

Cubias found wrestling home in California

By Bill X. Barron

In the life of any young person, there lives a life wrestling to be born. Then there are those who are born to wrestle.

For 17-year-old Juliana Cubias of Laguna Niguel, Calif., wrestling has become the metaphor through which her life — literally without a place to call home — has found its calling.

Finding herself with a family she had never known she had — two caring parents and three younger siblings — while at the same time having to separate from her mother's self-imposed circumstances, Juliana describes her perspective in 2014-15 as "lost" while everyone around her was involved in something meaningful.

"In many ways, Juliana has always been part of the family," said her aunt Noemi Marsh, now legal guardian along with her husband Nick. "When her mother, my sister Norma, was in rehab for drug-related issues, 'J' first lived with us from age 3 to 5, where she bonded with my son Luke.

"She called me 'Nina,' Spanish for godmother. With my sister in and out of treatment, at times both lived with us or with our mother in California. By seventh grade, Juliana had been in eleven different schools.

"When, at age 12, we learned she and Norma were homeless on the streets, we made the decision to move from Illinois. Her mom essentially disappeared, so we eventually decided to assume legal guardianship. That's when I insisted Juliana had to join a sport or school activity."

As her adopted father Nick relates, "The beginning was a learning process for her and us, as we had to earn her trust. In her very first year of wrestling (and high school), she not only did well, but also developed a love for the sport, engulfing everything she now is."

Since changing schools her sophomore year to compete for Aliso Niguel High School, where her uncle Eric Marsh coaches, Juliana has finished second and fifth at Sectionals, has twice qualified for the California Girls State Championship and has been named OCWCA League Wrestler of the Year two times.

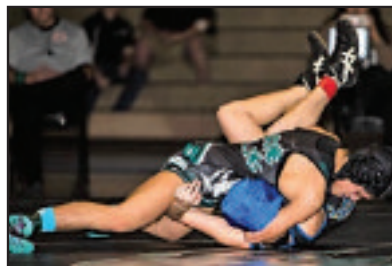
"I needed an outlet," Juliana declared. "My freshman year, being around other girls interested in wrestling, we experienced everything together, all as one team. They were welcoming, loving. I felt at home. I have never felt anything as tough as wrestling, and I know it has shaped me into the person I am today."

Now the returning varsity captain, Juliana became Aliso Niguel High School's first wrestler — male or female — to ever place at state when she garnered an eighth-place medal in the girls' championship.

"Wrestling has become her identity,"

Nick said. "It has totally encompassed every aspect of her life, turning her into a strong, dedicated, determined, Jesus- and family-loving wrestler."

Juliana now experiences the security, missing for much of her 17 years, which comes from both putting her trust in others and, more importantly, learning to trust and believe in herself.



Juliana Cubias (above and below center) found a wrestling home at Aliso Niguel High School in California and an adopted family from Noemi, Luke, Aiyana, Lenora and Luke Marsh.



Wrestling for Juliana has become family. It has helped her learn to allow others into her life, knowing both at home and on the team that these people — unlike her mother — would never again leave her alone.

"Wrestling is all about trust," Juliana said. "It's putting other troubles aside, trusting the move that the coach asks you to do is right, trusting others to be in my corner to push me to my limit, knowing my teammates are there win or lose and valuing family who are there in the stands cheering me on regardless of the result."

Jesse Jaime, Juliana's freshman high school coach, knew that "wrestling is the toughest sport physically, mentally, and emotionally," characterizes Noemi. "He told her that there would be no try-outs; if you can hang, you can stay. J responded to the challenge.

"Right away, I could see her focus become clear. I saw the potential — and the fire — that I knew was there all along." Juliana now holds in her hands a long-term prospective outlook on a life she has yet to know.

"I look forward to this senior season; together with six other seniors, we will push through everything together. We will take long bus rides, screaming out all the song lyrics. After high school, I am excited to see what college I get into, and after competing in college, I will return to coach Aliso Niguel."

As one family, Noemi, Nick and Juliana experienced RMN Events for the first time at the 2019 Freak Show.

"Just amazing, such caliber of girl wrestlers, with all their families there to support them," proclaimed Noemi.

"Everyone there was all in; the Freak Show flowed so well. We saw how much the level of competition pushed Juliana to do her best. We saw her renewed determination, with a new mindset to mentally prepare for the next match."

Trust in oneself also meant, for Juliana, that she not only had to value letting herself go, but also to give herself permission to go 100 percent.

"I did not know 100 percent until the Freak Show," she said. "I won my first match, then had to battle back through the consolation bracket, a total of 12 matches in two days.

