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Lamorinda Wrestling back on the mats

By Jon Kingdon



Hannah Ripper, Miramonte Photo provided

There has been a fair amount of shuffling and turnover among the Lamorinda wrestling coaches. Greg Weitzman, the Acalanes head coach is in his first full season following the abbreviated coronavirus year. Louis Suba moved from the co-head coach position at Campolindo to Miramonte and Phil Freeman, a Lafayette native, is now the head coach at Campolindo coming over from Liberty High School. The coronavirus is never far from the coaches' and wrestler' mind as they are a "no mask" sport, requiring testing every week.

Campolindo

Ironically, it's Freeman and Campolindo that has the largest turnout of wrestlers in the area. "It's been great so far coaching at Campolindo," Freeman said. "It's a great area with great kids. I have about 30 wrestlers on the team, split evenly among the boys and girls and we have a lot of kids new to wrestling."

After an extended hiring process, Freeman and the Cougars had to hit the ground running. "They've all worked hard, and I've made sure to give everybody attention," Freeman said. "We've scrimmaged and have

gone to a few tournaments and I'm still looking for a heavy weight."

Leading the way has been senior Ohia Paris, wrestling at 106 pounds. Paris went 4-2 and 3-2 in earlier tournaments and recently won the Bill Martell Invitational. "Ohia can be a top wrestler that just needs a little attention, cleaning some things up," Freeman said. "He does the general stuff well but just has to address the small things."

Junior Chase Young (145) and senior Walker Johnson (170) have also shown good potential. "Chase is coming along, and Walker should continue to develop and do something."

The girls are led by Isabelle Lurie (111) who works out with Paris and had three wins and three pins in an earlier tournament. "I've been impressed with all of the girls, even the beginners in that they are all listening and trying hard," Freeman said. "We're going to have a pretty strong girls' program. In fact, the attitude of all the wrestlers has been great in giving their best effort."

The captains on the team are seniors Sam Gruen for the boys and Madison Lee for the girls. "They have both been a big help to me, encouraging the players," Freeman said. "Madison, along with her mother (the team mom) has been very good at organizing things and have both been very helpful to me."

The backing that Freeman has received from the school and the parents is something that he is most appreciative of: "I'm happy about the support that I have received from the administration. We were able to hold the novice tournament (for first year wrestlers) at Campolindo that went well and was a good fundraiser for us. The parents have been good with communicating, carpooling and bringing snacks and water. It's been very impressive how organized and cohesive everyone has been. It's a credit to the parents for stepping up."

Acalanes

For Weitzman, with so many of the protocols no longer necessary, it's a whole new environment. "I'm definitely enjoying it so far," Weitzman said. "It's great to have a normal season unlike last year. I'm having fun getting out there and seeing the kids wrestle in a real season."

This is an inexperienced team with more than half of the 21 wrestlers being freshmen, sophomores and first-time wrestlers and four of them being girls. "We're a young squad but they work hard and are enjoying it which should mean better numbers next year as they get their friends to come out as well," Weitzman said. "We had a good offseason and our kids have been spreading the word. We participated in the athletics day at school and there's been a lot of word of mouth."

Freshmen Sam Whipple (220) and Luke Ross (138) have been the leading wrestlers for the Dons. "Sam has done a fantastic job and I'm really excited about his wrestling," Weitzman said. "He won three matches at the Bay Area 58 tournament and it's great to watch him pick up the sport. Luke, who missed last year due

to an injury is wrestling top opponents and it's exciting to watch him grow during the season. Zach Robb is a first-year heavyweight wrestler who came over from the football team and I'm excited to see how he will do at that level."

Senior captains Lucas Haase (138 or 145) and Cooper Womack (132) have led both on and off the mat, Weitzman said: "Both are doing well, and I really appreciate how they are keeping the team together and how well they are doing in practice and in matches."

Joy Baker, Dakota Goyert, Anya Haas Hollenbeck, Olivia Banks, and Dakota Goyert (whose brother Hunter is also on the team) are all new wrestlers. "All four are newer wrestlers," Weitzman said. "They went to the DAL Novice tournament, and I was blown away at how well they all did. They are enjoying a combination of the camaraderie and have learned that wrestling is like a kinetic chess match - trying to set up your moves as you wrestle your match the way you want to and not being reactive. It's really hard work, but they seem to enjoy it. As they come off the mat, they say how much they enjoyed it and ask me when their next match is."

The tournaments have returned with a greater sense of normalcy. "They've done a great job of insuring that anyone who is inside is wearing a mask," Weitzman said. "The energy from having a real season has increased the number of schools participating in the tournaments. With the new technology, the tournaments are running more smoothly. There's a lot more awareness of the sport and familiarity with how it functions, so the wrestlers are showing up with more energy and positive attitudes from all the teams that are just glad to be back."

Miramonte

Without an offseason program, there are only 11 wrestlers (3 girls) on the roster. "Because I was new to the program and did not have the opportunity to put in an offseason program, our numbers are limited," Suba said. "COVID had a lot to do with my small numbers this year as some wrestlers opted out" due to concerns over the virus. This is a young team, with a number of the wrestlers in the 152 to 160 weight class and the lightest wrestler at 120, and more than a few in their first year of wrestling. Junior Jack Hughes (160) has a background in jujitsu, and two years of wrestling experience has shown well so far, finishing first in the Bay Area Invitational, second in the Cougar Kickoff tournament and third at the Christmas Classic Tournament

"Our most promising young wrestler is a freshman, William Gilmore (120)," Suba said. "He is strong, fast and scrappy, wrestling in the 126-weight class, and is showing a lot of promise." Gilmore finished first in the Cougar Kickoff Tournament, third in the Christmas Classic, was 3-0 in the DAL and Berkeley Kickoff tournaments, and finished first in the Tri-City Tournament and now has a 13-2 overall record.

There is a solid core of sophomore first-year wrestlers in Jack Riley, Carter Camp and Beckett Randolph (a two-sport athlete) who are all showing great potential. Riley was 3-0 at the DAL and Berkeley Kickoff tournaments. Camp was 3-0 at the Cougar Kickoff Tournament and Randolph was 2-1 at the DAL Tournament. Ben Chinn (150), a senior who did not wrestle last year came over from the football team and has shown the skills to be a good wrestler. "Ben is strong, fast and scrappy," Suba said. "He just needs mat time and experience." Zack Fineman also finished second in the Bay Area Invitational and the Cougar Kickoff Tournament.

Leading the girls is junior Hannah Ripper, at 145, who can wrestle at either 137 or 150. "I was able to coach her last year when we joined the Miramonte and Campolindo team as one," said Suba. "She is just so aware of what is happening on the mat. With her 10 years of jujitsu experience, she knows how to use her body to control her opponent. She is very fast, being able to move on bottom and she is already one step ahead of the competition."

Ripper placed first in the Bay Area Invitational, second in the Castro Valley Girls Invitational and Roger Briones Invitational, third in the Folsom Girls Invitational, first in the Tri-Valley Tournament and won the Outstanding Wrestler Trophy. Alice Cropsey finished second in the Roger Briones Invitational and Gianna George finished in fourth at the Castro Valley Girls Tournament.

"I believe we've got things turned in the right direction both on and off the mat with not only our practices but with mandatory study halls twice a week," Suba said.

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[back](#)

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