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FEATURE STORY

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## **CORONA DEL SOL WRESTLERS LED BY NEW COACH, 3 RETURNING CHAMPS**

PHOENIX, AZ (Dec. 17, 2009) – Wrestlers from defending Class 5A Division I champion Tempe Corona del Sol were sad to see longtime coach Dave Vibber retire after last season, but the Aztecs don't expect to fall flat on the mat in 2009-10.

The team is buoyed by three returning state champions and the infusion of energy brought by new coach Jim Martinez, who won an Olympic bronze medal in 1984 in the Greco-Roman lightweight division.

Martinez has worked at numerous clinics over the years, but has never had responsibility for an entire team.

"We will work hard and continue what Dave (Vibber) started, build this strong tradition," Martinez said. "We are blessed with talent this year and have a chance at another title, but that should be our motivation every year."

Corona del Sol finished 7-1 in dual competition in the recent Warrior Classic at Mesa Westwood High. The Aztecs' only setback came against Tucson Ironwood Ridge, which figures to be a strong contender for the Class 5A Division II title. Corona del Sol also will be participating in the annual holiday tournament at Phoenix Moon Valley on Dec. 18 and 19, which features some of the top teams in the state.

The three top returnees are seniors Ryan Miller, who won the 145-pound individual championship a season ago, Derek Felton, the 160-pound champ, and heavyweight Mike Howard. Miller has moved up one weight level to 152 pounds this year, and Felton is at 171.

"Winning a championship once was pretty cool, so knowing what it takes should motivate our team and us as individuals that much harder," said Felton. "We have a target on our backs, but we expected to be good."

Added Miller: "There's always someone out there trying to work harder than you."

Howard said he benefited from Vibber's expertise and has worked with longtime Valley wrestling guru Mu Chang. He is eager to learn more from Martinez.

"He is very technique-oriented," Howard said. "He knows how to do it. When you learn something, you know what he's showing you works because he has been successful with it at the highest levels, college (University of Minnesota) and the Olympics."

All three wrestlers also are strong in the classroom, with grade-point averages of 3.5 or better on a scale of 4.

Felton has signed a letter of intent to wrestle at Arizona State and plans to major in pre-med, eventually becoming a doctor or dentist. Miller is undecided about his wrestling future, but is leaning toward studying psychology or sociology in college.

Howard hopes to wrestle in college, too, and plans to focus on a career in music. He said he has played the piano for a long time, a mixture of styles, and already has composed music pieces.

Felton, Miller and Howard vow to keep working hard, to keep the program successful and to serve as examples for some of the younger wrestlers. Martinez is excited about that and the numbers involved in the program. He estimates about 50 are involved in all three levels – varsity, junior-varsity and freshman.

“There are so many little things that you can do to improve,” Felton said. “It will help you keep the pressure on your opponents, try to build up those points.”

Miller said Martinez can notice elements some others might not.

“Maybe a slightly different body position and things that help you maintain your balance,” he said.

Martinez has enjoyed working with the team thus far.

“Wrestling has been a big part of my life, and I know that it’s a big part of theirs,” he said. “These guys are dedicated.”

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