

# Fighting Grin

**Maggini used Jiu-Jitsu background to help her excel in wrestling**

By Bill X. Barron

*“My teammates and opponents accept me as a wrestler, not as a girl. After practice or a match, we’re just really good friends.”*  
— Kaiya Maggini

This 13-year-old ‘all-everything-that’s-active’ girl from Penryn in northern California loves to compete, but embraces the camaraderie that comes before, during and after every athletic contest.

“To me, a person of character treats people with respect, helps others and is focused on others before thinking of themselves,” she said.

The first thing one notices when meeting Kaiya is her engaging smile stretching from one blond braid to the other. Not at all embarrassed to wear braces, one can sense Kaiya is quite comfortable with the person she is and is becoming.

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu fulfilled Kaiya’s first competitive instincts and the martial art prepared her to be a wrestler.

“Both require balanced attacks where you adjust in order not to get rolled,” she said, “Jiu-Jitsu and wrestling are all about the hips and knowing how to use that pressure to your advantage.”

Winning Rocky Mountain National titles began at the October 2020 Freak Show in Idaho. Kaiya followed this feat with championship performances at Who’s Bad, Rumble in Arizona and Terminator. Through accomplishing these milestones, she also brought home the Triple Crown and Golden Gear awards.

A six-year veteran competitor in Jiu-Jitsu, with just over two years in as a wrestler, Kaiya concluded the 2020-21 campaign by earning the 12U girls 80-pound crown at the RMN National Championships. Acquiring her fifth RMN title in a single event season earned her the World Championship Belt.

Recently, Kaiya brought home first place in 14U at the 2022 USA Wrestling Girls CA Folkstyle State, then in March won the USA Wrestling Girls Folkstyle Nationals in Colorado Springs.

Kaiya appreciates RMN Events for “holding exciting national events near where we live, with really tough competition and a really cool opening ceremony.” (If you hang out with Kaiya long enough, you’ll hear “really” at least a few times!)

As tough as she is, Kaiya at first rebuffed the invita-



Kaiya Maggini shows off her RMN Triple Crown Award for 2020-21.

tion to wrestle. However, it took just one practice to convince her — and her all-boy team — that she belonged in the wrestling room. Her dad Gabriel attests “the boys are not easy on her, but she has earned their respect by working hard.”

Adhering to the philosophy of the USA Gold Team (Calif.), Gabe willingly “hands Kaiya over to her high-level coaches. It’s key to separate the roles. That way there are no conflicts, confusion or mixed messages. My job as dad is to support her, to console or congratulate Kaiya, win or lose.”

Maintaining lofty ambitions, she strives to follow her role model Helen Maroulis and compete on the USA Olympic Team. But, her first goal is to capture four California high school state titles.

“Helen is quick and fast, with great technique,” Kaiya said. “It will take mental and physical toughness, determination and focus to get there.”

Kaiya welcomes that opportunity and the challenge it presents.

When not rolling on a wrestling mat, Kaiya is competing in Jiu-Jitsu or dirt biking in the hills, playing softball, hunting deer, dribbling a basketball or deep-sea fishing and catching an 18-pound salmon.

“While out in the woods, I love waiting for a coyote to cross my path, especially when it’s colder,” she said.

Kaiya appreciates her “peers for shaping my wrestling experience. They and my siblings are always rooting for my teammates and me. They push me hard, but truly they inspire me because of how kind and supportive they are.”

Kaiya’s dad, Gabe, works in law enforcement and offers this perspective.

“If you familiarize yourself with demanding situations, you grow more confident in facing challenges when the time comes to respond,” Gabe said.

“People who have not had the experience of a sport like wrestling go into ‘vapor lock.’ Wrestling builds invaluable life skills.”

Kaiya adds that she “enjoys the fact that in wrestling, you are one versus one. There is no one there to hold your hand. It gets you in shape, gets you focused, pushes you to the limits, and prepares you mentally and physically. As a result, it’s evident when an athlete has really worked hard and prepared for the moment.”

When you come to know the fireball known as Kaiya, you recognize that no matter the style or the situation, no moment is too big for this ascendant young grappler. ■