

# 'JAZZ'

## Continues to set the tone for girls wrestling in Colorado

By Bill X Barron

While women's wrestling is now more widely accepted, Jaslynn (Jazz) Gallegos of Brighton (Colo.) Youth Wrestling remembers when she began as a five-year-old in 2006, when she was embraced by her teammates and coaches but was not immediately accepted by those outside the team.

"Some refs made calls on the other wrestlers' behalf, not counting a takedown or not counting back points," she recalled. "Parents would tell their kid, 'it's just a girl,' and some would not even let their kid wrestle me."

"At practice, Jazz took to wrestling like a fish to water," said her father and coach Orlando. "She was impressive from the start, placing right away in the league tournaments."

She was the first girl to place at coed Middle School State, become the first Colorado girls state champion, and later a USAW girls folkstyle national champ, Jazz has been the No. 1-rated 106-pounder in the Future Women's Olympian rankings.

Now age 17, Jazz is a three-time All-American in three national events: in freestyle at Fargo, the UWW Body Bar Nationals and the USAW Championships.

Along with three straight Freak Show championships (two times the Outstanding Wrestler), Gallegos won the Most Pins award at Fargo (20 pins overall) three times, in addition to OW awards at RMN Nationals and War of the Roses.

Now a varsity senior starting on the Skyview High School team, Jaslynn has yet to select a college where she will compete as well as study criminal justice and forensics.

Beginning wrestling after watching her older brother in practice, Jazz credits her father, Brighton Club coach Eric Heinz, Skyview High coach Delfino Rodriguez, and youth coach Pat Ornelas for her success.

"My dad is there for me at every match, whether in the coaches' corner or the stands," she said. "Coach Heinz still coaches me, which is great because he is like another dad. Coach Rodriguez ('Fienz') pushes me to be a better person on and off the mat."

Both dad and daughter attribute their participation in RMN Events as crucial to Jaslynn's rapid rise to the top.

"I enjoy competing in RMN tournaments not only because



Jaslynn Gallegos became the first girl to win a Colorado coed Middle School and later a girls state championship.

there are a lot of competitors, but also because I get a lot of good challenges," said Jazz.

"Jazz always competed with the boys at every national tournament we attended," Orlando said. "She had never competed in a girls only tournament until Rocky Mountain National Events offered it. She would actually be nicer to the girl wrestlers so as to not discourage them. Other girls tournaments had low attendance, so it wasn't worth the travel time.

"Thankfully, Rocky Mountain Nationals continued to offer girl divisions at several of their tournaments. The fact that we could double-bracket in both the girls and boys divisions made it perfect to get plenty of mat time."

For Jazz, "wrestling has contributed to my success in the classroom because it taught me how to focus and work hard. This sport (and my parents) have made me who I am — it has helped become strong, mindful, and independent. If you ever feel that everything you do may not be enough, use that insight to work harder. If you can wrestle, you can do just about anything.

"Wrestling has always been part of my life; I really can't remember a point in my life that I was not part of the sport. Now I coach at youth tournaments whenever I can. I love watching the kids grow up and get better. Everyone who has been part of wrestling with me is family."

A special young person who competes with determined excellence, Jaslynn is also in touch with her heart.

"I know wrestling has taught me to push through tough times," she said. "But it has also taught me to be kind to others who are struggling because I have been there, too. I can honestly say wrestling has shown me how to be a decent person, whether I am on top of the world or the bottom." ■

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