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TRINITY - With as much success as the Trinity High School wrestling program has earned in recent years, it would seem very difficult for the Bulldogs to keep up that level of success.

But they are.

Two years after capturing the state 2-A dual meet championship and one year after having two individual state champions and placing eight of 10 male wrestlers at the state meet, Brandon Coggins once again has the Bulldogs among the elite 3-A programs in the state.

The Bulldogs were 20-0 in dual meet competition entering action this week and are led by a number of wrestlers returning after getting that state tournament experience a season ago.

"Randolph County as a whole, has a lot of blue-collar people and I like that kind of kid," Coggins said last weekend after a trip to Lake Charter High School. "I let the kids know our expectations, I'm pretty straight forward about it. Coming from blue-collar families, the kids make it easier."

The Bulldogs are benefiting from an experienced staff of former THS wrestlers who are now on the coaching staff.



*Trinity wrestling coach
Brandon Coggins.*

"I have a great staff, people who have wrestled for us and they get the kids to come out and they really develop the kids," Coggins said. "We are pretty demanding and have high standards. We have lost kids because of it. Sometimes kids don't want to pay their dues. But I've always preferred quality over quantity."

There's plenty of quality wrestlers again this year as Aiden Burkholder, who won the state 106-pound championship last year, is having a phenomenal season at 40-2. Stephen Cross, Omega Edge and Joseph Trahan return after finishing fifth last year in the state tournament and Edgar Vasquez, who placed sixth, is back. All are having solid campaigns.

Coggins does whatever he can to assure his kids are ready for the regional and state tournaments. He looks for weekend tournaments that include some of the best wrestlers in the state so his wrestlers can see exactly where they stand with the state's elite.

"That is part of the development," Coggins said.

Last year, Burkholder wrestled and lost to Washington High School's Sam Boltes during the regular season. But when the two met in the state championship finals match, Burkholder won with a second-period pin.

"It lets us see the adjustments we have to make," Coggins said.

There will be changes at this year's state meet. The 1-A and 2-A schools will be combined into one state meet, while the remaining six classifications will have their own meet. This means brackets will include only the top eight wrestlers in each weight classification instead of 16 and only four places will be recognized instead of six.

"When you get to the top four or six teams in any classification, I don't think anything will be easy," Coggins said. "We have some very good teams in 3-A. I think the margin for error will be less because we'll have eight-man brackets."

The Bulldogs are currently ranked first in 3-A and third among all wrestling teams in North Carolina by High School OT. The only two teams ahead of Trinity are 4-A Uwharrie Charter Academy and 6-A Union Pines.