19-0 NOTABLE Won CAC tournament, Bentonville and Springdale 2, Paul

Bondurant (Fayetteville) CLASS Senior RECORD 16-5

3, Andrew Wells (LR Catholic)

CLASS Sophomore RECORD 15-3

125

1, Cody Ealy (Cabot)

CLASS Junior RECORD 13-0 NOTABLE Beat Joshua Segovia, 1st in CAC, Des Arc

2, Joshua Segovia (LR Catholic)

CLASS Senior RECORD 12-3 3, Adam Irons (Bentonville) CLASS Sophomore RECORD 21-4

130

1, Adam Cline (LR Central)

CLASS Senior RECORD 22-2 NOTABLE Started the year at 135 2, Kile Coatney (Bentonville) CLASS

Junior RECORD 20-3

3, Ted Goll (Fayetteville)

CLASS Freshman RECORD 14-7

135

1, Cappy Leaf (Fayetteville) CLASS Junior RECORD 12-0 NOTABLE State champion at 130 last year,

undefeated in high school career 2, Dan Willingham (Searcy) CLASS Senior RECORD 14-0

3, Ben Cline (LR Central)

CLASS Sophomore RECORD 22-2

140

1, Colton Steen (Bentonville) CLASS Junior RECORD 20-4 NOTABLE Runner-up in 140-pound last year

2, Josh Koenan (Mountain Home)

CLASS Senior RECORD 17-3

3, Derik McGuire (LR Catholic)

CLASS Sophomore RECORD 15-4

145

1, Markies Eubanks (Fayetteville) CLASS Junior RECORD 26-0 NOTABLE State champion at 140 last year, undefeated in career

2, Christian Schuler (Bentonville)

CLASS Junior RECORD 19-5

3, Seth Bell (Cabot)

CLASS Freshman RECORD 12-1

152

1, Michael Gordon (Fayetteville) CLASS Senior RECORD 39-0 in Arkansas and Oklahoma NOTABLE Won 145 last year, team captain

2, Chris Rabe (Springdale Har-Ber)

CLASS Senior RECORD 18-4 3, Seth St. Pierre (Bentonville) CLASS Senior RECORD 19-7

160

1, Cody Conklin (Bentonville) CLASS Junior RECORD 24-0 NOTABLE 152-pound champion last season, one career loss came to Oklahoma wrestler

2, Dexter Carter (LR Catholic)

CLASS Sophomore RECORD 14-2

3, Camron Murrey (LR Central)

CLASS Senior RECORD 14-3

171

1, Aaron Butler (LR Central)

CLASS Senior RECORD 22-0 NOTABLE Third in state last year

2, J.J. Malinaro (LR Catholic)

CLASS Junior RECORD 15-4 3, Ben Scharfenberg (Fayetteville) CLASS Sophomore RECORD 14-6

189

1, Josh Anderson (Bentonville)

CLASS Senior RECORD 8-0 NOTABLE Heavyweight state champion last season

2, Cody Loftis (Mountain Home)

CLASS Junior RECORD 16-1

3, Markel Eubanks (Fayetteville)

CLASS Junior RECORD 16-3

215

1, Scott Hovious (Bentonville)

CLASS Senior RECORD 24-0 NOTABLE Been involved with Bentonville program for three years

2, Colby Schreagle (LR Catholic)

CLASS Sophomore RECORD 15-2

3, Adam Brown (Fayetteville)

CLASS Senior RECORD 12-5

275

1, Nick Stewart (Bentonville)

CLASS Senior RECORD 18-1 NOTABLE 215-pound champion last year, sole loss came to Oklahoma wrestler

2, L.J. Tarrant (Cabot)

CLASS Senior RECORD 12-2

Coty Cox (Mountain Home)

CLASS Junior RECORD 18-3

1A-4A

103

1, Shane Pomaybo (Bismarck)

CLASS Sophomore RECORD 10-11 NOTEABLE Finished 2nd at Des Arc and CAC

2, Drake Brainerd (Central Arkansas Christian)

CLASS Freshman RECORD 9-15

3, Brandon Dunlap (Des Arc)

CLASS Freshman RECORD 4-12

112

1, Eric Yarberry (Arkansas School for the Blind)

CLASS Freshman RECORD 17-5 NOTABLE Won the ASB Junior High Tournament, 2nd at Des Arc

2, Jeremy Pilcher (Bismarck)

CLASS Junior RECORD 10-6

Ethan Castleberry (Des Arc)

CLASS Sophomore RECORD 6-10

119

1, Bronson Baily (Episcopal Coll.)

