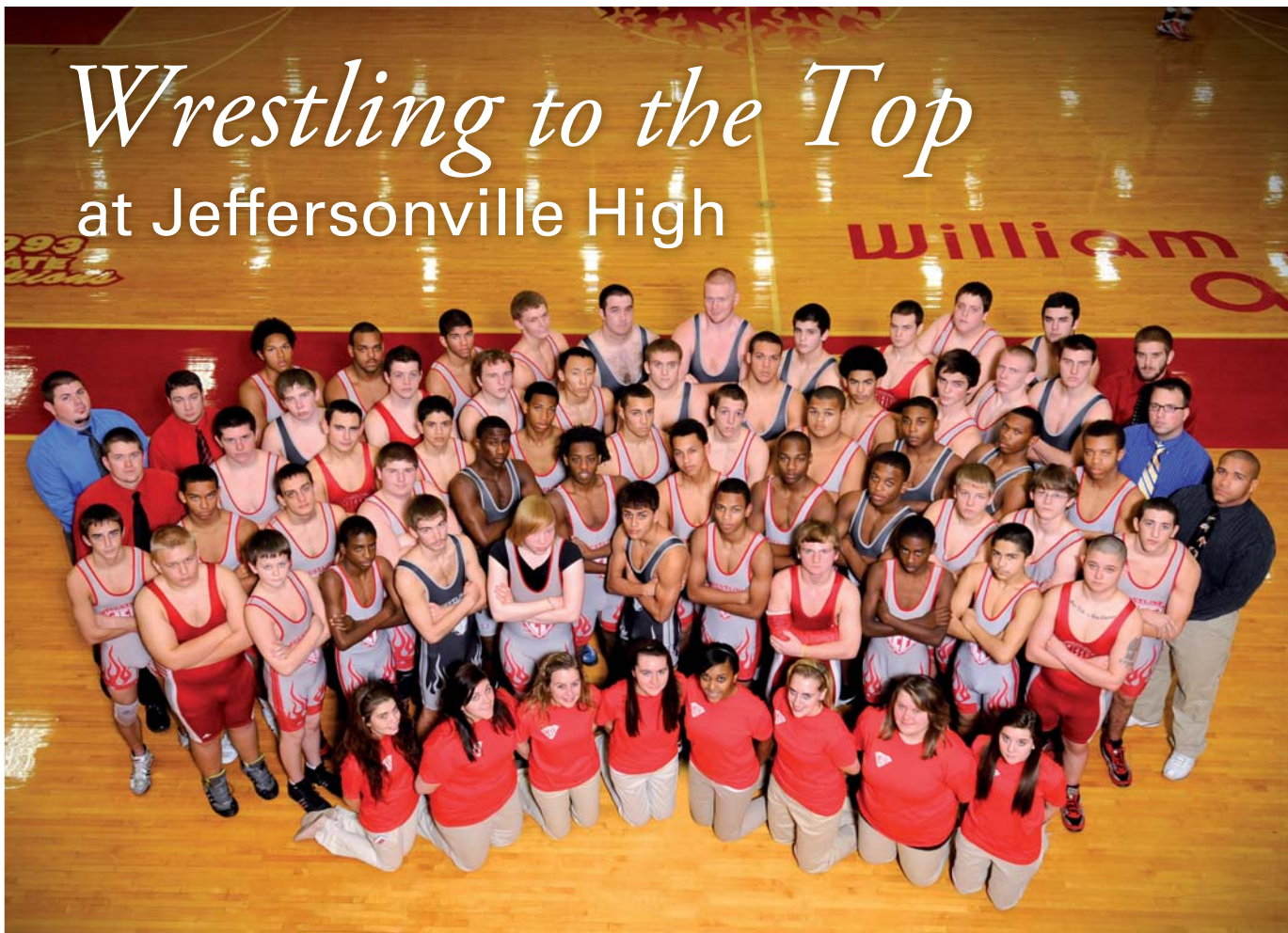


Wrestling to the Top at Jeffersonville High



Proving that the best way to excel in one sport is to be good in all of them

Ten years ago Danny Struck and his wife, Dawn, were searching for teaching jobs. They ended up at Jeffersonville High School in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Both were from rural high schools and this new school was urban, so they thought they might have a short stay. They were mistaken.

Struck took over as head wrestling coach and knew he was in for a challenge. The program was started by Louis Rosbottom and their success included two individual state championships, but it was struggling. The school had won a total of two dual meets in the previous two years, and had won only two sectional titles and one conference title in the past 25 years. The

freshman classes were not promising, as the feeder middle school had no wrestling program – and to make matters worse, there was no year-round strength and conditioning program.

Struck was able to find some assistants, but they had no wrestling experience. But he had a plan. So, he grabbed a local football and strength coach, Andy Cymbalist, and they started the wrestlers lifting weights.

“I believe if we do the right thing for kids, then we will win in the end,” says Struck. “I also go with the philosophy that if I don’t take the time to show kids the right way, someone with more time will show them the wrong way. It wasn’t easy – it took running

lots of kids and coaches through the program until we found people who believed. One of our purposes is to help our students become the best versions of themselves they can be, but we also have the goal of bringing a wrestling state title back to Jeffersonville.”

Strength in Numbers

The first thing Struck wanted was to get more kids in the program, and he did just that. They finished that first season with about 40 kids in just the high school; now they have more than 75 kids a day in the high school practices and 80 in the two middle school practices. They also have a 3rd-to-5th-grade wrestling league with nine

elementary schools participating and over 300 kids, and a USA Wrestling club with over 120 kids. But Struck's plans extended beyond wrestling.

