

No experience, no problem: Ramirez-Aguilar's rapid rise on the mat

Maddie Ruskamp
Headline Writing

By: REUBEN REYES

Wrestlers who place at state have usually been wrestling for five or more years, but for Jose Ramirez-Aguilar, that is not the case. Ramirez-Aguilar started wrestling as a freshman, and for him, it clicked. Throughout his three year career, Ramirez-Aguilar has steadily improved.

Freshman year, Ramirez-Aguilar had a record of 17-14. Having a winning record as a freshman is a challenge for most, but even more impressive for his first season. However, Ramirez-Aguilar is humble.

Ramirez-Aguilar said, "My first year of wrestling was decent; I had a respectable record."

Sophomore year, Ramirez-Aguilar improved. He was a medalist at conference, was one of the team's anchors during duals, was looked up to as a leader, and had a winning record of 26-20.

The head wrestling coach, Cody Bengé, who has been coaching for Ramirez-Aguilar's whole wrestling career, said, "Jose has developed a skill set specific to his style of wrestling. He has developed a methodical style of wrestling, with a huge burst of energy that opponents can't keep up with. Mental strength is also something Jose has come a long way with since his freshman year."

Then, in his Junior year, Ramirez-Aguilar wrestled his heart out. He lost a few, but when it came to Districts at

Kearny Catholic, he was able to place third, meaning he was going to state.

"I felt very proud of myself for making it to state and ending off districts with a win, getting 3rd, which helped me in state with the placement."

Coach Bengé said, "I felt Jose was well-prepared for the state meet. Jose consistently worked hard in practice throughout the whole year. He was wrestling his best matches at the end of the season."

After all the preparation, it was time to wrestle his first match at state. Wrestling at state is nerve-racking, with a huge crowd and everyone watching you win or lose.

"I wouldn't say I was scared. I was more nervous because of all the people watching on Friday night, since the arena was all full."

Ramirez-Aguilar won one and lost one on the first day. Then he had to wrestle back to get a chance to place at his first state tournament..

On the second day, Ramirez-Aguilar dug deep. He won twice and lost twice, and that earned him 6th place in the Class C Division at 215 pounds. His overall record for his junior season was 39-20.

"It felt great to get 6th. I learned that you should always be ready for anything that is thrown your way," said Ramirez-Aguilar.

Coach Bengé has some high expectations for Ramirez-Aguilar's

last high school season.

"I want Jose to wrestle like he wants to dominate every match. Tournament champion, conference and district champion, state champion are all things Jose is capable of. Mostly, I want him to believe in himself before he ever wrestles a match," said Bengé

Ramirez-Aguilar has a simple goal for himself. "I would like to improve my stamina during matches."

With a short three year wrestling career, Ramirez-Aguilar has left a lasting impact. Bengé said, "It's a pleasure to coach Jose. Mostly, I want him to believe in himself before he ever wrestles a match."



Jose Ramirez-Aguilar celebrates after winning a match at state in February 2025. (photo: Reuben Reyes)

Seven ladies, one detective, and a plot of trouble: Gibbon presents one act play

By: MADDIE RUSKAMP

The Gibbon Public Schools One Act cast and crew are preparing for their upcoming season. After weeks of rehearsals filled with laughter, hard work, and dedication, the cast and tech crew are ready to take the stage with their production of *Any Body for Tea?* Directed by Taylor Gellerman and assisted by Helen Bender, this year's show promises to capture both laughter and applause.

The play *Any Body for Tea?* is a mystery comedy about seven elderly ladies who live together in one big house. The group has a crush on their handsome neighbor, Detective O'Finn, who they watch out their front window. The ladies become obsessed with trying to find a way to bring the detective into their home so they can meet him. The group decides to poison a cup of tea to create a murder case that will require O'Finn's attention.

One Act members have been rehearsing since the beginning of September to learn and perfect their performance for audiences. Cast member, junior Haidyn McKinley, portrays Birdie who is one of the old ladies.

