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New sense of normalcy returns to Lamorinda Wrestling

By Jon Kingdon



Miramonte's Willie Gilmore wrestles and medals at a recent tournament.

With the pandemic in the rear-view mirror, the turnout numbers for the Lamorinda wrestling teams have all shown an increase. The lower numbers were attributed to the reluctance of athletes that had been deterred from going out for wrestling, but a new sense of normalcy has returned.

Campolindo

Coming off a very successful season and off-season, head coach Phil Freeman is looking for a carryover to this season. With his girls' club teams winning the state championship earlier this year in Greco-Roman wrestling and having success at the Pan-American Championship and world championships in Rome, Italy, Freeman was recently named the NCS Honor Coach for Girls wrestling.

With a roster of 30 wrestlers, it's a balanced number of boys and girls on the team. "We lost a number of seniors to graduation, and we have a lot of new boys and girls," Freeman said. "We're a young team, with only two seniors but I expect good things this year and in the seasons to come because we have so many underclassmen."

The boys' team is being led by senior captain Chase Yang (147), Shane Harris (HW), Gavin Juni (197) and Daniel Thaler (162).

"Chase has already won the Bay Area 59 and Bill Martell Tournaments and has a 13-1 record so far," Freeman said. "He's doing all the things a captain should do - showing up all the time, organizing team runs outside of practice and being a great leader. Shane is still healing up from football and we're taking it slow with him. Gavin (7-3) has been medaling consistently and as a junior looks like the present and the future."

Thaler has also been winning varsity matches and like his teammates is bigger and stronger this year. "We're in the weight room a couple of days a week," Freeman said. "One of our goals this year was to get stronger, which we have accomplished."

On the girls' side, the leading wrestlers have been co-captain junior Natalia Kalas (108), Camila Baxter (140), and KT Thompson (128). "Natalia has been making it to the finals in her tournaments," Freeman said. "Camila has placed at all of her tournaments and KT has medaled a couple of times as well. I believe our girls are going to finish very strong at the North Coast Section Tournament and am optimistic about sending someone to the state tournament again."

Piper Lalli (154) is also a co-captain who has been injured most of the year, but has been helping in any way she can and is expected to be back soon and wrestling with the team.

Making it to state is a harder path for the boys because now only the top two qualifiers go to the state tournament instead of the top three and the loser in the finals has to still defeat the consolation champion to make it to the state tournament. "We're still hopeful about sending someone to state this year," Freeman said. "Chase and Gavin should be in the hunt and coming up this week, Chase will be wrestling against someone from the national Japanese team which will be over here on a cultural exchange."

Freeman does not lack for confidence in his teams: "I'm hopeful to win the league with the boys and girls again because for the first time ever, there will be an inaugural DAL girls championship team and we want to be that team."

Miramonte

For Miramonte head coach Louis Suba, he made it a point to increase the number of wrestlers on the team's roster after only having 10 wrestlers on last year's team.

"At the beginning of the year, Hannah Ripper and I did a demonstration for all the freshmen PE classes," Suba said. "This generated a lot of interest and Hannah really resonated with the kids and we now have a

roster of 20 boys and 10 girls. We are missing some of the heavier weight classes, but we have 11 of the 14 weight classes covered. Unfortunately, Hannah has been out for about a month and a half after suffering a concussion, knocking her head against her partner and she has just begun practicing after receiving her clearance."

With the influx of so many new wrestlers, experience is not a large commodity on the team. "We're a young team with a number of first year wrestlers so we've entered a lot of novice and JV tournaments," Suba said. "They're learning and trusting in the process and getting better with every practice. Everything we work on in practice was demonstrated in the six tournaments we've competed in."

Standing out for the boys' team has been sophomore Willie Gilmore who is wrestling at 132 pounds this year after weighing 125 last year. "Willie has been wrestling all summer and has gotten stronger and faster," Suba said. "He is completely wrestling obsessed and he has been a standout. I've never met anyone that loves wrestling as much as he does. His technique has gotten a lot better and he is developing some favorite moves that have almost become unstoppable."

