

# 'Cats wrestlers look to rebound from last year's early playoff exit

BY DAVE PAYNE  
BLUFFTON TODAY

Are you ready for some wrestling? Bluffton coach John Hollman is, and so are his bustling, bruising Bobcats.

Coming off back-to-back region championships in its first two years of existence, the Bluffton High wrestling program is expected to be even better this season.

"We're making progress," said Hollman, who, following five seasons coaching the sport at Hilton Head High, launched the BHS program in 2004 after the school opened its doors for the first time. "It was a challenge the first year, with only three athletes on the team with wrestling experience. We did well, with three state qualifiers.

"Last year we were successful in building some credibility for our program in the state by placing in four tournaments. We won the South Effingham tournament, advanced beyond the first round of the (3-A) Lower State (team) tournament and had four (individual) state qualifiers."

Three of last year's state qualifiers are back: seniors Chris Nicolosi, Ryan Koons and Nick Shappee.

Nicolosi settled as the state 3-A runner-up in the 112-pound weight class last February after a controversial loss in the final to then two-time defending champion Andrew Jenkins from East-side. Shappee placed fourth at state in the 145-pound class after a disappointing 3-2 loss in the semifinals. Koons was eliminated in the 140-pound consolation round.

Shappee, who will compete as a 152-pounder this year, said he's fit and ready for the challenge in the higher weight group after limping through last season with a groin injury.

"The injury made it difficult to wrestle in matches and practice," said Shappee, who played wide receiver and outside linebacker on the BHS football team. "It was frustrating because I was limited in what I could do.

"I feel good going into this season. It's going to be tough wrestling at 152, but it's something I'm



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**Freshman Tyler Rosenlieb, standing, works out with senior teammate Nick Shappee during practice. Coach John Hollman has high hopes for Rosenlieb this winter.**

looking forward to."

Koons said he is motivated to succeed on the mat after experiencing a "disappointing" football season as a fullback and middle linebacker on a team that finished 5-6 with losses in its last four games.

"I thought we would do much better in football," he said. "I don't believe we wanted it badly enough.

"I'm looking forward to wrestling, for myself as well as the team. I have been working hard to get better. Coach Hollman's practices really get you in shape."

Koons was among the Bobcats' wounded last season, missing a number of matches with a fractured finger.

He also deals with asthma.

"It's something I've had since the third grade, and I've learned to manage it while playing sports," Koons said. "Being in good shape helps me to overcome it."

Other returning wrestlers expected to help bolster B-Town's fortunes are senior Trey Jarosz (130), juniors Troy Dolin (heavyweight), Stephen Scott (heavy-

weight), Rickey Peavey (145), and sophomores Austin Tosky (125) and Mike Wetmore (130). Dolin, who also has asthma, is returning to wrestling after sitting out last season. Peavey finished third in the 2005-06 state junior varsity tournament.

Hollman is looking for freshmen Tyler Rosenlieb (152), Phillip Boni (125), David Lopez (189) and Josh Wetmore (119) to contribute to the Bobcats' cause. The foursome was coached at H.E. McCracken Middle School by Steve Broome, also the high school football team's offensive line coach.

"Tyler has a lot of wrestling experience," Hollman said. "I anticipate him and Phillip making an immediate impact to the team.

"Steve is doing a super job preparing his kids to wrestle for Bluffton. It's extremely important for the development of our program."

BHS wrestling took a hit with the loss of seniors Michael Burke (130), Patrick Barwise (125) and Alex Londeau (171). Burke moved, Londeau decided not to wrestle and

## NOTEBOOK

- The Bobcats will entertain rival Hilton Head in a huge Region 7-3A match on Jan. 24. Hilton Head moved from 4-A to 3-A this year after a drop in its enrollment. Hilton Head is ranked fifth in the state 3-A pre-season poll, Bluffton tenth.

- John Hollman, who coached the Bluffton football team's defense the last two years, says he has no interest in becoming a candidate to replace Dave Adams, who earlier this month resigned after two seasons as the team's head coach. "I want to spend more time at home with my wife, Danielle, and 2 1/2-year-old son, Jadon," Hollman said. "I'm going to devote my coaching to wrestling at this time and devote the rest of my time to teaching and my family."