McKinley said, "I like that the play makes us challenge ourselves as actors to act like old people and that we get to be flirty old ladies at that. The most fun I've had during this play has been getting to do our old lady makeup and

dress up."

As practices continue, actors have had to adjust their timing on stage. McKinley explained that one of the harder challenges for the cast has been "Getting the right lines said at the right times during our performance."

With a blend of mystery, comedy and over the top characters *Any Body for Tea?* will entertain audiences and showcase the incredible talent of Gibbon's students.

Director Taylor Gellerman said, "I am really excited about this group of kids. They are willing to work really hard and they want to do well. We have an interesting mix of being really young, but also having a lot of experience."

On November 24, the one act will travel to Ord for the Louplatte conference competition. The final regular season competition is districts on December 3, 2025. Gibbon will be hosting the competition and performs at noon.

Gellerman said, "I am so proud of all of the work the kids on the stage, behind the stage and the students in my classes have put into this production. I wish people could see the difference between the rehearsal two weeks ago to the District performance because the show, and all those who work on it, have so much growth during this part of the activity. I think we have learned a lot as a cast."

By: ABBIE MILLER

If you walked into almost any high school in Nebraska and asked a student if they know someone who has vaped or currently vapes, they probably say yes. For a long time, it seemed like *everyone* was doing it. But here's the truth: fewer teens are vaping now than a few years ago. According to a 2019 survey conducted by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), about 17% of Nebraska students said they vaped regularly. By 2023, though, the NDE reported that the number had dropped to around 7%. That is progress—but there are still thousands of teens in our state who are hooked.

Here's the thing: this isn't a problem for the adults around us to try and figure out. It's all on us. We're the ones in the hallways, in the bathroom stalls, at the hangouts. We're the ones who are seeing everything. If fewer and fewer of

Change starts with us: why vaping should not be normalized

us pick up a vape and speak up when we see people doing it, then we can prove it's not normal anymore. Change doesn't start with rules on paper; it starts with us.

So, why is vaping so common? One primary reason is the way they are advertised. The flavors are usually sweet like candy or fruits, which don't exactly scream "adult product." On top of that, some of the newer vapes are starting to get touch screens on them, allowing people to play games or play music from their vapes. You read that right,

