

Published March 2nd, 2022

Lamorinda wrestlers compete at NCS; Ripper and Lee make it to state

By Jon Kingdon



From left, Campolindo Coach Phil Freeman, Madison Lee, Hannah Ripper and Miramonte Coach Louis Suba smile after the girls qualify for the state tournament. Photo Baldwin Lee

technically claim to be the first, having qualified 20 minutes ahead of Lee.

After winning her first three matches by pins at the state tournament, Ripper lost her next two matches to the eventual winner and No. 1 seed and then pinned her final opponent to finish in fifth place. "Hannah had an incredibly strong finish," Miramonte head coach Louis Suba said. "She's an unbelievable competitor and it was a great tournament for her."

As the first female from Lamorinda to place at the state meet, Ripper is also the first wrestler from Miramonte to place since Mike MacDonald's third place finish in 1999.

Lee was 1-2 at the state meet, highlighted by her pinning her opponent on the second day. "Coming here and winning a match by pinning her opponent was a real accomplishment," Campolindo head coach Phil Freeman said. "To pin someone in the first division, at the state tournament, is a great accomplishment. It was the capstone of her entire high school career, going out on a high note."

Despite its being Freeman's first season at Campolindo, he already knew the way to Bakersfield having coached at other schools, the most recent, Liberty High School.

Not lacking for confidence, when he first met with the team, Freeman announced for all to hear: "What we are going to do is win all of our dual meets. We're going to have the best girls' program in history. We're going to have multiple NCS placers and we're going to state."

As they say, "It ain't bragging if you do it," though there had to be some relief for Freeman when Lee fulfilled his final prediction. "When I said that we would be very successful, I'm not sure that everybody necessarily believed me because I saw some raised eyebrows," Freeman said. "I'm happy that we're going to state, that we had several section placers and that we won our division."

For Lee, her success at NCS was overwhelming. "As soon as I got off the mat, I started crying," Lee said. "I thought back to the team's banquet my freshman year when Louis (Suba, the Campolindo coach then) said that someday I would make it to the state meet. Actually, my goal was just to make it to day two of the NCS so making it to state is just gravy and I'm super happy that I got to this point."

The other Campolindo girls that competed were Isabelle Lurie (108) who went 4-3, placing in sixth, as well as Natalia Kalas, KT Thompson, Cheryl Potter, Camilia Baxter, Piper Lalli, Isabelle Zabronsky and Charlie Rose.

The seven boys from Campolindo that qualified for NCS included Ohio Paris (106), who finished in eighth place, and Chase Yang (138), Daniel Thaler (152), Walker Johnson (170), Gavin Juni (182), and Shane Harris (220).

Competing at NCS should prove to be valuable training for everyone, according to Freeman: "The experience will make them better wrestlers. To go to a big tournament, even if you're only there to watch it,

There were 13 boys from Lamorinda (Acalanes-8, Campolindo-5) who qualified Feb. 18 and 19 for the North Coast Sectional tournament at James Logan High School. At the same time, there were 13 Lamorinda girls (Acalanes-3, Campolindo-9 and Miramonte-1) who arrived at Albany High School with the same goal: make it to state. For the girls, it was a matter of finishing among the top four wrestlers in their weight class.

In the end, there were just two wrestlers from Lamorinda still standing, qualifying for the state tournament: Miramonte's Hannah Ripper (132) who finished in first overall, pinning her final opponent in 50 seconds and Campolindo's Madison Lee (138) who finished in fourth. At that point, their coaches and parents quickly grabbed their phones to make room reservations in Bakersfield.

Though not the first wrestlers from Lamorinda to have advanced on to the state tournament, Ripper and Lee are the first females to take that next step. Ripper can

will allow them to have the 'been there, done that' feeling the next time they go to a tournament. It takes away some of the intimidation and it becomes something that they can feel that they should do every year."

For Suba, it was a matter of quality over quantity at the NCS with Ripper being the only qualifier among the boys and girls, and he was effusive in his praise for Ripper. "Hannah is an amazing athlete," Suba said. "She is a natural talent who is strong, fast and loves to wrestle. You can teach her a move and by the end of practice, she will have it down. She understands leverage and how to use her body to control her opponent. Hannah is very coachable, pays attention to all the details, and makes all the adjustments she needs to and that's what makes her great."

Ripper gave credit to her first coach at Miramonte, Jason Rosiak and Suba. "I feel very proud to have won the NCS and to make it to state," Ripper said. "Jason was a great guide for me and managed what I needed to get to the top. Coach Suba pushed me physically and mentally and made me want to grow after each defeat and work and want to get better. They were both people that I needed to ultimately win the NCS and make it to the state tournament."

"We started out with only 10 wrestlers led by Hannah and Jack Hughes," Suba said. "Jack Riley got hurt late in the season, but has shown the talent to succeed along with Carter Camp (162) who brought a jujitsu background to the mat and finished second at the JV league tournament."

Suba was particularly excited about the future for Willie Gilmore (126). "Willie was incredible for a freshman," Suba said. "He finished the season with a record of 20-10 and came in sixth at the league tournament. He is wrestling obsessed and should make NCS next year."

Along with Ripper returning for her senior season, freshmen Alice Crapsy (162) and Gianna George both showed good potential for next year.

Acalanes head coach Greg Weitzman's team went 5-1 in dual meets and was well represented at the NCS tournament. "I'm really proud of our team with our seven boys and three girls that wrestled in the post-season. At the NCS, we had some really awesome wrestling. Freshman Sam Whipple (220) and Lucas Haase (145) both made it to the second day, each going 3-2. They put in a lot of hard work with all of the twists and turns due to the COVID virus. To see them at the end, having fun and wrestling their best was just awesome to me as a coach."

The other qualifiers from Acalanes were Hunter Goyert (132), Lucas Ross (138), Matt Soto (152), Zach Robb (285) and Miles Garcia.

Olivia Banks finished in eighth place at the NCS, Anya HaasHollenbeck (108) was 3-0 and Dakota Goyert (101) had a 1-2 record.

Weitzman also appreciated how valuable the experience was for everyone: "It was immensely powerful for our seniors, as a capstone and final moment of their high school wrestling careers. It wasn't just one or two people but to have 10 of our wrestlers, more than half of our team, was phenomenal to see. It was great to see the camaraderie and how excited it was for our underclassmen and seniors. We are going to be doing a lot of interest building to replace our seniors. If we can have a good off-season and get the kids doing some free style and practicing, we will be coming in next year with kids that will have gotten some real mat time."

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