

Gallup wrestling club promotes strength through mentorship

Written by By Rick Abasta For the Sun
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MIYAMURA PATRIOT WRESTLING HALL OF HONOR											
STATE CHAMPIONS	JASPER DINE TOLAN 2015	STANBROUCH 2016									
STATE PLACES	BRANDON GARNENEZ 2ND AT 101 LBS 2010	BRANDON GARNENEZ 3RD AT 101 LBS 2010	TOSHO WERBERA 4TH AT 101 LBS 2013	TAK CANIKKI 6TH AT 101 LBS 2013	BRANDON GIBBY 3RD AT 101 LBS 2013	TOSHO WERBERA 2ND AT 101 LBS 2014					
	JOSHUA 5TH AT 121 LBS 2014	A.J. STANBROUCH 2ND AT 145 LBS 2014	BRANDON GIBBY 3RD AT 220 LBS 2014	TOSHO WERBERA 2ND AT 101 LBS 2015	BRANDON GIBBY 4TH AT 145 LBS 2015	BRANDON GIBBY 2ND AT 101 LBS 2015					
	MAX AGUIRO 6TH AT 150 LBS 2015	AARON BALCONADO 2ND AT 58 LBS 2017	JOSHUA ADRIELY 4TH AT 295 LBS 2017	GARE DUCKETT 6TH AT 170 LBS 2017	GRACE GARNERED 5TH AT 101 LBS 2017	GRACE GARNERED 5TH AT 101 LBS 2017					



On Dec. 19, the Stars and Stripes Wrestling Club Gladiators met for weekly practice in the Miyamura High School wrestling room.

Parents and volunteers watched over the junior wrestlers, who range from ages five to 14, while guest coach Nate Sellers ran the group through drills.

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Activities ranged from speed calisthenics to mat exercises to one-on-one wrestling drills.

SSWC is a non-profit organization that formed in 2014 to teach area youth the fundamentals of wrestling while promoting physical fitness, self-discipline and the pillars of responsibility, sportsmanship, academics and community pride.

Paul Gutierrez is the board vice president for the non-profit, and believes SSWC has compensated for what was previously a neglected area in Gallup.

“There was a definite need [for a wrestling program]. This is a program that Gallup was lacking for the past few years, an organized youth wrestling program,” Gutierrez said.

He said a wrestling program for Gallup was needed in order to compete with wrestlers from Albuquerque or Farmington, which have programs that begin teaching kids at the age of five.

The Gladiators compete in New Mexico Junior Wrestling, Inc. They often face fierce competition at junior level tournaments in the Albuquerque area.

“When one of our wrestlers gets to high school, they basically have to play catch up. Other kids are starting at five or six years old and they have years of experience,” Gutierrez said.

Another board member believes the club is laying the foundation for state champion wrestlers of the future.

George Martinez, board president, said the club has produced three back-to-back champions that brought home titles in 2015 and 2016.

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Dominic Gutierrez, Elias Martinez and Rhys Sellers are state champions for the Gladiators and their competitive edge is evident throughout the practice session.

The next match for the Gladiators is scheduled for Jan. 6-7, 2018 in Moriarty.

“The Moriarty tournament is one of our qualifiers that the kids have to wrestle in order to compete in the state tournament in February,” Martinez said.

He said the Gladiator roster currently has 30 kids, including six girls on the team.

“Girls wrestling in New Mexico has grown. The state is now hosting a girls only tournament, which is a first,” he said.

This year’s state wrestling tournament will feature the inaugural all girls state classification. Female competitors will also have the option to wrestle in the boys classification.

BEYOND STRENGTH TRAINING

Wrestlers from the surrounding area are also Gladiators, a point of pride for the club. Participants include athletes from Zuni, Ramah and Window Rock.

For \$40 per month, students are coached in the finer points of wrestling and the personal commitment and sacrifice required for victory. They also receive a t-shirt, pullover and singlet for competition.

“In off-season, we brought out AJ Starkovich, the Miyamura High School state wrestling champion. It was an opportunity for him to teach a class to our kids,” Gutierrez said. “He’s a collegiate athlete wrestling at the Division I level.”

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Other potential mentors have been brought in to inspire the kids.

Chris Pendleton, the assistant coach for the ASU wrestling team, was also invited to speak to the kids and share tips about wrestling. On Dec. 13, a special agent from the New Mexico State Police spoke to the kids about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

“Special Agent Long gave a very good PowerPoint presentation about the consequences of getting caught up with alcohol and drugs at an early age and we thank him for the information,” Gutierrez said.

Giving back to the community is another pillar of the SSWC.

Board member Natasha Sellers said the wrestling club encourages the kids to give back to the community.

“The community of Gallup helped us get this program started, so we’re real big about giving back to our community,” she said.

She said the toy drive last Christmas gave the wrestlers firsthand experience with providing toys for the less fortunate. The toy distribution took place at the community center.

“Respect and nutrition is a big part of what we’re trying to teach these kids,” Martinez said. “We’re teaching them how to exercise, self-discipline. School work is their number one priority.”

The SSWC practices on Tuesday and Thursday at the Miyamura High School wrestling room, beginning at 6:15 p.m.

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For more information, visit www.sswcgladiators.com .

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