Hollman



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**Coach John Hollman addresses the team after a training session.**

Barwise has elected to play goalie on the Bobcats' lacrosse team.

"Michael was a big loss," Hollman said. "He won 28 matches last season and barely missed qualifying for state. You hate to lose a kid of that caliber."

Hollman, a former outstanding high school and Division II college wrestler in Pennsylvania who runs practices at BHS that would be the envy of a Perris Island drill instructor, said he is happy with the progress his team is making as the Bobcats close in on their Nov. 30 dual meet opener at home (7 p.m.) against Beaufort.

"The kids are really working hard and I'm pleased with where they are in training," he said. "The younger kids are learning from the experienced guys. The kids are bonding while pushing each other.

"The hunger and desire of the

returning athletes are definitely spreading to the younger people."

Hollman has assembled tough schedules for his Bobcats the last two seasons to prepare them for the post season, and this year is no different. Along with their Region 7 matches, they are entered in seven tournaments leading to the single-elimination state dual championships in early February.

The Bobcats will be the home team for the Beaufort County Championships on Jan. 20 and the individual Lower State championships on Feb. 16-17. The state individual finals are Feb. 23-24 at Airport.

"Having the Lower State championships at Bluffton is a big boost for our program," Hollman said. "It's another step in our growth toward being among the top wrestling programs in the state."