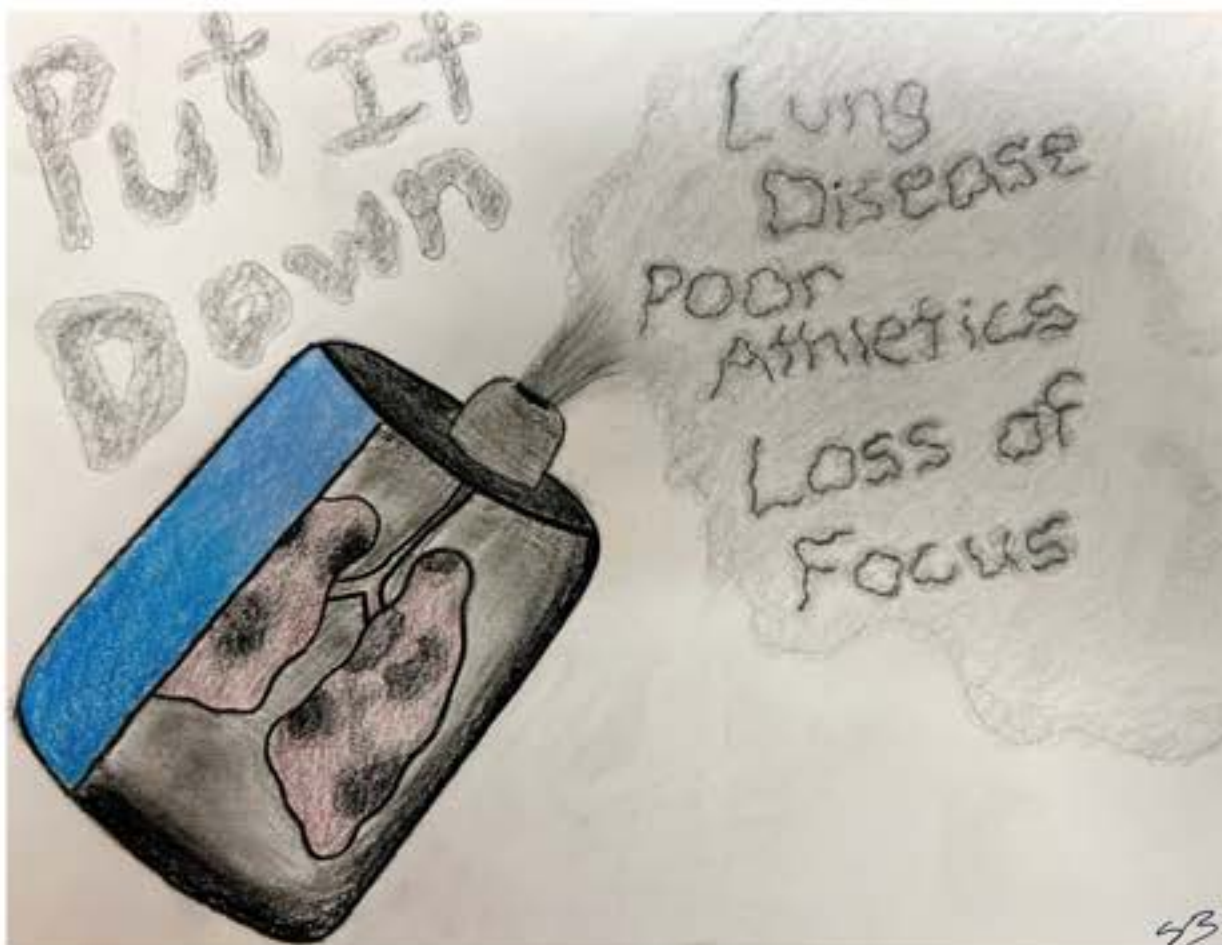
they can now play games from them. Once again, it seems that those companies are targeting us to be their customers. Add in all the influencers on TikTok that make vaping look fun or harmless, and it's no wonder so many high schoolers have tried it before. On top of that, even though you're supposed to be 21 when you buy them, teens still get them from older friends, stores that fail to check an ID, or online shops that have a

very sketchy age verification.

Companies have never had our health in mind; all they care about is our money. They make vaping look fun and cool, but in reality, they're just trying to hook their next

generation of customers. But we're smarter than that.

Here's the good news. Nebraska teens have been quitting. Many are beginning to realize that it's not worth the money, stress, and health risks. If you or someone you know wants help quitting, many resources can guide you on the path to being vape-free. And if you don't vape, speaking up and being honest with your friends matters way more than you think. Vaping might feel normal right now, but we don't have to let it stay that way. We all have the power to change what feels normal and make vaping something Nebraska teens leave behind.



Cartoon by Scarlett Bragg.



THE HIDDEN DANGERS OF E-CIGARETTES

Nicotine Addiction

- Nicotine affects brain development, especially in teens, leading to long-term dependency
- Increases anxiety levels and leads to intense cravings



FDA Oversight & Risks

- Most e-cigarette products are NOT FDA-approved for safety
- The FDA is working on regulations, but many products remain untested



Lung Damage

- Vaping can cause inflammation and severe lung injuries like "popcorn lung"



Harmful Chemicals

- Vape liquids contain heavy metals such as nickel, tin, and lead, as well as volatile organic compounds and toxic flavorings



Targeting Youth

- In 2024, nearly 90% of youth e-cigarette users chose fruit or candy flavors, sparking addiction and health concerns

90%

Heart Damage

- Over time, vaping raises the risk of heart disease and stroke



information from (<https://www.lung.org/>)

Information graphic by Jacqueline Ramirez Estrada

Stronger together: Clark twins turn sisterhood into teamwork

By: ANDREA MONTANEZ

Coaches often try to create an atmosphere where teammates are like family. However, for 16 year old twins Emma and Claire Clark, it's a reality to balance their lives and sports. The twins are homeschooled but attend Gibbon Public Schools for two periods a day and also participate in athletics. Because they are both three sport athletes, the twins spend most of their time together; however, that doesn't mean it's easy.

