

Alirez is All In

Colorado prep ready for next level at No. Colorado

By Bill X. Barron

Andrew Alirez, the nation's No. 1-rated prep wrestler at 152 pounds from Greeley Central in Colorado, does not measure himself by titles or accolades.

"I would like to be remembered as the guy who showed up ready to go to war," Alirez said. "Good things come from heart and desire. Everyone wants to win titles, but not everyone wants to put in the work."

With five wins within the past year over ranked college opponents, including Penn State's Nick Lee (who finished fifth in the 2018 NAAs), as well as a Pan-Am gold freestyle performance, Andrew has always been preparing for the next level.

"I do everything in my power to put myself in a position to win," explains Alirez. "If I don't come out on top, I will gain from the experience. When I used to focus on winning or losing, I wrestled more cautiously; now my focus is on doing all I need to do to get it done."

Before entering middle school, observers were already talking about the possibility of Alirez becoming Colorado's second seven-time state champion for grades 6-12 (others are Broomfield's Phil Downey and potentially Pomona's Theorius Robison this year).

Alirez, Robison, and Ponderosa's Cohlton Schultz all won their fourth prep title last month and are part of Colorado's best high school graduating class in years.

Andrew's journey has certain symmetry. For his first junior high gold in sixth grade, he defeated Jason Hanenberg of Air Academy — one to whom Alirez had previously fallen short — in overtime. As a freshman, to acquire his first secondary school title in 2016, Alirez faced the now sophomore Hanenberg in the finals and earned a 12-5 victory. Currently a freshman starter at Western Colorado University, Hanenberg finished his 2018 senior campaign with his own state championship.

Staying in his home state of Colorado was a relatively easy decision in spite of an all-on college recruiting effort. Having

made an early verbal declaration to attend the University of Northern Colorado, Andrew declared: "Commitments are important to me. My dad (Andrew), my uncle (Mike), my high school coach Eric Penfold, and the Top Notch Wrestling

Although he has sustained just one loss (out of state) in his high school folkstyle career, Alirez is more proficient in freestyle, in which the three-time Fargo placer has aspirations to make the 2020 Olympic Team.

"Freestyle has taught me never to expose my back," he said. "I love wrestling on my feet, gaining a takedown, earning exposure.

Those who know Andrew well, appreciate his unselfish attitude and approachable demeanor.

"It is important for me to always give back," he said. "I enjoy coaching youth; I do what I can to make them the best they can be. It also makes me a better wrestler; in order to coach, I have to break down technique."

Andrew admits his approach to the sport begins with a different mindset than most.

"My attitude is that this dude's going to have to kill me," Alirez said. "In the end, the outcome will be what it will be. To beat me, someone's going to have to ragdoll me. My style is to get physical without getting into a fight. I wrestle with everything I've got."

The literary Boo-Boo is a companion to Yogi Bear, serving as a vocal conscience. The real-life

Andrew 'Boo-Boo' Alirez serves both as a role model and a check on his teammates. For the true Boo-Boo is a humble warrior, whose actions tell us more than his words, a battler who stays within himself, win or lose. While he knows others are watching, he battles more to glean the lessons than to acquire the accolades.

The essence of Andrew is that his desire for constant improvement outweighs any achievement, which is only a trophy that becomes outdated the moment that pinnacle is earned.

For him to succeed at the highest level, Andrew knows he must trust in his absolute training as well as continue to learn more advanced technique, both of which will integrate with his superior conditioning to arrive at a level which is difficult for his opponents to match. ■



Andrew Alirez, who recently won a fourth Colorado state championship for Greeley Central High School, will compete next fall at Northern Colorado.

Club all gave me a good base and the right direction to thrive in college."

Alirez said the UNC coaching staff, led by head coach Troy Nickerson, along with Michael Moreno and Garrett Kiley, has "helped me evolve my style, making me a completely different wrestler, teaching me how to hand-fight, to create angles. I learned to rely less on speed, more on fakes to take me to the next level. Coach Ben Cherrington has helped me tremendously; he's the best hand-fighter I have ever seen."

RMN Events will always be special to Alirez in his growth process: "All the dreams have now come to fruition. RMN helped me aim to succeed at a higher level. As things fell into place in middle school, I began to prepare for high school and beyond. It's all synergy."

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