

PRESS RELEASE

April 17, 2014

ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS HONOR COLUMBIA HIGH SCHOOL'S STATE CHAMPION FENCERS

Girls' and Boys' Teams Honored during Freeholder meeting held at SOPAC

(Newark, NJ) – During its Wednesday, April 16, 2014, meeting at the South Orange Performing Arts Center (SOPAC), the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders honored Columbia High School's State Champion girls' and boys' fencing teams. Both teams finished their seasons undefeated, ranked #1 in New Jersey, and named by *The Star-Ledger* as the state's "Teams of the Year". The boys' sabre squad was also acknowledged for winning the squad state championship for the second year in a row. The Board's commendations were presented to representatives of the teams by Freeholder Carol Clark of East Orange, Freeholder Gerald Owens of South Orange, and Freeholder Vice President Patricia Sebold of Livingston.



Members of the State Champion Columbia H. S. Girls' and Boys' Fencing Teams were honored by the Board during its April 16th meeting held at the South Orange Performing Arts Center: (front row, l. to r.) Joelle Santos, Najiyah Latif, Jared Lebron, Jonathan Kirk; and (2nd row, l. to r.) Ravi Cho, Harrison Clark, Max Gould, Noah Kambili and Coach Daryl White. They were joined by (2nd row, r. to l.) Freeholder Vice President Patricia Sebold and Freeholder Carol Clark, and Freeholder Gerald Owens (back row, center). PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

"2014 has been a very good year for fencing at Columbia High School", said Freeholder Clark. "By winning the girls' and boys' team championships, and by both teams finishing their seasons undefeated seasons, ranked #1 in the state, and named the 'Teams of the Year' by *The Star-Ledger*, Columbia has proven yet again that it is the epicenter of fencing excellence in New Jersey." She went on to add, "As I look out at these fencers, I am looking at the definition of 'perfection', and this year you've put an exclamation point at the end of the title, 'Columbia H. S. – The Fencing Capital of New Jersey!'"

"As a South Orange resident, I am so happy to recognize the talent of these outstanding young people", said Freeholder Owens. "I admit I wasn't all that familiar with the sport before moving here, but in light of the amazing

success at Columbia, I've certainly become a fan. Your hard work has really paid off and you have made your families, your school, your towns and the entire county very proud, and especially this freeholder!"

Coach Daryl White spoke of what a fantastic year it was and said, "At the beginning of the year, we challenged the teams to win state championships, and they went out and did exactly what we asked them to do", remarking that it will be very difficult to repeat this year's accomplishments, "because I believe these two teams will go down in Columbia High School history as two of the best ever." "No matter how hard I worked them in practice, they just wanted to be challenged even more, and that's a tribute to them as athletes." White also expressed his appreciation to the parents' organization saying, "There is no other school in this state that has a more supportive parents' organization than ours."

The girls' team won its state championship on February 26th when it defeated Bernards H.S., 14-13, to finish the season undefeated with a perfect record of 13-0. Preceding that match, the team first defeated Voorhees H.S. (16-11), Governor Livingston H.S. (15-12), and then Livingston H.S. (17-10). This year's state championship was the program's second title in the last three years, and its 11th since 1998, which prompted NJ.COM to characterize the team as "a juggernaut" and to opine, "Simply put, no girls fencing program has come close to dominating the sport in the manner which Columbia has. The program is the standard by which any team in the state is measured." The Cougars also won the District 3 Championship on January 26th and the championship of the prestigious Santelli Tournament on January 4th.

The team's accomplishments were recognized by *The Star-Ledger* when it was declared the "2014 Girls Fencing Team of the Year", by its final ranking as the #1 team in New Jersey, and by the naming of Samantha Viqueira to the 1st Team All-State, Blessing Olaode to the 2nd Team All-State and Marissa Viqueira to the 3rd Team All-State.

The team was comprised of: seniors Alexandra Viqueira, Lane Williams, Najiyah Clark, Joelle Santos and Nina Kambili; juniors Blessing Olaode, Celia Accardi and Charlotte Cramer; sophomores Natalie Martinez, Samantha Viqueira, Bridg Lynch and Abigail Merelman; and freshmen Marissa Viqueira and Camille Pham.

The boys' team also won its state championship on February 26th, when it defeated Ridge H.S., 17-10, and like the girls' team, finished its season undefeated as well, 14-0. Leading up to the championship match, the Cougars first defeated Northern Highlands H.S. (19-8), Montclair H.S. (15-12), and then Ramapo H.S. (16-11).

This year's state championship was the second consecutive and fourth in the last five years for the supremely-successful Columbia High School Boys Fencing program, which NJ.com has referred to as both "a storied program and model of sustained excellence", and a "dominant dynasty". It also captured its fifth straight District 3 Championship on January 26th. The team also captured the championship of the prestigious Cetrulo Tournament for the third straight year on January 15th, its fourth title in the last five years; its fifth straight District 3 Championship on January 26th; and at the Squad State Championships on February 22nd, the Sabre Squad captured the state championship.

The team's accomplishments were recognized by *The Star-Ledger* when it was declared the "2014 Boys Fencing Team of the Year", a distinction it also earned in 2013, 2011 and 2010, and by its final ranking as the #1 team in New Jersey. The team was further recognized by the naming of Andrew Doddo, Bryn Hammarberg and Max Gould to the 1st Team All-State.

The team was comprised of the following members: seniors Ethan Hein, Jared Lebron, John Kirk, Basile Antoine, Elijah Leung, Bryn Hammarberg, Max Gould, Ravi Cho, Harrison Clarke and Matt Van Duesen-Gross; juniors Gordon Rutledge, Jake Thomas, Jack Goldberg and Kiichi Sakai; and sophomores Andrew Doddo and Harrison Woods.

The Boys Sabre Squad won its second consecutive title on February 22nd, and was comprised of junior Gordon Rutledge and sophomores Andrew Doddo and Harrison Woods, but they were unable to attend the presentations due to previous commitments at school.

The Columbia H.S. fencers were coached by Head Coaches Daryl White and Ibtihaj Muhammad and Assistant Coaches Sam Varon and Tiffini Austin Ginlock.

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