"If we're disagreeing about something, sometimes I think it's harder to leave it outside off the court," Emma said.

The twins push each other to be the best they can be.

"I know I can be harder on her than my other teammates, but I'm pushing her to be better," said Claire.

This isn't the only challenge the twins face.



Twins Claire and Emma Clark are in serve receive at the home triangular on September 4. (photo: Bailey Weldon)

"Comparison is a struggle because we're compared to each other a ton," Claire said. "I found myself trying to be better than her. I have to remember I'm not competing with her, I'm working with her towards the same goal."

Being able to have a connection in team sports is an essential key.

"She gives me confidence because I know that she believes in me and I believe in her so we can rely on each other," Claire said.

Having someone who is there on and off of the court can be very beneficial.

"Even if everyone else is having a rough day, I think just what a blessing it is to have someone going through the same things as me who understands it the same way. I think I take it for granted sometimes," said Claire.

"I get to spend a lot of time with her. Also, our connection is better than with just another person. We are able to

have good chemistry with each other," said Emma.

The team benefits from having both of the twins on the court. Angela Smallcomb has been the head volleyball coach for two years. Throughout the season she's been able to see the twins' chemistry spark on the court.

"It's really special. Emma and Claire aren't

The Clark twins celebrate with teammates after a Buffalo point. (photo: Bailey Weldon)



just twins; they're the workhorses and leaders of our team. Claire runs the offense as our setter, and Emma anchors the defense as our libero."

Having one strong leader on a team is exciting for any coach, but having two who are juniors is incredibly rare.

"They feed off each other's energy, and that connection makes our team stronger," said Coach Smallcomb.

Emma and Claire have gone through many challenges on and off the court, but the twins don't miss a beat. They brighten the atmosphere everywhere they go.

"She's my built-in best friend. It's just fun being able to be teammates with her," said Emma.

St. Paul Girls Golf Invite: Bendfeldt takes gold, team finishes as runner-up

By: XIMENA URBINA GONZALEZ

At the St. Paul Golf Invite held on September 4, Junior Natalie Bendfeldt took first place. The course at the St. Paul Country Club is a nine hole course meaning the Gibbon girls played the nine holes twice. In addition to Bendfeldt's success in the tournament, the team also had a strong day.

The Gibbon girls golf team consists of five athletes: seniors Bianca Corona and Sahara Vasquez, junior Natalie Bendfeldt, sophomore Ximena Urbina Gonzalez and freshman Kasey Ackley. Bendfeldt won her first individual title. Corona placed 13th, along with Vasquez who got 14th. The team finished as the runner-up at the meet.

Coach David Benge said, "They improved at a rate I have never witnessed as a coach. Every girl improved their score from [the previous meet] by 19+ strokes. I'm incredibly proud of them."

Bendfeldt said, "It felt really good considering I still didn't play as well as I wanted to play. When I struggled with a hole and it got into my head, it was mentally challenging for me to recover."

The challenges didn't stop Bendfeldt. Even though golf is an individual sport, the team played a big role.

"I love my team with everything in my heart. They are the most uplifting and caring girls and Coach Benge is always an encouragement."

This win was just the beginning for the Buffaloes. There is a lot of golf left to play this season. The team has been working hard and improving.

Bendfeldt said, "My goals are to get better everyday and become a better teammate to my team. I want to be able to be a role model for little kids and adults on the golf course!"



LEFT: Coach Benge and Natalie Bendfeldt after the St. Paul Invite. (courtesy photo: Jodi Bendfeldt)
RIGHT: The runner-up team including Kasey Ackley, Natalie Bendfeldt, Bianca Corona, and Sahara Vasquez. (courtesy photo: Coach Benge)

