

Lamorinda Wrestling Mid-Season Report

Wrestlers hard at work toward season goals

By Hannah Raslan



Bottom row, from left: Max Flemming, Justin Joss; middle row: Jared Deloso, Owen Chang(C) Alexander Jang(C), Justin O'Camb, Justin Correll, Leo Zepada; standing: Sam Field, Joseph Santos, Deven Galang, Skylar Wright, Alec Gates, Zachary Francis, Ben Warren, Cristofer Holobetz, Aidan Kohr(C), Coach Jose Herrera Photos Andy Scheck



Bottom row, from left: Tomas Martinho, Grant Smith, John Monasevitch, Jaqueline Guelfi, Avery Novick. Middle row: Logan MacDonald, Eric Monasevitch, Jason Pollock, Andrew Armen, Lorenzo Ruiz, Ronin McCobb; standing: Jeremy Dunbar, Keai Lucasey, Nathaniel Armen, Trevor Martinho, Ryan McCormick, Jackson Wiley, Sean Flannelly, Matt Lopresti

Looking into Miramonte, Campolindo, or Acalanes' gyms this season, spectators will surely find teams of hardworking, dedicated wrestlers practicing with an aim at the NCS title. All three teams are filled with talented, experienced wrestlers, eager new players and underclassmen ready to prove themselves on the mat.

The Miramonte Matadors (1-2 in DFAL) are an upstart team filled with young and inexperienced athletes who are enthusiastic to improve their wrestling skills with help from seasoned upperclassmen and head coach Jose Herrera.

Last year, the Mats lacked upperclassman who could guide the new recruits. They had only one junior and no seniors.

"We had 14 returners and 12 new wrestlers—usually underclassmen," said Herrera. "We're young. A lot of these guys did not know what wrestling was until freshman year, so we started late, but we are catching up."

This year, however, the team is stronger behind the returners. Junior captain Alexander Jang and junior

Justin Joss lead the team twenty wins apiece. Junior Sam Field has notched 17 wins.

The Mats are hopeful for a spot in the North Coast Section (NCS) tournament this year. Jang, Joss, and Field are poised to qualify.

The Mats recorded their first win of the dual-meet season against Acalanes. They suffered tough losses to Campolindo and Dublin.

"[Against Campolindo] we had one of the most exciting duels I've ever been a part of," said Herrera. "With one match left it was tied; we ended up losing, but we will see them next year."

The Mats return to action on Jan. 30 at Dougherty Valley.

Campolindo is having a strong season, despite a losing record. At 3-4 overall, the Cougars have already faced most of the DFAL's toughest teams including Dougherty Valley, which has "a good team, and that was a pretty tough match," said Campolindo head coach Bob McLaughlin. "We are doing alright. Hopefully we can finish above 500."

Senior Jeremy Dumbar is having a career-best season with the Cougars. Fellow seniors Grant Smith and Jack-

son Wylie also lead the team in wins. They have an eye towards the NCS tournament.

Looking toward the rest of the season, Las Lomas and Dublin will be the toughest and most threatening competition. McLaughlin is confident that his team will take home the win against the Dons.

"We have done well in the NCS duels. In the past three years we've finished fourth, third, and fourth, so I would like to compete [this season]."

With a small roster, the Dons have yet to win a dual meet. At 0-4, Acalanes has to forfeit a majority of their matches.

The Dons possess skill, drive, and a much larger team than last year, but they still are not able to compete at the same level as bigger, more developed teams.

"Even though we often win the majority of matches, we haven't won a dual meet yet because we have to forfeit so many weight classes," said senior captain Brian Lilienstein. "We have one of the smaller teams in our league."

As the season progresses, the team hopes to get more participants in order to become a threat.

From World Cups to Whistles

Star rugby player transitions to coaching

By Clare Varellas



Gary Hein, pictured in center

Photo provided

Thirty years ago this month, UC Berkeley freshman football player Gary Hein stood outside Memorial Stadium about to enter the locker room to begin his usual off-season workout. But before he could even begin dressing, friend and teammate Don James approached him with a proposition that would change his life.

"He came in and grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and said, 'Come on, you're coming with me. Why don't you just come sit down and watch this sport called rugby?'" Hein recalled. "So I did, and after about ten minutes I said, 'Alright, I'll try it out.'"

Little did Hein know, that rugby practice in January of 1984 would be the first in a long and successful career that led him to play for Cal, for the U.S. national rugby team, and for a variety of top rugby teams around the world.

Hein, who is now a lawyer and the head coach of his twin sons' U12 Lamorinda Rugby Club team, comes from a line of renowned athletes, including his grandfather, an NFL Hall of Famer, and his father, a past world-record pole vaulter.

Hein was recruited to Cal on a football scholarship and played football all four seasons. However, he says that in comparison to football, he prefers both the "continuity and the camaraderie" of rugby.

"I really enjoyed the fact that in rugby when someone was tackled with the ball, it wasn't a dead ball," said Hein. "In rugby, you play a match, and afterward you have dinner and drinks with the other team."

Hein was a four-time All-American, a two-time National Player of the Year, and a member of the Cal rugby team that won three national championships. He was offered a chance to try out for the national rugby team during his junior year.

"My football eligibility had ended at Cal, and I was toying with the idea of trying out in the NFL, but it was right at the same time that I got this selection onto the U.S. rugby team," said Hein. "Given the choice of trying out for the NFL and representing my country in the first rugby World Cup, I chose the latter and loved it."

Hein played for the United States in the inaugural Rugby World Cup in 1987. He stayed on and played in two more World Cups in 1991 and 1993.

In the meantime he lived in

Dublin, Ireland, playing for the world-famous club team Old Belvedere. Hein attended Oxford University to earn his law degree from 1989 to 1991 and played on the university's varsity team and for the London-based club, Richmond.

After returning to the United States, Hein continued playing for the national team and for Old Blues, the Cal alumni rugby team. He retired from playing in 1994 but worked as an assistant coach for the Cal team in 2001-02.

In 2009, Hein started coaching for Lamorinda Rugby Club, trying to instill the same love he has for the sport into his young players.

"The most important thing is that they love the sport, and that they come back," said Hein. "If you try to pressure them too much to be committed to the sport year-round, you're more likely to lose them to other sports, whereas we make it fun for them."

Hein said that coaching is also about preparing athletes for life. "We try to teach them life lessons about how to work together as a team, how to set a common goal and work toward achieving it together," he explained.

In an era of mounting concern regarding concussions, it would seem that the lack of padding, particularly the lack of helmets, in rugby uniforms would increase players' danger of getting hurt. However, Hein believes that rugby is actually safer than football because players are more careful without all the preventative padding.

"The helmet can be a sword as well as a shield," said Hein. "It can protect you, but I think when people are wearing a helmet they feel like they're bulletproof or immune to injury... whereas when you're playing rugby you're probably intending to protect yourself as well as other people."

As rugby grows increasingly popular worldwide (it will be an Olympic sport in 2016), Hein treasures the memories he has of being a part of the world's first rugby World Cup, and continues to promote the sport's values via his coaching.

"To have done that on the highest level, on the highest stage in the world with some of the best players as your teammates was really exhilarating," Hein said. "I miss it, but I have a lot of great memories and will always look back on it fondly."

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