"I think it would be the coolest thing ever to win state titles in both football and wrestling in the same year," says Struck. To accomplish that, he figured he needed to get more athletes playing multiple sports – only one football player was on the wrestling team when he started. Coach Struck started coaching high school football when he moved to Jeffersonville to show kids that not only were they going to play more than one sport but that he would too. He says, "Today on our wrestling team there are 25 football players, six soccer players, three cross-country runners and one volleyball player. Our kids know they have to do more than one sport to gain an edge. We like competing against wrestling teams that are one-dimensional – we know we have more athletic skill sets to beat them with our multi-sport athletes."

Not only have they built the numbers in Jeffersonville to more than 500 kids wrestling, but they do it in conjunction with the elementary football league and middle school football. "We give T-shirts that say "multi-sport athlete" on them to all the K-12 kids

who do more than one sport. For the kids at the high school level we even give a trophy with both their sports on the top." It has paid off.

Jeffersonville is now a continuously top-20-ranked team in a one-class state tourney system, and has won four of the last five sectional titles, and two of the last three conference titles. They have sent 18 kids to wrestle in college over the past seven years, and have had seven USA Wrestling All-Americans. Not only that, but the kids on the Jeffersonville High Wrestling team have visited more than 30 states to wrestle, and have wrestled internationally in Poland, Turkey, Australia, Japan, China, Mongolia and New Zealand. Says Coach Struck, "It has been a very big draw for us to show kids the world and what it offers outside of our sport. We tell our kids, 'See the world through wrestling.'

"I told our AD at the time he hired me that my plan was just to do more than the other schools and we will win." So what does Jeffersonville do more of? They host a 3rd-to-5th-grade football-to-wrestling camp every fall, a strength and conditioning camp for 5th- to-8th graders every fall and a 5K run for scholarships for seniors; they also host more than 20 wrestling events

in their high school gym a year, host a Kentucky vs. Indiana All-Star meet, do community service, run a golf scramble, wrestle the state champs in matches from three different states and have year-round open weights at 5:45 a.m. Coach Maddox runs an MMA club for adult wrestlers who have finished their Jeffersonville Wrestling experience, and the high school coaches and kids run their elementary wrestling league and monthly wrestling outings (swimming, UFC viewings, road trips, dinners) – they even built their own weightroom." Yes, their own weightroom.

"I got tired of booking odd times to lift weights, and I got tired of working with broken weights," says Struck. "So we got together with our booster club, our new principal, James Sexton, and our welding department, and we made our own wrestling weightroom. Our kids believe their weight program is unique and more effective than that of any school they wrestle. I have been certified with BFS and USA Weightlifting for about four years now, and I took those two philosophies and adapted them to what I thought fit our weightroom and our wrestling style best. Our kids are strong, in shape, and injury-free when they hit the mat. Also, our kids continuously get stronger even

Photos by Gary Fridley



The Jeffersonville High Wrestling team has visited more than 30 states to wrestle, and has wrestled internationally in Poland, Turkey, Australia, Japan, China, Mongolia and New Zealand.

in season. We don't taper; we just keep getting stronger."

Jeffersonville High School currently runs about 75 high school wrestlers per practice, with half of them lifting weights every day using the BFS set-rep system. "They have been using that set-rep system for about five years now, plus using our own variations of the auxiliary lifts, doing everything on a timer. Opposing teams tell us now that we are the biggest, strongest team in the state that they wrestle," says Struck. He adds that they do snatches, tumbling drills and speed work stations. "Our tumbling drills and our speed work drills are big for us, as we make sure kids know that these skills will help them in all sports." Jeffersonville High runs the elementary league through the BFS exercises with bars of PVC pipe to teach them the form, and when they hit middle school they start doing modified lifts with the high school team.

Spreading the Good Word

This program has spread

throughout the Jeffersonville community. When the wrestling team started seeing success, Principal Sexton asked Coach Struck and basketball coach Amy Austin to run a sports performance course that would help all kids. The kids have seen amazing growth in their skills. "I love that our program is growing," says Struck. "I tell our coaches, who are now almost all former JHS wrestlers, that if even one kid comes to us for one day, we have to impact their lives in that one day. I love it that we now are helping kids in other sports reach their dreams by having them come to our camps and sports performance class. Kids need to know that there is so much more for them in multi-sports."

This year the Jeffersonville High School Wrestling Team started off ranked number 13 in the state with three top-ranked wrestlers: Alonzo Shepherd #4, Brandon Marlin #11 and Elijah Curtley #14. The team has been named the wrestling club of the year by

the Indiana State Wrestling Association twice, and has been Greco-Roman runner-up five times. They have won their sectional four of the last five years and have won two of their last three conferences. Coaches Danny Struck, Joe Somerville, Rob Ferguson and Zach Harper have all been invited to and have studied at the Olympic Training Center. Senior Alonzo Shepherd recently won a scholarship to wrestle at Indiana University, and Coach Struck was just named the USA Wrestling National Developmental Coach of the Year.

Although the wrestling team at Jeffersonville High has yet to win the state title, they are making huge strides toward it. They start, finish and fill their practices with positive affirmations toward this goal. Says Coach Struck, "I tell the kids, 'I will keep working until we win it, and if we don't win it with you as a wrestler, then you come back and we will win it with you as a coach.'" BFS

