

Bulldogs hitting the mat with new coach in '22

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When Cornersville wrestling coach Sam Hubbell departed for Spring Hill High School, the school's administration wanted to keep building on the groundwork laid last season in the restart of the wrestling program.

That's when the administration turned to then-assistant coach Jeff Gross to pick up the torch and carry on the program in the 2022-2023 season.

"I was an assistant coach last year and got to work with four of the guys we have returning this year. It's exciting watching how I went through wrestling and being able to coach and watch other kids excel and progress in the sport," Gross said.

Gross is no stranger to wrestling within Marshall County.

A 2019 graduate of Forrest High School, Gross has been wrestling for the better part of his life and has been pretty successful during his competitive years.

"I've been wrestling since I was four. I won a few state titles throughout different styles of wrestling. I won three state championships at Forrest High School.

They asked me last year if I wanted to step up and help. Coach (Sam) Hubbell went to Spring Hill and they needed a head coach. They asked me and I'm the man for the job," Gross said.

With the program in its infancy in the restart carried over from last year, there are inherent challenges in not just sharpening technique and skill on the mat, but also the logistics of fielding as big



Cornersville wrestling coach Jeff Gross gives instruction to the Bulldogs during a recent practice.

Tribune Photo by Chris Siers

of a team as possible.

While wrestling pits two wrestlers on a mat in a given match, it's very much a team sport with various weight classes tallying points for the overall team score.

The more wrestlers who can fill the 14 weight classes, the better a team score can be.

"Individually, you're on the mat with just one other guy. But the team aspect, there's 14 different weight classes and each match scores points for your team. With last year, we only had four guys and we lost a lot of our matches team wise, but a lot of our individuals stepped up and

started winning a lot more as we progressed through the season," Gross said.

"Having a smaller team, it is difficult, but we'll still go out there and scrap with whoever is on the schedule."

With just a handful of wrestlers hitting the mat for the Bulldogs this season, Gross' vision focuses on hammering conditioning and slowly improving technique as the season progresses.

"We're trying to hit all aspects of it. We have all first and second-year wrestlers. The main focus has been sticking to the basics and drill it hard. Everything we do is a conditioning circuit.

We'll start off and run miles before practice, then we'll get good and stretched out. We'll go into a little bit of technique. We're learning right now. As we learn technique throughout the season, the drilling comes into play," Gross said.

While wrestling remains a smaller sport, the vision is to grow the excitement for a new athletics program in Cornersville.

"Wrestling is new around here. We want to grow it and watch everyone excel. The guys we have now, we still have them for another season because we don't have any seniors," Gross said.

Coupled with a small squad, the logistical challenges with building a new mat center around the fundraising for a competition mat so Cornersville can host more home matches.

"We're still working on getting a mat. We only have a practice mat right now. We're looking to build up money for a new mat and having the community come in and watch wrestling more often," Gross said.

When it's all said and done and the season has come and gone, Gross of course wants to see as many of his wrestlers tally wins for the Bulldogs, but more so wants to see each wrestler who steps on the mat improve from the season's beginning to the end at whichever level of the postseason that may be.

"Just watching the guys progress. If they got better throughout the season, that's a positive note. It's a tough sport. We don't have a lot of kids stick with it. Just watching these kids come in and grind. They want to come in, get better and learn. It's fun to watch," he said.

For prospective athletes looking for a new sport to give a try to, Gross had just one thing to say, "Come out and try it out."

For those interested in helping the fundraising component of the program and helping the Bulldogs secure a new mat, there are a handful of coaches and administrators the public can reach out to.

"They can reach out to athletic director Eric Crabtree, our assistant coach Katie (Vizcan) or me," Gross said.

Hunting trip leaves lifetime memories

Chris Siers

The Extra Point

In the world of sports, occasionally you see one of those rare performances that just create legendary stories.

Wilt Chamberlain scoring 100 points against the New York Knicks in 1962, Vince Young's performance in the 2006 Rose Bowl, Randy Moss catching three passes for 163 yards and three touchdowns—performances that stand the test of time.

Every year, Thanksgiving means family gatherings, turkey dinners and football all day long on Turkey Day.

