

Though this isn't necessarily the strongest squad **Battery Creek** has ever sent to the state wrestling finals, it might be the one coach Nathan Day has grown most attached to.

And with good reason — five Dolphins got their start with Day back in middle school, where the championship coach resumed his career after taking 15 years off to raise a family. After securing state titles as freshmen and sophomores, they could earn their third in four years Saturday.

"This group is a special group," Day said Friday. "It would be nice to see those guys close it out, let the seniors go out on top."

The final step figures to be the toughest, though, taking on **West-Oak** in a Class 3A showdown of teams that have swapped the division's No.1 ranking this season. They'll square off at Columbia's Dreher High School, with the first match at 1 p.m.

The teams met once earlier this season, with **Battery Creek** prevailing 37-33 at last month's Red Raider Invitational in Greenville. To win the title, the Dolphins will have to do it again.

"That was one match," cautioned Day, who also captured four state titles during his first term at **Battery Creek** from 1988-98. "This one could definitely go the other way."

The Dolphins only have to look back at last season for a painful illustration, when Marion put a stop to their run at a third straight crown in the Class 2A Lower State final. Marion went on to take the title a few days later.

"That was hard on the kids," Day said. "After beating Marion a couple of weeks earlier, they lost to them when it mattered. I'm sure it was motivation for trying to get back into the final and hopefully come out on top."

Battery Creek, 44-6 in dual meets this season, is anchored by a trio of seniors ranked No.1 in their weight class. Omar Daniels (132 pounds) and Cooper Kaminsky (220) won state individual titles a year ago, with Turhon White (170) completing the trio.

As a group, they've suffered just eight losses this season — Kaminsky once, Daniels twice and White the other five.

All three, by the way, are among the quintet that goes back with Day to their days at Robert Smalls International Academy. Liam Payne and Fernando Whitehead are the others.

The Dolphins also have two more wrestlers ranked No.2 in their divisions: Nate Torres (113) and Tyrus Singleton (120). Nonetheless, Day was quick to put the favorites' tag on **West-Oak**, which also has five wrestlers among the top two in their weight classes.

"I heard one of their coaches say it's the best team in the history of their school," Day said. "And they do a great job up there, year-in and year-out."

He also noted that the Warriors (24-1 in duals) have sent several wrestlers to elite tournaments in such hotbeds as Iowa and Ohio.

"They've got some elite-level kids," Day said. "They definitely have a lot of resources as far as their program that a lot of schools don't have."

A side-by-side rankings comparison shows the Dolphins hold the edge in eight of the 14 weight divisions. But everyone still has to produce Saturday, and coaches may tweak their lineups to get an edge at one key matchup or two.

"It's a chess game," Day said. "Each team has probably five guys that you kind of know are going to win, so it's those other four. ... We're going to have to wrestle well to get to 8-6. It may be 7-7 and come down to who gets the most bonus points."

Jeff Shain: 843-706-8123, @jeffshain

Copyright (c) 2017 Island Packet (Hilton Head, SC)