

LAMORINDA SPORTS

Increased interest in Lamorinda wrestling

By Jon Kingdon



Photo Gint Federas

The requirements of wrestling are best summed up by Dan Gable, the most famous amateur wrestler in college history: "Once you've wrestled, everything is easy."

Wrestling is a bit of an oxymoron – it is an individualistic-team sport: There are 900 wrestling programs in California, comprising 25,000 wrestlers. Unlike most other sports, there is only one competitive division, meaning that there will be only 14 champions in the whole state.

With the popularity and growth of mixed martial arts, there has been a concomitant growth in high school wrestling. Each of the schools in Lamorinda is seeing an increased turnout of wrestlers.

Jason Rosiak, in his first year as head coach at Miramonte, is trying to imbue a new attitude in his wrestlers: "I'm trying to build a program that focuses on the athletic side of the program and what it can do for you post high school. I want to bring a perspective that combines physical and cross training and different exercises."

Rosiak has worked hard to attract new wrestlers to the team with a good deal of success. There are 25 wrestlers on the team this year with only four returning from last year's team. Says Rosiak: "This is a two- to three-year process to get the freshmen and sophomores in shape. We graduated seven people from last year's team. This year, we're starting all over."

With such a young team, Rosiak is leaning heavily on his two senior co-captains, Owens Madaus, who wrestles at 145 or 152 and is looking forward to qualifying for the state tournament this year, and Gram Berger, who will wrestle at 160 or 170, down from 182 where he wrestled last year. Madaus took first place earlier this year at the Bill Martell Tournament at Northgate High School.

Due to a lack of wrestlers for the heavier weights, Miramonte is not going to be able to provide a wrestler for each of the 14 weight classes.

Freshman Dylan Welch in one of the lower weight classes has shown a lot of potential.

Rosiak knows that things will not turn around immediately: "We are in a strong league with strong coaches and strong programs. ... My job as a coach is to provide a tool box for different moves. Each wrestler has a different personality and each wrestler will have different techniques and moves on the mat. No one has to use the exact same moves. Each wrestler is painting a different picture – different personalities, strengths and mental approaches. I want them to feel that they have a choice and take that with them on the mat."

Coming off a very successful 2016 season, Acalanes coach Dave Ridge has had a lot of turnover through graduation and the loss of a number of his wrestlers due to injuries suffered while playing football last fall. The Dons have 33 wrestlers on the varsity and JV teams.

Heavyweight wrestler, Antonio Correa, having fractured an ankle last fall, is just coming back and Ridge expects him to compete later in the season.

Co-captain Ben Ross fractured a kneecap playing football as well and has been lost for the season, yet has stayed involved with the team, doing stats, filming and whatever he can do to serve as a leader for the younger wrestlers.

The other captains are Isaac Douglass, wrestling at 170 who finished fifth at the Mat Classic at Granada High School and Jeremy Ridge, wrestling at 152.

Jeremy Ridge, who will be wrestling for the University of Pennsylvania next year, has over 100 varsity wins over his career. So far this season, he is 17-2 and is the 11th ranked wrestler in California, and finished in the top 12 in state last year.

At the 49th annual Pat Lovell Holiday Wrestling Classic in Aptos, with 83 teams competing from four states, James Trainer and Isaac Douglass advanced to the second day of the tournament. Ridge went on to win his weight class and recently finished in the top 12 at the Doc Buchanan Classic in Clovis, California.

Coach Ridge remains optimistic about the Don's upcoming matches: "We are going to be able to have people compete at every weight. We are young but I look forward to the dual matches to see who will develop."

Ridge wants to instill confidence in each of his wrestlers as they compete: "You have to have no fear of losing. You can't just rely on athleticism. You have to 'see the field' like a quarterback, being able to anticipate the opponents moves and seeing how things unfold."

Ridge believes in wrestlers competing at their natural weight and not trying to struggle to lose weight: "What I hate about the sport is the culture of cutting weight. They are student athletes – they're growing. Wrestling is the toughest physiological sport in an anaerobic and aerobic activity. This is a sport that actually requires more technique than power. I want our wrestlers to understand leverage and angles. You are the offense and the defense and in on every play."

Beginning his fourth season as the head coach at Campolindo, Sam Sotelo is excited about a state champion's return to his team. No, it's not a returning wrestler from last year's team. It's assistant coach, Nikko Triggas, who won the state championship for Campolindo in 2002 and then went on to wrestle for Ohio State.

Sotelo is optimistic about his team's prospects: "We have over 40 wrestlers on the team and will have a full varsity and JV team. It's the biggest team since I've been here."

Leading the team are senior co-captains, Craig Amador, wrestling at 182, Leon Yushin, a middleweight, Rex Chen, at 220 who missed last season due to a concus-

sion, Brian Kikugawa, returning from a back injury, wrestling at 160, and Peyton Manty who competes at 145.

Sotelo is also excited about "good lightweights," sophomores, Keichi Serrano and Noah Hammond.

With Scott Fukiyama, also a Campolindo graduate, coaching the junior varsity and Louis Suba, the girls coach, Sotelo brings an attitude of internal fortitude: "My main philosophy is that conditioning and heart is the key to being a champion. We can teach technique but the kids need to bring the heart. We are definitely running a lot. Our kids are very motivated and dedicated and we're excited to see what we can do."

Sotelo is looking for the team to be much improved in their riding skills (controlling an opponent on the mat in such a way that prevents an escape or reversal: "We have improved on our riding under Nikko's tutelage and are more confident on our feet and in our ability to get off the bottom."

Wrestling is no longer exclusively a male participation sport. Coach Ridge says that participation of girls in wrestling is growing very fast. There are girls wrestling for each of the Lamorinda teams. Though there are not enough girls competing to allow them to have their own teams, the girls will practice with and wrestle against their male counterparts. However, they will only wrestle against girls in tournaments.

Ridge has three girls participating for Acalanes with sophomore Alexandra Haase showing great potential, along with Abigail Dunsmore and Corina McTigue.

Coach Sotelo is particularly pleased with Remy Brenner who is a co-captain: "She takes charge of the team. She comes in early and is a leader for our entire team."

Coach Rosiak has two freshmen on his team, Shannon Lipp and Neena Grewel: "Both have a good future. They work very hard and it motivates the boys. They do all the work that the boys do."

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