For my family, it means trekking to West Virginia and putting in another week of deer hunting, hoping to pull the big one off the hill and fill the freezer full of venison.

The area we hunt is an old coal strip that's not been in service for several years.

Going back over the last decade, the hunting has been certainly up and down.

From Hurricane Sandy devastating the deer herd in the state in 2012, to hemorrhagic fever, among other things, it's been a mixed bag of hunting for us.

If we're lucky, one of the group, consisting of myself, my dad, my uncles and grandpa, might be lucky enough to get a moderate sized six or an eight point.

But one thing we've noticed in the past



Sports editor Chris Siers is pictured with his six-point (far right), his dad with his 10-point, uncle Gary with his eight-point and his grandpa's (not pictured) eight-point after a week of hunting in West Virginia last week.

Tribune Photo by Chris Siers

several years is we're seeing more and more deer—and not just more deer in general, but more deer with big racks.

This year alone, we counted upwards of 10 BIG deer.

The hill has been good to me for the past several years. In 2015, I ended a long week (and a five-year drought) with a nice 10-point buck on my last day.

I followed up with a five-point, albeit smaller, in 2019.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I chose not to travel in 2020, but last year, I bagged a beautiful eight-point.

So entering this year, there certainly wasn't pressure on me to take a smaller buck by any stretch, allowing me to be much more selective than in years' past.

Last Monday morning, I got to my stand,

weathering a brutal 18 degree morning and settled in for the week's hunt.

Monday wasn't as eventful for me, but around 11 a.m., I heard a shot ring out from near where my Uncle Gary had his stand set up and I turned on the radio and heard he knocked down a monster eight-point. A few hours later, I heard another shot ring out coming from near where Grandpa was set up and sure enough, he shot a dandy of an eight-point.

Now the pressure was on me and my dad to get ours. The thing about hunting, you've got to be patient and willing to just become one with nature and allow the deer to come to you.

All day Monday, I saw three does and a spike—certainly noth-

ing I was interested in taking on opening day.

Later in the afternoon, a third shot rang out from our hill and sure enough, Dad shot a heck of a 10 point.

With the first day's light fading fast over the rolling West Virginia mountains, I knew I would have to remain patient in order to get mine this year.

Tuesday came and went without much excitement at all. The only deer I saw all day came around 2:30 in the afternoon—two spikes, which again I wasn't going to harvest knowing the number of big bucks still roaming the ridge.

I can't really explain it but Wednesday morning I just had a gut feeling something was going to happen, so I got to my stand around 6:30 a.m. settled into my stand and had not

had my gear situated and been settled for more than 10 minutes when a doe came trotting around my stand and wasn't 10 yard from the steps leading up to my platform. So I settled in and watched her and coming from behind me, I heard another deer rustling through the reeds.

Thinking this was the same pair of does I saw two days prior, I sat my rifle against my window and just happened to glance out and saw a monster rack trudging its way through the weeds down in front of me, following the doe.

Having just enough daylight on the ridge, I quickly gathered my rifle, pulled up and fired a shot.

Immediately, Dad and my uncle came over to help me track him, as the deer took off and bolted over the hill

down into the ravine.

As more and more daylight began to fill my general area, my heart began to sink as there was no sign I actually hit the deer—no blood, no fur, nothing.

Once we found his trail, we were able to follow his path over the hillside and not 20 yards down the hill, my monster six point laid on his side.

Any time the bulk of us can bring a deer off the hill, it's a great season.

But for us to pull four BIG deer in the manner we did, it really made for the best hunting season we've ever had.

We definitely got our fill of venison to fill the freezer, and several new wall ornaments to hang.

Everyone has their own list of things to be thankful for and in a week of reflection of giving thanks for everything in your life, I can truly say I'm blessed to have etched another chapter in our book of stories together.

One of Grandpa's favorite things is camaraderie with friends and family, swapping stories of yesteryear and reminiscing on trips of the past.

Growing up, I would always listen to great hunts or fishing trips Dad, Grandpa and family and friends participated.

After the week we had last week, it's safe to say our 2022 hunting trip is right among the very best of the stories we've been part of.

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