CLASS Junior RECORD 14-9 NOTABLE Two quick pins this season

2, Jimmy Godwin (Bismarck)

CLASS Senior RECORD 6-8

3, Seth Johnson (Gentry)

CLASS Sophomore RECORD 10-22

125

1, Tyler Cox (Des Arc)

CLASS Junior RECORD 22-1 NOTABLE 1st in Des Arc Tournament, 2nd to LR Catholic Josh Segovia

2, Brett Hogan (CAC)

CLASS Sophomore RECORD 16-6

3, Trevor Monreal (Gentry)
CLASS Freshman RECORD 0-1
130

1, J.C. Eldridge (Des Arc)
CLASS Freshman RECORD 17-4 NOTABLE Undefeated in 1A-4A matches, beat Clemmons twice

2, Patrick Clemmons (Episcopal Coll.)
CLASS Junior RECORD 7-9

3, Dennis Edwards (Gentry)
CLASS Freshman RECORD 0-1
135

1, Tyler Binford (CAC)
CLASS Freshman RECORD 15-12 NOTABLE 1st at Des Arc tournament, placed in every tournament

2, Carl Weaver (Des Arc)
CLASS Freshman RECORD 8-8

3, Derek Monreal (Gentry)
CLASS Sophomore RECORD 4-9
140

1, Blake Hogan (CAC)
CLASS Senior RECORD 21-7, NOTABLE 1st at Des Arc

2, Nick Holloway (Des Arc)
CLASS Junior RECORD 20-3

3, Zach Scheffler (Shiloh Christian)
CLASS Sophomore RECORD 9-2
145

1, Greg Welch (Des Arc)
CLASS Freshman RECORD 17-5 NOTABLE 5th in 145 in open competition at ASB and Des Arc

2, Braxton Myers (Episcopal Coll.)
CLASS Junior RECORD 17-8

3, Jacon Szybowski (Oak Grove)
CLASS N/A RECORD 3-4
152

1, Justin Hollis (Des Arc)
CLASS Freshman RECORD 11-2 NOTABLE Coming off an injury

2, Bradley Goshen (Central Arkansas Christian)
CLASS Junior RECORD 6-3

3, David Huddleston (Gentry)
CLASS Junior RECORD 11-15
160

1, Josh Childers (Des Arc)
CLASS Freshman RECORD 23-1 NOTABLE Only loss came to Gordon from Fayetteville

2, Robert Henry (Episcopal Collegiate)
CLASS Junior RECORD 8-4

3, Robert Henderson (Gentry)
CLASS Sophomore RECORD 13-16
171

1, Jared Thomas (CAC)
CLASS Senior RECORD 17-5 NOTABLE 2nd at Fayetteville tournament in open division

2, Tra Harrelson (Des Arc)
CLASS Senior RECORD 14-5 3, Blaiq Charles (LR Episcopal) CLASS Junior RECORD 6-5
189

1, Nick Rynders (CAC)
CLASS Junior RECORD 26-1 NOTABLE 1st at Des Arc, CAC, Fayetteville and Bismarck

2, Dustin Efram (Gentry)
CLASS Freshman RECORD 13-15

3, J.D. Crow (Bismarck)
CLASS Freshman RECORD 7-4

215

1, Brian Huskey (Bismarck)

CLASS Freshman RECORD 18-5 NOTABLE 1st at Bismarck, 2nd at Des Arc

2, Josh Gibson (Des Arc)

CLASS Senior RECORD 11-3

3, Jonathan Roberts (CAC)

CLASS Sophomore RECORD 26-13

275

1, Kelvin Walker (Des Arc)

CLASS Senior RECORD 14-2 NOTABLE Finished 2nd in state last year, only 220 pounds

2, Richard Brooks (Pul. Oak Grove)

CLASS N/A RECORD 6-0



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/KAREN E. SEGRAVE Little Rock Central's Aaron Butler (left) and Brandon McCuien are top seeds in their weight classes two years after taking up the sport. Butler had relied on his judo background while McCuien's cheer skills have helped him.

