

Grizzly wrestlers on mission to outwork opponents

■ PATRICK SHELBY
Managing Editor

SUNNYSIDE — The phrase, “He’s on a Mission” is used by the Grizzly boys wrestling program to describe an athlete’s willingness to embark on their disciplined training in a professional manner which sets them apart as an elite competitor.

By selflessly outworking opponents in every phase of preparation, inspiring a distinguished legacy for individual and team achievement.

“As a team collectively, I

think part of what separates us is the guys’ willingness to put in really tough work. To actually put in the work. But that’s not just a few individuals. That’s mostly the entire team. It’s the culture,” SHS Boys Varsity Wrestling Head Coach Jason Moyer explained.

Over the past 12 years as an assistant coach alongside Hall of Fame Coach George Paulus, Moyer said there’s a strong correlation in his mind of what it takes to be a state champion and the long-standing tradition of putting forth the necessary training



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Shadow boxing is one more method Villanueva uses to get his heart pumping during his routine workouts.

Individual conditioning and strength training

SHS senior Austin Villanueva brought home a third place medal during last season’s Mat Classic XXXII at the Tacoma Dome. The disappointment of his individual achievement was difficult for him to accept, he said.

The team’s second place state finish under Coach Paulus’ final season inspired him to examine his individual commitment and desire in becoming a state champion.

He recalled how he didn’t put in enough time and was hanging out too much with friends. The former 138-pound weight class wrestler believed that was the deciding factor between him winning the gold or having to settle for the bronze medal.

After returning home on Feb. 23, Villanueva began the process of rededicating himself to the sport he has embraced since the age of five. When the quarantine struck home in March, the popular wrestler hit back strong.

“I haven’t stopped working out since the quarantine hit. I feel ready to wrestle in the state championships right now,” the soon to be 18-year-old confidently stated the day after Thanksgiving.

Villanueva began an eight-month weightlifting regimen and was focused on getting stronger. He stopped lifting in November and has been immersed in building up his cardiovascular fitness.

“While everybody is hanging out with their

friends and having a good time, I’m working out. I’m training. It gives me that mental edge to know I put in more time than the other guys did. So, there’s no reason they should beat me,” he expressed.

His Monday through Saturday, cross-training home routine takes about two to three hours, consisting of sprints up and down the driveway, lunges, squats, pushups, and pull-ups on the backyard tree.

Once Villanueva is warmed up, the aspiring mixed martial arts athlete pounds the punching bag while practicing his boxing combinations and Muay Thai leg kicks in timed and interval workout sessions.

“Boxing is all cardiovascular and it’s just to get your heart pumping, so it feels good,” the disciplined athlete said as the steam of sweat lifted from his recently buzzed cut head. “I’m not really a fan of running, so it’s a good substitute for cardio. I think it’s even better.”

He knows the team shares his passion for wrestling and because they feel the same way, making sacrifices and putting in the necessary work doesn’t seem all that hard, Villanueva asserted. “As far as my team, I know that they’re self-motivated. It’s about chasing the dream. You want to be a state champ. You want your teammates to be state champs,” he declared.

“We’re going to be a terror. We’re just going to dominate this season.”



Patrick Shelby/Sunnyside Sun

Taking a practiced swing at his punching bag Sunnyside High School Austin Villanueva makes boxing part of his conditioning regime.

to being the best are the hardest working wrestlers.

Sunnyside’s prestigious program features 41 state champions and the blueprint for success is a dedicated approach in being both physically and mentally equipped for the rigorous grind of a routine, three month wrestling season.

While confirmed COVID-19 cases proceed to resurge throughout Yakima County, high school students seeking to begin hybrid learning remain locked out of the classroom without a start date to begin limited in-person instruction.

Participation in athletics and activities have also seen new health restrictions put into place on (Nov. 24). All inside school facility workouts have been officially suspended. Protective face coverings are required to be worn outside and remain on at all times, even during strenuous activities.

“Here we are trying to transition into this 2021 season. We don’t know what’s going to happen next week and they could tell us we’ve got to shut everything down; we just don’t know. All we can do is follow health protocols,” Assistant Boys Varsity Wrestling Coach Ralph Mendoza conveyed.

As a result of the restrictions, volunteer workouts, which began on Oct. 29, with three days on and six days off for athletes aspiring to participate has been challenging for both coaches and athletes.

Under adverse conditions of the pandemic and winter weather elements confronting them, the limited time



Patrick Shelby/Sunnyside Sun

Villanueva firmly believes that whether “...I lose or win, I know that I gave 100%.”

together seems to have re-fueled their drive to push through these difficulties, while strengthening their individual and team bond with one another.

“I think it’s a big win for the kids. They’re the ones wanting to be here and practicing. And of course, kids want to come back to school,” Mendoza stated.

He indicated the importance of in person, student-teacher relationships and their positive impact on affecting young people’s lives, “You can’t substitute it.”

The start of the winter sports season was scheduled to begin on Dec. 28 has now been pushed back to Feb. 1 and will consist of seven weeks. A district wrestling

tournament and an Eastern Washington culmination event are planned to take place in the shortened season. “We can’t wait to build up our conditioning like we

“Whether you win or lose, you win with pride and lose with dignity. Whether I lose or win, I know that I gave it 100%.”

– Austin Villanueva

normally would do in the three-month season,” Moyer acknowledged. “Coaches are encouraging athletes to be prepared and hit the ground running on their conditioning and weight,” he said.

Athletes and coaches continue to prepare for a wrestling season and remain optimistic they will have one. There’s a favorable forecast

on paper about the present window for the team to win its first 4A state title, the first-year head coach reported.

“...We need to go and get it because teams aren’t going to give it you,” Moyer communicated. “We have probably four or five guys that are title contenders but those guys on their own don’t do it. It’s not

enough.” Moyer believes their overall team depth is still better than any other program, including last season’s state champion Chiawana. “This year looks as good as any year that we’ve ever had.”

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