



[Video of JoJo's Black Belt Promotion August 23, 2023](#)

DAILY BULLETIN

Upland's Johanna Forman is the Sun/Bulletin girl's wrestler of the year!

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On Left - Upland's Johanna Forman defeats Corona's Mariah Dow to win the 137 LBS. match during the CIF Southern Section girls wrestling championships in Beaumont on Saturday, Feb 22, 2020. (Terry Pierson Photo) On Right - JoJo at 2019 Judo Nationals.

Upland freshman Johanna Forman 'JoJo' was one of the few people who believed she could actually do it. She wasn't seeded first in any of the three CIF postseason tournaments, yet came home as the 137-pound state champion, and by doing so she has earned Sun/Daily Bulletin Girls Wrestler of the Year honors.

"I had a goal in the beginning of the year to become a state champ," Forman said. "Proving people wrong was my biggest thing."

While Forman had not wrestled competitively until this year, she was prepared better than most for her freshman season.

As is the case with many wrestlers, she got her start in martial arts, studying at [Goltz Judo](#) in Claremont since she was 4. She said she was a Junior Olympics Judo Champion twice. She also has some experience in Brazilian JiuJitsu. ([2016 Video Profile of JoJo at Judo](#))

Her sister [Sadie](#), a senior who also wrestles for Upland and finished sixth in the state tournament at 143 pounds and is a black belt in judo, introduced her to the sport. While in middle school, Johanna observed or took part in several Upland practices.

"It was the easiest transition. My older sister – she was my idol," Forman said. "But even if my sister wasn't a wrestler, I still would've wanted to try it out. Watching my sister, I knew it (wrestling) was going to be my thing."

Forman practiced last summer, then entered Freak Show, an annual tournament in Las Vegas that takes place in October before the official high school season begins.

Forman, wrestling in the 130-pound weight class, faced the No. 1 seed in the first round and lost, 10-5. But she battled back and took fifth in the tournament.

"It gave me a lot of confidence going into the season," Forman said.

She said the biggest adjustments from judo to wrestling are the stance, the uniform and that you don't attack the legs in judo. In addition, you are on your feet usually in judo, while much of wrestling is done on your hands and knees.

Carl Argueta, in his first year as Upland's girls wrestling coach after serving the last three years as an assistant, quickly realized he had someone special to coach.

"I think within the first two or three tournaments I knew she would place at state," Argueta said. "She was at that caliber."

Forman entered the CIF postseason with only two losses, yet was seeded behind Corona junior Mariah Dow in the CIF-SS Central regional, largely based on Dow's success in previous years. Forman pinned all of her opponents, including Dow in just 37 seconds in the final. Forman spent just five minutes, 25 seconds on the mat for her five wins.

The next week in the CIF-SS Finals, Forman was seeded fourth, again behind Dow (seeded third). Again, Forman pinned all of her opponents, including No. 1 seed Samantha Snow of Los Alamitos in the semifinals and Dow in the finals. Despite the success, Argueta had concerns. "Throughout she was able to pin people, and very, very fast," he said. "That kind of scared me. I didn't know how it would go against higher-caliber wrestlers."

The CIF State meet, where Forman was seeded fifth, proved to be a better challenge. In the quarterfinals, she faced No. 4 seed Beyonce Garcia of Union City James Logan and the match went to overtime before Forman prevailed 12-7 in the third overtime.

“My cardio was a little off because I did have to maintain my weight,” Forman said. “That was my first overtime match.”

In the semifinals, she drew No. 1 seed Faalia Martinez, a senior from Modesto Central Catholic who took third in the state last year. Forman pinned her in 3:06.

“I wasn’t nervous. I had belief in myself that I could take her out,” Forman said.

In the finals, she faced No. 2 Savannah Gomez of Brawley and trailed 2-0 after a period.

Gomez won the flip at the start of the second period and deferred her choice to the third period, a decision she quickly regretted.

“I chose neutral (starting position) and I went after her. I prefer neutral,” Forman said.

Garcia knows that now. Argueta was confident as the second period began.

“I thought, ‘she’s hungry enough to finish right now,’” he said. “Both me and my brother thought it was going to be a throw into a pin.”

It was. Ten seconds into the second period, Forman was a state champion.

So what’s next for Forman?

She’s not abandoning martial arts. She’s working toward her black belt in judo, which the 14-year-old can’t get until she turns 16 at the earliest.

She’ll have to adjust as her sister and training partner goes to wrestle at NAIA Wayland Baptist University in Texas. And she knows she needs to get better as she goes from being the hunter to the hunted.

“There’s always room for improvement,” Forman said. “My focus is always to get better. And fighting off from bottom (position).”

Argueta believes psychology will be a key component.

“I think the whole underdog thing was our go-to the entire season,” he said. “Now there’s a target on her back. I’m scared of her getting her head too big. I think one of the things that she needs is more experience on the mat. She has her go-tos (moves) that have made her very successful. Now there’s footage to go after and I think she needs to learn to have a backup plan.”

