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Success and potential for Lamorinda Wrestlers; Campo wrestler makes it to state

By Jon Kingdon



Caiti Freeman (expecting a daughter), Tyson, Phil Freeman and NCS Commissioner Pat Cruickshank

As is his wont, Campolindo wrestling head coach Phil Freeman was very optimistic heading into the season, looking to win the boys' and girls' league championships and hopeful about sending someone to state again this year.

The boys team was 5-1 in league matches, finishing second to Concord but, after some late season adjustments, defeated Concord finishing in third at the NCS duals, and brought home a banner. Freeman was looking for the girls' team to finish in the top 10, but they came up just short. "Our girls were third after the first day and finished 11th out of 70 teams, earning their highest NCS finish to date," Freeman said.

With a roster of nine boys and 10 girls at the NCS tournament, it capped a successful season for the team. Senior Chase Yang placed seventh, ending his season with a 36-8 record, with 29 of the wins being by pinfall. The other boys at NCS were Gavin Juni, Daniel Thaler, Shane Harris, Adam Barash, Kevin Humphries, Kaleo Howell Young, Soushians Bahramifar and Luke Hansen.

"As a group, they just got better and better as the year went on," Freeman said. "Chase had a very good year and he will be missed. Gavin had an injury prior to NCS and was super tough, wrestling with a bad shoulder, still beating some opponents. Daniel will continue to show improvement. Adam wrestled at 108 and was a pleasant surprise, nearly winning the league. Luke and Soushians, freshmen that came over from the football team, were two big people that provided us with a lot of size. Kaleo made a lot of progress and Kevin got a win at NCS at 122 which is what we hoped he would do."

There was a solid core of female wrestlers for Campolindo with only one senior, Molly Breznikar. The underclassmen at NCS were Natalia Kalas, K.T. Thompson, Patricia Davila Gil, Analise Gonzalez, Camila Baxter, Isabel Zabronsky, Piper Lalli, Ori Rogers, and Atlas Benko.

Leading the way were Zabronsky who finished fourth, Lalli seventh, and Baxter in eighth place. "We had a number of wrestlers like Natalie and K.T. that lost in the 'blood round,' the round you need to win to be able to place," Freeman said. "Molly helped the team all season and contributed a lot to the team. Patricia and Analise showed improvement all season. Atlas missed a lot of time with a concussion but contributed in a number of ways and Ori also fought through some nagging injuries and like Atlas showed improvement throughout the season. Our girls program is only getting better and better and my goal is to eventually win it all."

It was Zabronsky, who wrestles at 145, that fulfilled Freeman's preseason prediction that he would have a wrestler at the state meet this year. Going off last year's record of 0-8, most would not have given her much of a chance to have such a good year, but it was not a surprise to Freeman or Zabronsky. "Isabel did freestyle and Greco with my girl's class all summer long," Freeman said. "She did everything. I took her down state, to Fresno and Hawaii where I coached at a wrestling clinic over the summer, and she stuck with me like glue. She showed up all the time, was hungry to learn, worked hard, developed rapidly with an enormous amount of mat time. This is a real testament to Isabel's work ethic, mental toughness and mindset."

The state meet was, as anticipated, a very competitive tournament. "Isabel lost to the No. 2 ranked wrestler in the first round and then lost a tough match the following round," Freeman said. "It was tied going into the second round and even though Isabel wrestled well, she got pinned. She will be back, better and stronger."

Freeman also received special recognition being named the 2023 NCS, CIF Honor Coach Award (Coach of the Year) in his 17 years of coaching at Heritage, Liberty, Deer Valley and Campolindo high schools.

With accomplishments too many to list, Freeman has served as a manager and director of many wrestling groups, coached several wrestlers that went on to college, among them a collegiate and national champion. What may have served Freeman best was his personal philosophy: "Wrestling should be fun! Wrestling should be for everyone!"

Acalanes

For Acalanes head coach Greg Weitzman, it was a year to grow on that showed potential for the future. "We have a lot of young talent on the boys' team and we came in fourth overall in league competition," Weitzman said. "Part of it was dealing with a number of kids that were out sick but we worked with what we had and I was really proud of the team. The theme for the season was that a lot of our wrestlers had illnesses and they did not have as much mat time as we would have liked."