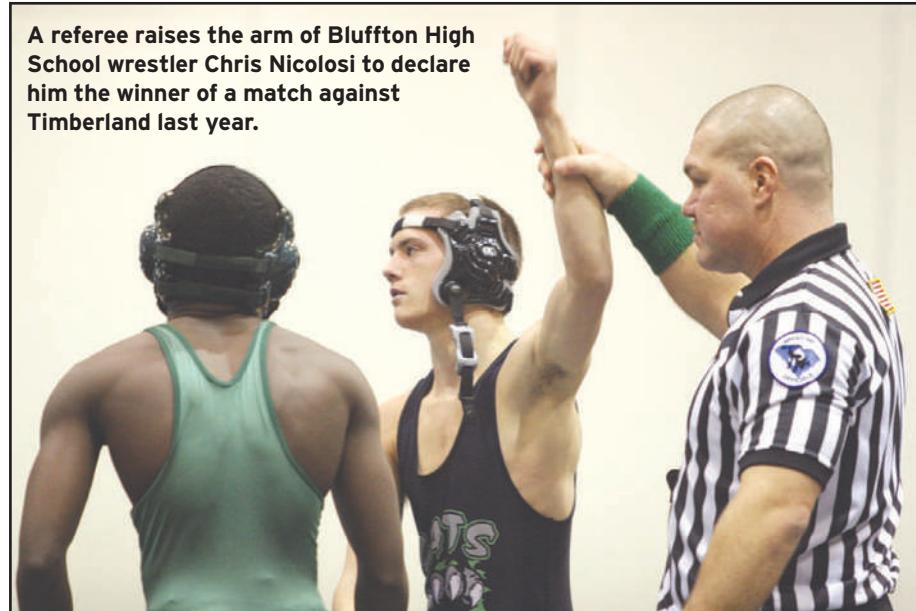
## BHS 2006-07 wrestling schedule

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| Nov. 30    | Dual match vs. Beaufort   |
| Dec. 1-2   | at South Effingham tournament                                   |
| Dec. 6     | Dual match at Timberland  |
| Dec. 8-9   | at North Myrtle Beach Invitational                              |
| Dec. 13    | Dual match vs. Bamberg-Ehrhardt and Stall                       |
| Dec. 15-16 | at Lugoff-Elgin Invitational                                    |
| Dec. 29-30 | at Clover duals   |
| Jan. 5-6   | Lowcountry Invitational at Beaufort                             |
| Jan. 8     | Dual match vs. Benedictine and Ridge View                       |
| Jan. 10    | Dual match at North Charleston                                  |
| Jan. 12-13 | at Dreher Invitational  |
| Jan. 20    | Beaufort County Championships at BHS (Hilton Head and Beaufort) |
| Jan. 24    | Dual match vs. Hilton Head                                      |
| Jan. 30    | Dual match at West Ashley (WAHS/Hanahan)                        |
| Jan. 31    | Dual match vs. Colleton County                                  |
| Feb. 5     | Class 3-A dual playoffs, first round                            |
| Feb. 7     | Class 3-A dual playoffs, second round                           |
| Feb. 9     | Class 3-A dual playoffs, semifinals                             |
| Feb. 10    | Class 3-A dual championships at Lugoff-Elgin High               |
| Feb. 16-17 | Class 3-A individual Lower State championships at BHS           |
| Feb. 23-24 | Class 3-A individual State championships at Airport High        |



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The returning BHS wrestlers along with their coaches include (top row, from left) Coach John Hollman, Nick Shappee, Troy Dolin, Chris Nicolosi, Stephen Scott, Ryan Koons, assistant coach Eric Snider; and (bottom row, left to right) Ricky Peavey, Trey Jarosz and Austin Tosky.



Bluffton Today file photo

## Nicolosi focused on winning '06 state title after '05 controversy

BY DAVE PAYNE

BLUFFTON TODAY

In time, as Chris Nicolosi matures and goes on to the next chapters in his life, the sting will remain of having a state wrestling championship yanked from beneath him during last February's 112-pound final by a referee.

But, for now, it's an experience he says sticks with him as if it happened yesterday.

"I still have nightmares about it," said Nicolosi. "I don't think I'll ever get over it."

Nicolosi had a 2-0 lead eclipsed in the third and final two-minute period when, after the referee warned him late in the second period for stalling, the BHS wrestler was called for stalling with 30 and then three seconds remaining, each resulting in a one-point penalty that sent the match against two-time defending state champion Andrew Jenkins from Eastside into overtime at 2-2.

As if that wasn't enough, Nicolosi said he had Jenkins in a position where he was close to a match-winning 2-point takedown in overtime when the referee stepped in and declared the wrestlers were in a stalemate. Jenkins ended up winning with a 2-point takedown on what Nicolosi explained was a lock cradle hold.

Making the event even more painful was that Nicolosi was dedicating his tournament success to his older brother, Michael, who had succumbed to a gunshot wound only a couple of weeks earlier.

"I wasn't stalling," said Nicolosi, who scored his point on a takedown early in the match. "It was a matter of my opponent and I being so evenly matched it was like we were in a stalemate the whole time. He was in the down position in the second period and couldn't get a 2-point escape

and I wasn't able to pin him or get a near fall. The referee didn't bother to call a stalemate then.

"I was in the down position in the third period and I kept trying to escape to take a 4-0 lead, but I couldn't get out."

He recalls his post-match devastation. "I wanted to win the championship for my brother," Nicolosi said. "Next to my brother's death, it was the most painful experience in my life."

It was a moment Bluffton wrestling coach John Hollman said still infuriates him when he thinks about it.

"In all my years in wrestling, as a competitor and a coach, I've never experienced anything like what that referee did to Chris," Hollman said. "I've never seen a more blatant misuse of power, especially by an adult against a kid."

"I had people I didn't even know come up to me after the match and say how obvious it was that Chris was cheated out of winning a state title. I even had had fans from Eastside (call) apologizing for what happened, and I received e-mails and letters about the incident. Chris won the championship, and everyone in the place knew it."

Nicolosi said the injustice experienced at the 2006 finals will be added motivation for him to return to the 3-A state title match in February, and possibly get a shot to deny Jenkins from winning for a fourth time.

"That would be great," Nicolosi said. "But there is plenty of wrestling between now and then. I have to be focused on what's in front of me at the moment."

Also important to Nicolosi is earning a college scholarship in wrestling.

"I'm told I might have a chance," said Nicolosi, who said he is working hard on improving his grades. "I want to be the first in my family to graduate from college."