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Using four on the floor

Arrupe Jesuit's team lacking in numbers, but not confidence

By Scott Stocker, Rocky Mountain News
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It is a strong possibility the wrestling team at Arrupe Jesuit High School in Denver could be the smallest in state history to be ranked in the top 10.

Arrupe Jesuit, coached by Clyde Gallegos, has only four wrestlers - yes, four - on the team. The four Generals are good enough, though, to be ranked No. 7 in Class 2A by *On The Mat*, a wrestling publication. The hopes also are high for a top-five team finish at the state tournament in February.

After all, the Generals finished 12th at state last season, with three sophomores earning medals.

Lance Gallegos, son of the coach, was the runner-up at 130 pounds, Richard Apodaca was third at 112 and Jonathan Candelaria placed sixth at 119. All three again are ranked in their respective weight classes, with Apodaca and Gallegos holding down the No. 1 spots at 125 and 135 pounds, respectively. Candelaria is ranked No. 5 at 119.

The fourth wrestler, sophomore Joseph Trujillo, is unranked at 152 and has not won this season, but Gallegos believes he is gaining the ability to score when it comes to the big meets.

"Joseph is only in his second year of wrestling," Gallegos said. "He came to the team last year weighing about 180 pounds and did not know anything, really, about the sport. He won a few matches last season, is really coming along, and just being around the others is making him better." Arrupe Jesuit is a third-year, private parochial college prep school with an enrollment of 195 and does not have a senior class. It is housed in the old Holy Family High School building in northwest Denver, and its concept is as unique as its wrestling team.

Because of the small roster, the team participates only in tournaments. The Generals will wrestle at the Denver South Invitational on Saturday before competing in the prestigious Top of the Rockies at Centaurus and then the Lincoln Invitational. Although the school participates at the 2A level, the majority of its competition comes against top-flight programs.

Arrupe Jesuit finished 36th of 56 teams at the University of Northern Colorado (all-classifications) Tournament yet was the highest-finishing 2A team in the field. Apodaca was runner-up at 125, losing to Centauri's Rory Keys, who is ranked No. 1 in 3A at their weight.

"Because of our numbers and the kids' experience, we can do well in tournaments," coach Gallegos said. "We will have more kids coming to the team over the next few years from the middle school, but right now, these are the boys we count on."

Apodaca (9-2) has lost only to three-time state champion Henry Cejudo of 5A Coronado and Keys. Gallegos (9-1) lost to Roosevelt's 3A champion, Quinten Fuentes, and Candelaria (2-2) lost to

Wyoming state place-winner Garrett Brinkman of Laramie and Justin Gonzales of Northridge, ranked No. 4 in 4A.

Apodaca also is ranked No. 21 nationally by *Wrestling USA* magazine. He went 32-1 last season and dreams of having an opportunity to wrestle at the Division I level in college and, perhaps, in the Olympics.

"Richard only lost once last year but had to settle for third," said Gallegos, who also coaches the Denver All-Star Wrestling club team. "He's hungry, too. It's made him all the more hungry to do well this time."

Lance Gallegos relishes being part of a small contingent.

"I think being on a small team is not so bad, as we get a lot more attention from the coaches and everything," Gallegos said. "Being ranked seventh is

pretty good with only our four guys. We could have done better at state, and there is always room for improvement. I'm feeling good about my season, getting better as it goes on."

The school is modeled after the Crystal Ray School in Chicago. Every student works one day a week at various businesses around the metro areas and attends school four days a week.



Evan Semon © News

Members of the Arrupe Jesuit Class 2A wrestling team, from left: Jonathan Candelaria, Lance Gallegos, Joseph Trujillo and Richard Apodaca. Although Arrupe Jesuit is only a third-year school, the Generals quickly have established themselves as a top-flight wrestling program.

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To meet the number of state-required school days, school does not adjourn for summer vacation until late June.

"The students get paid at their respective jobs, and the money they receive covers about 71 percent of their tuition," Arrupe Jesuit athletic director Mike Lovinguth said. "The rest is paid by their families or from scholarships based on need. We schedule our activities around their work. If a conflict happens, work comes first, then school, then athletics and activities.

"The students work in four boy/girl teams at entry-level positions with professional companies," Lovinguth said. "Right now, the teams are mainly composed of two freshmen, a sophomore and a junior."

There is little doubt the lifestyle is very demanding.

"The expectations are very high," said Candelaria, who works at the Holland & Hart law firm in downtown Denver and has been wrestling since he was 8 years old. "We have two hours of homework every night, and that's after wrestling practice. It is more difficult than public school, because of the expectations. Then our jobs also take a lot of time."

Said Apodaca, who works at the University of Denver: "It's hard sometimes to balance school, our work and wrestling, but it's cool working at the college. But if you do it right, you can be at your best.

"We don't have a lot of time to ourselves, but still time to do things we want. Being a leader and getting good grades is an accomplishment. You want to be at the top of your class and show hard work pays off."

Lance Gallegos works at Johnson & Wales University in the Career Development Department, as well as with the Colorado Business Bank and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Colorado. Trujillo works for Regis University.

As uncommon as the tiny team and school curriculum are, Arrupe Jesuit also stands out for another reason: its "wrestling room."

After additions to the school left the team without a training room, "We were told to try and find a place where we could practice," assistant coach Jesus Apodaca said. "We couldn't."

Arrupe Jesuit then purchased a house across the street that it planned to use for office space. Instead, it turned it over to the wrestling team.

The original living room has become the wrestling room. The coaches and wrestlers, along with help from their parents and other students, tore down the inside walls, painted and laid new floor and mats.

"They did the makeover in two weeks," coach Apodaca said. "And we were able to get weights donated to us from Regis High School. As younger kids come into the program, they will see what these boys have done. They have a lot to be proud of besides their wrestling efforts."

"It's a luxury when you think about it," Gallegos said. "We have the time to commit to the boys, and because of this, we are all very close as a team. The kids always try to outdo the other, and that makes for some great competition between them just in the practice room."

The camaraderie, no doubt, has helped the Generals succeed in all areas.

"At Arrupe, the goal is to be the highest academically in the state," Gallegos said. "Our academic requirements are higher than those of (the Colorado High School Activities Association), much more stringent.

"In wrestling, the goal is to be as high as we can, too. This year, we believe this is a top-five team at state."

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