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## Several Lamorinda Teams Head to Odyssey of the Mind State Tournament

*Submitted by Nicole Reader*



From left: Diego Aguilar, Cameron Berg, Sam Laudy, Isaac Reader-Taatzes and Paul Stephan Photo provided

A team of third-graders from Del Rey Elementary School in Orinda took first place at the San Francisco Bay Region Odyssey of the Mind tournament on Feb. 28. They will advance to compete in the California State Tournament on March 28. Team members are Diego Aguilar, Cameron Berg, Sam Laudy, Isaac Reader-Taatzes, and Paul Stephan. Their coaches are parent Nicole Reader and teacher Marta Wallace.

Three other teams from Orinda will advance to the state tournament: two from Orinda Intermediate School, and one from Glorietta Elementary School, as well as four teams sponsored by Moraga Rotary, and two teams by Lafayette Rotary.

The team of five boys from Del Rey was at a double disadvantage: It was their first year participating in Odyssey of the Mind, and they were at the bottom of their age group, as they competed in Division I, the category for third through fifth

graders. Despite this, they outstripped their closest competitor by nearly 30 points.

According to Lynn Larsen, state director of California Odyssey of the Mind, the program is "a combination of theater and problem solving with a creative twist." Teams of students choose one of five possible problems assigned each year by Odyssey of the Mind, then work together for four months to create a "solution" comprised of a story, costumes, props, scenery, and technical elements. Although the team is guided by an adult coach, everything must be entirely devised and created by the students. At the tournament, the team presents the solution to this "long-term" problem in the form of an eight-minute skit. Another aspect of Odyssey of the Mind is a "spontaneous" problem, solved at the tournament with no prior preparation.

The Del Rey team tackled a long-term problem entitled "Experiencing Technical Difficulties," which required practical engineering skills in addition to creative thinking. According to the Odyssey of the Mind, "the problem is to design, build, and demonstrate various devices that complete specific tasks. The team will create a theme where technical failures must be resolved through completing the tasks. There will be a list of tasks to choose from including ring a bell, change the wording on something, sound an alarm, move an object, etc. There will also be a mysterious engineer character. Of course, there's a twist - all of the devices must be powered by rubber bands!"

As Larsen points out, in Odyssey of the Mind "students with talents in many areas find a unique opportunity to showcase their gifts in script writing, costume creation, music, dance, visual arts, props and scenery construction, engineering, problem solving, leadership, critical thinking, and more."

Whenever the Del Rey team asked coach Nicole Reader if she thought they would win the tournament, she told them two things: First, working hard was more important than winning, and second, it would be highly unusual for a team of third-grade rookies to make it to the state finals. At the award ceremony, blue ribbons around their necks, the team turned to Reader and gleefully reminded her of these words.

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[back](#)

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