

# WOOD COUNTY JR. HIGH-MIDDLE SCHOOL HISTORY

This year's Wood County Middle School Tournament will be golden as the league celebrates its 50th championship since wrestling begun at this level in 1962. The 2011 tournament will showcase outstanding contributors over the past half-century during its Championship Finals Round as the history makers will be guest award presenters throughout the evening.

Scheduled for February 12th at Memorial Fieldhouse, the finals will begin with a Ring-of-Honor as past county champions and head coaches are invited to surround the center mat before the Parade of Champions begin. All previous champions and head coaches are asked to report through Gate 2 to check in and gain free admittance.

Wrestling was first introduced to the local Jr. Highs by varsity wrestlers from Parkersburg High School (PHS) in the mid to late 1950s. PHS Coach Bob Dutton would send his wrestlers to visit the Jr. Highs to teach wrestling during their gym time.

In 1960, while teaching at Jackson Jr. High, A. James Manchin (a former WVU wrestler and High School coach at Rupert, Hundred and Webster Springs) would oversee intramural wrestling during lunchtime. This intramural activity help lay the foundation for the Jackson Jr. High program.

Manchin was the state campaign manager for John F. Kennedy in 1960. When President Kennedy took office in January 1961, he appointed Manchin the State Director of the Farmers Home Administration, thus creating a teacher position at Jackson Jr. High.

Principal Bernie Price filled Manchin's position with December Marshall graduate Buddy James, a former football and state wrestling champion from PHS and a collegiate wrestler and letter winner from Montana State and Marshall College.

Ninth grader Bob Pickens, one of the lunchtime intramural wrestlers, pestered Coach James to start a wrestling team which Coach James agreed to. Pickens got his inspiration for wrestling from his grandmother's enthusiasm for T.V. studio wrestling. Coach James was also coaching basketball at the time and would coach wrestling on one end of the gym and basketball at the other. Coach James then contacted VanDevender and Hamilton Jr. Highs and Jackson travelled to both schools for scrimmages. After the 1961 contests and support from coach Dutton, the Wood County Board gave their consent to officially include wrestling as a sanctioned sport in the Jr. Highs for the next year.

The first ever Jr. High match featured Jackson against Edison and was held as a preliminary before the Parkersburg and Marietta dual on Valentine's Day, February 14th, 1962. Jackson rolled to a 46-10 victory winning the first eight matches with seven coming by pin.

The first official tournament was held a month later in March 1962 and was officiated by Dr. Jim Mendenhall in the finals and recent High School State Champion Joe Handlan officiating the quarter and semi finals rounds on the first night. Ticket prices were 15 cents for students and 25 cents for adults. PHS Coaches Bob Dutton and Paul Starr were directors.

Jackson Jr. High won the first four county tournaments and the sport prospered in popularity as the tournaments were too large to be held in Jr. High gyms and had to be held in high school venues. The original charter coaches during the first year were: Edison, Bill Gonzalez; Franklin, Glenn Kiger; Hamilton, Harold Nicholson; Jackson, Buddy James; VanDevender, Len Hanford; and Washington, Ron Kincaid.

The typical uniform comprised of gym shorts and t-shirts and the first weight classes were set up by Buddy James based on the weights of the wrestlers on his team. Before the 1962-63 season, Coach James, with State Director Manchin, approached Principle Kiger about purchasing uniforms from state money that was coming and with Manchin nodding his head in the background. Ten years later Kiger told Coach James he was still waiting for the state money and wondered if it was ever going to come.

The league continued for 12 years with the six original members and county tournaments were held in late March or early April until after the 1971 season. The wrestling season was then held after football season and the tournament was wrestled in December before basketball season started in January. In 1976, the season was then held concurrently with basketball, with the season starting in late November and the tournaments being wrestled in late January or early February.

The South Freshmen team joined the league in 1974, which was replaced two years later by Blennerhassett Jr. High. Three years later, Williamstown joined the league giving it a solid eight members. After the closure of Franklin and Washington Jr. Highs in 1993, the league extended outside the county borders and included Belpre and Wirt County Middle Schools. Six years later, they strengthened its competition by adding Ritchie County in 1999, then Ripley and Point Pleasant in 2003. Parkersburg Catholic has also participated in the league over the years.

Franklin's Coach Dan Clevenger became the first individual to win titles as a wrestler and a coach, having won his individual crown for Edison in 1968 and ten years later would win the team title. He and Blennerhassett's Coach Bob Miller battled back and forth for the league title as the Falcons and Bobcats became the Lakers and Celtics rivalry of the league, winning nine consecutive titles from 1976 to 1984. Each coach won a record four titles which stood for 13 years.

In the 1990s, Edison Jr. High flexed its muscles and won seven consecutive titles from 1992 to 1998. They were coached by Steve D'Angelo '92, Marvin Pickens '98 and Bob Moore '93-'97 who set and currently holds the league record

of five titles. Edison's seven consecutive titles broke the 30 year old record of four set by Jackson from 1962-65. Edison has been the overall dominate team over the last half century having won 16 league titles.