"Even though I was exhausted, it was the most fun I have had in a tournament because I had to fight to the end. My body was so tired, I just wanted to go home. But in the end, I had no regrets. I fought my best. Even when I lost by points, it was after three full periods. I never gave up."

If you hold back, there is always the excuse that you didn't try your hardest. Perhaps Juliana's most important lesson, applicable on and off the mat, was that she learned she could trust herself to give her all, then just as importantly to believe enough in her innate resilience to own the final result.

Juliana feels she "could not have done this by myself. My coaches, especially Richie Trevino at Aliso Niguel, get me through everything. Coach Trevino said it was the best day of his life when I transferred there my sophomore year!

"Inside the wrestling room, it's all about wrestling. Richie always encourages me to do my best. He helps me fix my mistakes; he knows my moves better than I know them!" Coach T also understands there's a place for balance: "he reminds me to have fun outside the room."

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JOHN KLESSINGER, From page 14

morning, late at night, when you are tired, not feeling your best, and everything in between on a consistent day to day basis. It is not going to practice from 3:00 – 5:00 PM during the months from August to October. Those are the expectations for any team. It is not working hard.

Fairness, Equality, Excuses, and Blaming Others

Sometimes, it will not seem fair that “Joe” has so much success with half the effort of yours. You need to get over the fact that Joe is kind of lazy and you work your tail off and still struggle. It sucks, but that’s the way it goes. My advice to you is to work hard anyway. Regardless of others, you keep working hard, and from

that, you will learn much more than Joe ever will. In the long run, your effort will pay big dividends and offer more significant opportunities. In the article, “7 Qualities of a Good Employee and Candidate” on the website www.jibe.com, it lists a strong work ethic as the No. 1 employee trait that employers look for when hiring new people.

We are not all equal when it comes to athletic talent and gifts. Some kids are just better at lacrosse, football, or wrestling. Likewise, some kids are better at math or science. It hurts emotionally and is a blow to your ego, but that is just the way it is. Stop comparing yourself to others and focus on your improvement, talents, and strengths. You have unique

skills and abilities. It may not be in tennis or basketball although you love playing it. Newsflash! It is not a coach’s or parent’s fault if you are not succeeding. It may not be even your fault. Sometimes, you will work your tail off and fail. We cannot all be Steph Curry, Paul Rabil, or Renaldo.

They are who they are because they have the athletic talent the majority of us will never have. I am sure all three work extremely hard, but they have been blessed with extraordinary abilities.

If you do not maximize your potential, it is your fault. If you choose not to do the work, blame others, and make excuses, it is your fault. Here’s the deal, you are in control of two things: your effort and your attitude. No coach has control

over those things. Only you. Stop blaming others, complaining and making excuses. You will not always like your coach, boss, or teammates. However, it is not their fault why or why not you are successful. It is you and you alone who controls that.

Decide now to take full responsibility for yourself. If you aren’t where you want to be, fix it! Get off of the “Blame” train and take ownership of yourself. When you do that, things will change, and they will change for the better!

(John Klessinger is a teacher and wrestling coach at South River High School in Maryland. He is the author of the ebook “Strong Mind Strong Body.” You can follow him on Instagram @coachkless and like his Facebook page, “Coach Kless.”) ■

JULIANA CUBIAS, From page 30

In a life in need of balance, Juliana has learned to accept and value having parents who are always there for her. Now, instead of pushing away help, she welcomes their partnership.

“I would not be in wrestling if it were not for them,” she said. “My parents believe in me. Even when I lose, they pick me up.”

Wrestling has opened Juliana, breaking through street-reinforced walls of isolation, enabling her to “openly express her fears and doubts, as well as overcome moments where she would freeze up,” espoused Noemi.

“She needed to know people would not give up on her before she could learn not to give up on herself. Wrestling’s such an awesome sport! I didn’t realize how much she would come to love it!”

Juliana has transformed her personality from “lost,

frustrated, and withdrawn” to “happy, focused, and excited.” Through it all, Juliana now knows she “can do it” on the mat and with her life.”

Nick and Noemi credit their faith in God for helping all of them “find a path and a purpose. Through God’s passion, we have managed to stay together as one family. He has grounded us with a sense of purpose. We live knowing God has gotten us there.”

Likewise, wrestling has embraced Juliana, helping her to “gain faith in herself and trust in others.” Noemi knows these trials have shaped Juliana’s character.

“We tried to help her mother win back custody through rehabilitation but eventually we had to decide what was best for J,” reflects Noemi. “Through change, transition, and adaptation, she has struggled with trust.

