**Joel Partridge: Socorro High School (NM) Coach**

*“Put good kids out into this world.”*

By Bill X. Barron

“In wrestling, there is nothing to hide behind. As a human being, you must be willing to be vulnerable and take a hard look at your flaws. Wrestling – it keeps kids humble. It keeps you level-headed and it brings accountability,” states Joel Partridge, Socorro High (NM) Coach.

Joel continues: “Though I was never a champion myself, wrestling has done tremendous things in my life. I believe through wrestling we can change our society. It begins in the grassroots like our community. I want to see wrestling thrive and become a mainstream sport. Our goal is to set up youth to succeed, teach them how to overcome adversity. Together, we will put good kids out into this world.”

Joel was born in New Mexico, then wrestled his high school years in Nevada, joining the team after the high school coach sent cheerleaders with balloons to his English class! When he moved back to NM in 2009, there was no high school program. A local father had a passion for the sport and three sons but had no wrestling background, so his coaching began there.

In 2011, he took over the Socorro NM club and has been at it ever since. Now the youth program has 40 kids, though they have had as many as 67. Joel’s sister Jenelle donates her gymnastic facility for practice space.

Ed Gutierrez, CEO for RMN Events, has personally visited Socorro. “He always checks in on us and has been good to our families,” states Joel. “What has Ed has done for Western wrestling is amazing! When they bring the competition to us, it leads to recognition for kids all over the state as well as the country. RMN has put all their chips into making wrestling succeed out here. We love being a part of it all.”

Coach Partridge’s first season at Socorro High in 2017-18 began as a two-year arrangement with school district to bring the team to the state level. Joel donates his time as an unpaid volunteer.

“The first-year success of the high school wrestling program stimulated the whole town and had a noticeable positive impact upon our youth,” Joel expresses. “They now have pride in themselves and in their community. Our town mayor and city council love everything we do.”

The first season saw 33 come out for the team, with 28 kids sticking it out. As just a novice program, Socorro High qualified seven wrestlers for New Mexico State. Joel’s niece Chailynn Amaro placed 4th as an 8th grader in the all-comers, exhibition girls’ division. His son Joel III “Trey,” also an 8th grader, became Socorro’s first-ever state champion at 3A 113 pounds. “The rest of the team follows Trey,” Joel proudly relates. “They see that he has put in the time – and that with effort they can achieve the same result.”

The 2018-19 team, a second-year program in a school of just 448 students, qualified the entire team for the 3A State Tournament: all 14 boys starters as well as 2 girls for the exhibition state championships. Individuals have to place in the top 3 at District to qualify for the next level. As a team, the Warriors finished 2nd, with district champions Joel Partridge (126 lb.) and Nicolas Gonzales (170), along with seven runner-ups and five 3rd-placers.

Competing in the New Mexico State Championships for just the second time, Socorro finished 3rd in the 2019 3A team standings, just ten points out of 2nd. The bronze plaque was the school’s first ever state award. In total, the Warriors had eight individual state placers, including two state champions – Joel “Trey” Partridge at 126 pounds (the second state title for this freshman) as well as another 9th grader Orion Rottman at 160 pounds.

Additional 2019 state placers include four consolation champions; Andre Gonzalez at 120 lbs., Sean McNeil at 138, Francisco Encinias at 145, and Nicolas Gonzales at 170 each placed third. Finishing with a 4th-place medal were 195-pounder Xavier Otero and Ian Jordison (220 pounds). In the girls’ division, Chailynn Amaro took home 4th place at 106 pounds.

Joel proclaims: “It is clear to the town that we have formed a relationship with our community; they know that people hear about the town through us. With our kids finding success on and off the mat, the rest will take care of itself. When kids who have placed at State have their own kids join the program, we will have then come full circle.”

Coach Partridge sees a greater meaning in how the sport shapes character: “Wrestling promotes healthy lifestyles and stabilizes the sports landscape. The football coach and athletic director are huge on it. For the skill positions, it makes them better on the field and improves their leverage. And when it really matters, they will persevere because they know what to do and how to handle it.”

Still humble despite immediate success at the high school level, Joel relates: “At 36, I have not yet made it to the top. I am still open to learning; I enjoy the coaching. Seeing kids succeed is better than experiencing it myself. I live to see kids overcome obstacles and find themselves on the mat. I love the tremendous feeling when a kid does well. It’s beautiful!”

Of course, the high school team could not have succeeded without the youth development program. Coach P concludes with a bit of wisdom: “I have learned is to keep wrestling fun. You have to propose the sport to kids in the right way. Colleges are not recruiting your 8-year old. No one is winning a national tournament at the local level. It’s all about balance. Keep it simple – basic technique wins at every level. Keep it competitive but keep it fun.”