At the turn of the century Blennerhassett developed a new rivalry, replacing Franklin with Edison. The two programs won 8 of the last 10 titles and in the past 26 years have won 24 overall crowns since 1986.

In 2004, Point Pleasant and Coach Dave Darst changed the landscape of the league by becoming the first school outside the county to win the league title. Their accomplishment was matched in 2009 by Ripley Middle and Coach Matt Smith. The league also changed from Jr. High to Middle School in 2009.

The Wood County Middle School Tournament is believed to be the second oldest in West Virginia, being two years older than the Little Kanawha Conference and the Wood County Recreation League founded in 1964, and eight years younger the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference that started in 1954.

The league has produced 20 three time county champions. The Outstanding Wrestler Award was first presented in 1977 and resulted in a rare three-way tie between Edison's Randy Beatty, Blennerhassett's Dave Rittenhouse and Franklin's Kraig Burke.

Six National Wrestling Hall of Fame members from the West Virginia State Chapter have also been involved with the local Jr. High system and includes the above mentioned Bob Dutton, Joe Handlan, Bob Pickens, A. James Manchin along with long time tournament score-keeper Vernon "Tiny" Marlow and former Franklin mentor Rod Oldham.

Hamilton's Bill Kupfner was the first County Champion to move on to win a High School State Championship in 1964. The league has produced around 200 State High School Champions, 17 High School Outstanding Wrestlers award winners, 9 Dutton Award winners, over 40 High School All-Americans, one State Outstanding Official winner, 14 three-time High School State Champions, one four-time High School State Champion, several Collegiate Tournament qualifiers, four Collegiate All-Americans and one Deaf Olympics Gold Medal Winner (twice).

As well as honoring former champions and head coaches in a Ring of Honor Ceremony before the Championship Finals, this year's tournament will honor three time County Champions as award presenters for the 15 different weight classes. The Parade of Champions Marshalls for the finals will be lead by legendary coaches and National Wrestling Hall of Fame members Coach Joe Handlan of Parkersburg High and Coach Bob Pickens of Williamstown. Team awards will be presented by record setting coaches Bob Miller, Dan Clevenger, Bob Moore, Dike Goff and Buddy James. Two new awards will be presented at this year's tournament; a new Coach of the Year Award will be presented as well as an Official of the Year Award.

**Team Tournament Finishes  
Championships and Runner-ups**

- 1) Edison 16 - 11
- 2) Blennerhassett 13 - 10
- 3) Jackson 7 - 10
- 4) Franklin 7 - 4
- 5) VanDevender 3 - 2
- 6) Washington 1 - 4
- 7) Ripley 1 - 1
- 8) Point Pleasant 1 - 0
- 9T) Hamilton 0 - 3
- 9T) Williamstown 0 - 3
- 11) South Freshmen 0 - 1
- 12T) Belpre 0 - 0
- 12T) Wirt County 0 - 0
- 12T) Ritchie County 0 - 0
- 12T) Catholic 0 - 0.

**Jackson 46, Edison 10**  
**Feb 14th 1962 at PHS Fieldhouse**  
*Preliminary to PHS vs. Marietta Dual*  
*first Jr. High dual in Wood County,*  
*possibly West Virginia*

- 80 Dave Paxton J pinned Bucky Bennett E :44 2nd
- 90 Bob Armour J pinned Eddie Harris E :43 2nd
- 100 Paul Clayton J pinned Bill Pincell E :15 1st
- 105 Mike Deem J pinned Larry Dunn E :35 1st
- 112 Mike Jonas J pinned Bob Richards E :56 2nd
- 118 Dave Bumgarner J pinned Roger Smith E 1:00 3rd
- 123 Richard Sheridan J dec. Tom Gribble E 5-4
- 127 Alan Handlan J dec. Don Harris E 6-0
- 135 Lloyd Dowler E pinned Gary Whited J :54 3rd
- 145 Herb Eaton E pinned Melvin Wiseman J :39 2nd
- 155 Steve Chichester J pinned Brad Davis E :19 2nd
- UNL Mike Yonkers J pinned Gary Townsend E 1:41 2nd



Jackson Jr. High, 1962 Wood County Champions. Shown (l-r) FIRST ROW – Dave Paxton, Mike Deem, Richard Sheridan, Paul Clayton, Melvin Wiseman, Steve Chichester, Gary Whited, Dave Bumgarner, Mike Jonas, Steve Phillips. SECOND ROW- Coach Buddy James, Danny Wilson, Steve Whited, Steve Flowers, George Schultz, Virgil Chichester, Alan Handlan, Tim Atkinson, Dave Dwelling, Mike Dennison, Bob Armour and H O’Neal.

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