

# Ross unveils Voggenthaler-Dowell Wrestling Complex

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(Photo: Molly Corfman/The News-Messenger)

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Mike Mezinger qualified to the state wrestling tournament as a Fremont Ross senior in 1985.

Al Voggenthaler picked Mezinger up at his house with a snowmobile and the two dug in to the school so Mezinger could work out in preparation. They didn't do it for the facilities.

"The old wrestling room was under the stage in the gym," Voggenthaler said. "It would flood every year. There was four-and-a-half feet of water in there more than once.

"It was condemned for two years and they practiced in the old metal shop and at the YMCA."

Voggenthaler told the current group of wrestlers at Fremont Ross it has more collective potential than any Little Giants team in the past. It will try to live up to the high praise by training at the Voggenthaler-Dowell Wrestling Complex.

The name was unveiled on the wall Wednesday for a facility paid for by the Fremont Area Foundation. The wrestling room opened in 2005.

“I don’t know of a high school in the state with a better facility,” Voggenthaler said. “We’re proud. It’s very rewarding. I’m pleased to have my name involved in something this special.”



**Al Voggenthaler, center, was honored Wednesday as the name was unveiled for Voggenthaler-Dowell Wrestling Complex at Fremont Ross. Ross coach Mike Mezinger hands Voggenthaler a plaque. (Photo: Molly Corfman/The News-Messenger)**

Voggenthaler was Ross’s head wrestling coach from 1972-1991. Grover Dowell then took the reins until 2003, after a decade at Genoa.

Dowell and Voggenthaler combined for more than 300 dual meet victories, six conference coach of the year honors and 23 state qualifiers, including 10 placers for Ross.

“I had so many great kids come through,” Dowell said.

The Little Giants have only five head coaches since 1953 in Mal Mackey before Voggenthaler and Mike Mezinger and Chad Long after Dowell. Mezinger was an assistant for Voggenthaler and Dowell from 1987 until taking over.



Footage from name unveiling Wednesday of wrestling room at Fremont Ross. Matthew Horn/News-Messenger

Dowell wrestled for Mackey before graduating in 1969. He turned down an opportunity to play football at Ohio State to honor his father as a U.S. Marine in Vietnam.

Voggenthaler and Dowell have different styles and Mezinger took a little from each.

“He was like a father figure to me,” Mezinger said. “There were times I’d be struggling with my weight and he’d take me home with him and make sure my eating habits were on. We had a family thing and he’d take my sister or me out of class to talk.

“To this day, if one of their wrestlers needed something, they’d be right there. I learned from two of the best. We had lots of fun.”



Merrill, who is an assistant at Ross, was a freshman Dowell's first year as head coach. Merrill was head coach at Clyde for a few years.

"I've tried to copy them," he said. "I don't want to just show up for practice and leave. I want to be there for them and try to be more than a coach. You name it, if we needed it, he did it. That's the type of coaches we're trying to be. They made you love it."

Dowell took Merrill on his college visits as a recruit.

"Grover was way more than a coach," Merrill said. "He was like a second dad. He hired me every summer (for a construction job). He didn't just help us become wrestlers, he helped us become men.

"He stayed after or came in extra. Anything we needed he was there for us. That's every wrestler. They were here for Fremont City Schools and the athletes, not themselves."

Their names will always be right there with the Little Giants.

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