“Because of wrestling, she has gone from not wanting

to do anything on her own to becoming a go-getter who is completely independent, totally in charge of her life.”

Perhaps because she grew up with a tenuous hold on life, never knowing what might come next, or when Norma might next be in rehab or just absent, Juliana learned to live in the moment.

Presciently, Juliana sees that as her mother’s unknowing gift to her. “Experiencing what my mom has gone through, I am thankful because I know better what choices to make with my own life.”

“Most of all, wrestling has helped Juliana overcome emotional and physical hardships that could have destroyed her,” concluded Nick. “It has truly taught her the value of who and what she is. She now knows that through hard work and determination, anything can be overcome.” ■

NICK PASSOLANO, From page 23

“I went with my teammates to the funeral,” said Passolano. “We buried my mom on my birthday (Nov. 27) and I went back to school. With the coaches, my teammates and sports psychologist Marty Martinez, I had an incredible support system. After my mom passed, my perspective in life changed. Winning a national championship wasn’t the most important thing.”

In the winter of 2003, Iowa came to the Hilton Coliseum looking to extend their 31-match win streak over the Cyclones. Down 13-3, the Cyclones rallied winning the last five matches. In the final bout, Passolano electrified the crowd pinning Cole Pape in 31 seconds to make it 21-13.

Bono dubbed him, ‘Hawk Slayer,’ it was the first of many game-changing wins Passolano posted during his career which made him a favorite among Cyclone faithful, especially when he helped ISU win 19-16 in 2004-05.

But he failed to step on the All-American stand while wrestling in four NCAA tournaments. The closest he came was in 2004, when he fell in the Round of 12.

“Nick was one of best ever not to place,” said Bono. “He had a ton of respect from his coaches and teammates. Nick fought back through some very tough injuries, but nothing would derail him. He was always a very selfless guy. I wish I had 10,000 of him on the

team. His brothers [Dominick, Tony and sister Nicole] were tough and his parents raised a great group of kids.”

When the stakes were highest, Passolano had a patent of producing despite rehabbing through six knee surgeries during his five years in Ames.

Douglas would ask, ‘Can you go?’ And he responded.

“Because of injuries, Nick never reached his full potential,” Douglas said. “But he was a key factor in the character of our team with the effort he put forth.

“Nick had a spirit, will and want about him that was very unique. I never had a wrestler work harder. He didn’t have the tools that

others had, but he earned everything he got. He was limited in his movement, but he developed quickness.”

Former Iowa State star and Wisconsin assistant coach Jon Reader, a three-time All-American and national champion in 2011 at 174, found the quintessential mentor in Passolano.

“I didn’t understand what it took to get to top,” said Reader. “He said, ‘This is how you cut weight, this is how you do this with everything.’ My senior year, he always checked in and I drew a lot of energy from that. He called me a half-hour before the NCAA finals. He was the first guy I thanked after I won the national championship.” ■

IRONMAN COWBOY, From page 21

Lawrence uses his journeys as a platform to aid non-profits. The focus for the 50 was the Jamie Oliver Foundation, raising awareness of the childhood obesity epidemic and encouraging healthy eating habits and developing cooking skills for children and families.

In September, he will attempt to swim across Utah Lake, bike 615 miles from Utah Lake to Lake Tahoe and run the Tahoe 200 (actually 205 miles) in one week. He’ll be supporting the Pheel Good Foundation, a non-profit organization founded in memory of Phil Brown.

Brown was inspired by Lawrence’s accomplishments, but Brown’s life was cut tragically short when he was hit while riding his motorcycle to work in March 2017. The PHEEL GOOD Foundation allows others the opportunity to enjoy those adventures, by providing quality events that bring communities together to enjoy and participate in activities that make them “pheel” good — physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

In what he called “an amazing journey since the 50,” Lawrence noted that despite no advertising, he’s traveled to 41 countries in three years and made 85 appearances a year.

Now Lawrence has set his sights on breaking two more world records in 2021. The first: posting the fastest ironman through six continents.

And the second? “They’ll be an undisclosed world record set that will defy logic,” he declared.

“I know there’ll be a day when I don’t go as extreme, but I think it’s important that everybody gets uncomfortable intentionally at least once a year, because as humans that’s where we see growth.

“It gives you confidence in all areas of your life,” he explained. “You see growth in struggle and adversity when you’re trapped inside your head and have to have real conversation within yourself.

“Ultimately,” said this former wrestler, “it’s when you start believing in yourself and stop getting in your own way.”

(Sandy Stevens is a long-time public address announcer of national and international events and was named to the National Hall of Fame in 1998.) ■