Among the other leaders on the team are senior Jack Hughes (170) and juniors Jack Riley (160) and Zach Fineman (170). "Jack (Riley) and Zach are both looking strong and have done well in the tournaments and we're looking for good things from Jack Hughes."

There has also been a big turnout of freshmen, many who came over from the Miramonte water polo team. It's a very promising group comprised of Owen Beidelman, Xander Egan, August Hance, Calvin Lai, Zach Lindheim, Brody Suba, and Julio Villanueva. "With my son Brody on the water polo team, I was at all of their matches, talking with them and their parents to at least try out for the wrestling team. They all showed up in good shape and were ready to go from the start," Suba said. "We just have to teach them to wrestle."

Hannah Ripper, the girls co-captain, after making it to the state tournament last season, is ranked 17th nationally by USA Wrestling. "Hannah has gotten stronger and faster," Suba said. "She just has to work on her cardio before she is ready to wrestle since she has not been able to work out."

Sophomore Alice Cropsey, who showed a lot of potential last year, is returning and leading freshmen Claire Casado and Melissa Le and junior transfer Izzy Ballesteros.

"Their learning curve is steep because they're brand new to the sport," Suba said. "However, the girls are working really hard in practice, showing up every day and getting better after each practice and in competing at tournaments."

Acalanes

Despite losing a number of wrestlers to graduation, the Dons have some returnees who had success last season but also have a roster comprised of freshmen and first year wrestlers.

"We're young and scrappy," said head coach Greg Weitzman. "Our numbers are okay this season with 23 wrestlers, four of which are girls, though we did not see the influx of wrestlers that I was hoping for. However, we did a lot of off-season work and I feel good about that. We're looking for ways to win with the team that we have, and I believe we're going to make it happen. It's getting them started the right way by teaching fundamentals and wrestling tough."

Weitzman is particularly excited about the arrival of two freshmen, Marley Oh (126) and Kirian Gracie (113). Marley has a jujitsu background and has already wrestled in varsity tournaments and has a winning record and this is only after wrestling for a month," Weitzman said. "Kirian also brings a jujitsu background and has displayed a lot of toughness. Bryce Birdsong (132), a rugby and football player, is another freshman who is a really hard worker and is showing a lot of potential."

Key returners for the team are sophomore Sam Whipple (195) who made it to day two of NCS last year and senior co-captains Zachary Robb (HW) and Hunter Goyert (138). "Sam wrestled last year at 220 has lost 25 pounds and put on a lot of muscle, and Zachary is also leaning up well," Weitzman said. "Junior Dylan Potter (170) is a core part of the team and Miles Garcia is our 152 wrestler."

With such a young team, many of the newcomers are being asked to step up and compete on the varsity level. "They've been wrestling tough," Weitzman said. "We've been able to fill almost all of the wrestling classes using a number of freshman and first year wrestlers."

Junior footballer Collin Malmquist (160) and sophomore Matthew Law have come out for wrestling for the first time. "Collin has stepped in and is wrestling tough," Weitzman said. "He's winning and losing some matches but he's learning a lot. Matthew (132) is tough and has a lot of athleticism and talent."

The girls' team is comprised of four who returned from last year's team - junior Dakota Goyert (101), senior Joy Baker (106), Olivia Banks (160) and sophomore Anya Haas-Hollenbeck (116).

"Dakota is 5-0 in tournaments against girls and 7-1 against boys," Weitzman said. "She's doing great and kicking butt. Joyce missed almost all of last season with an injury and is having fun on the mat. Anya has shown a lot of improvement over last year and Olivia had a good off-season and is wrestling well. We've got a lot more tournaments for them this year and I'm excited to see them take advantage of it and if things

break right, possibly going to state."

Weitzman has been relying on the leadership of Goyert and Robb. "They all have a lot to learn, and Hunter and Zach have done a good job in leading the kids on things like making weight, how tournaments work, how to warm up and to eat and manage their weight, something many of these kids had never thought about before. The kids that stick with it and put in the work come to love it. It's an enjoyable part of the year for me."



Campolindo co-captains Chase Yang and Natalia Kalas Photos provided

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