The boys' team was led by senior co-captains Hunter Goyert (138) and Zachary Robb (HW). "Hunter was close to the medal round at NCS and overall he had a great season and I'm really proud of the work he contributed to the program," Weitzman said. "Zachary had a good season but was unable to wrestle in the league tournament due to a concussion suffered earlier in the season."

Also representing the Dons at NCS were Kirian Gracie, Dylan Potter and Sam Whipple. "Kirian making it to NCS as a freshman in his first year as a wrestler was very impressive and he learned a lot this year," Weitzman said. "Sam was an amazingly hard worker with a lot of talent and he should be great next year. Dylan did well at NCS and is set up to also have a great senior year."

There is a solid core of young wrestlers that Weitzman is counting on - Marley Oh, Bryce Birdsong and Gracie. "They all did well and showed up for us at the DAL tournament," Weitzman said. "They were really bright spots in our program and wrestled tough against juniors and seniors and should continue to improve over the next three years."

Weitzman is equally enthused about the girls' team, comprised of junior Dakota Goyert, sophomore Anya Haas Hollenbeck, and seniors Joy Baker and Olivia Banks. "Joy was a pleasure to watch wrestle," Weitzman said. "She did a great job coming back from an injury that caused her to miss last season. Olivia was a fighter and a warrior that put in the work and had a great tournament at the NCS, losing a tough match right at the end. She contributed a lot to our program and it was fun to coach her. Dakota was close to the medal round at the NCS and had a spectacular season going 19-5. I'm really proud of all the work she put in. Anya was also close to medaling and also had a very good season. She is naturally strong and should continue to develop."

As with most schools, Weitzman is looking to increase the numbers on the team next season. "We'll be recruiting by spreading the word around campus and make it easier for the students to find us and come out, especially the freshmen," Weitzman said.

Miramonte

It was somewhat of a bittersweet season for the Miramonte wrestlers, epitomized by senior Hannah Ripper's season. After going to the state tournament last year, Ripper suffered an early season concussion, missing regular season, finishing with a 3-1 record. Despite such limited time on the mat, Ripper went on to win the DAL tournament and made it to the NCS finals before having to injury default. Even though this qualified her to go to the state tournament, Ripper opted to pass on going to the tournament.

Miramonte was also represented at the NCS by freshmen Melissa Le and Claire Casado and junior Izarra Ballesteros who was a first year wrestler that transferred to Miramonte this year.

"Izarra won a match and Melissa and Claire got great experience being able to wrestle in a big time tournament and I expect all of them to come back next year and be more competitive," Head coach Louis Suba said. "We went from a roster of 9 to 28 this year after doing demonstrations for all of the freshman PE classes and will do it again this year and hopefully we'll get our numbers up again next year."

Willy Gilmore, who began the season wrestling at 132 and then moved to 122, was the clear leader among the boys' team. "Willy won the league championship which was great for a sophomore," Suba said. "Willy went 2 and 2 at the NCS which was a big accomplishment and finished the year with a 22 and 9 record."

Suba is confident that Gilmore will be making big steps next year: "Willy can get on the podium and maybe make state next year, depending on much stronger he gets and how much he improves in the off season. He has the endurance to last an entire match. If he can get stronger over the summer and can improve on his technique and do a better job in using his legs to wrestle, he can certainly meet those goals."

Suba will also be counting on the return of junior Zach Fineman who wrestled at 170 pounds. "Zach did well finishing 15 and 15 and had his share of good showings," Suba said.

Owen Beidelman, Xander Egan, August Hance, Calvin Lai, Zach Lindheim, Brody Suba and Julio Villanueva were a solid core of freshman boys that are being counted on to be the foundation of the team. "They are going to carry us into the future," Suba said. "August led the group with a 14-4 record and qualified for NCS but failed to make his weight. We're looking for a core of 15 more wrestlers to come in next year."



Campolindo's Isabel Zabronsky and Coach Phil Freeman

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