



Jordan Gurrola is one of nearly 500 wrestlers who competed under Lars Jensen at San Francisco State University. (Courtesy Simon Jimenez)

# Legendary wrestling coach told by SFSU they would not renew his contract

JACOB C. PALMER / Jun. 6, 2017 12:00 a.m. / SPORTS

Lars Jensen is a legend in his craft. His San Francisco State University biography page says as much. “Lars Jensen has become synonymous with the success of the San Francisco wrestling program,” reads the description of the head coach.

But, since June 1, his assistant Isaiah Jimenez has been listed as the wrestling coach on the team’s roster. The move corresponds with an evaluation meeting in which he was told the university would be “reopening his position.”

In 34 years of coaching at SFSU — his alma mater — Jensen has accumulated one of the most impressive resumes in school history: He brought the first NCAA Division II national title to the program, has sent 125 national qualifiers (three at the D-I level, 10 individual champions) and 63 Academic All-NWCA selections since beginning his reign in 1983. He's been inducted into the California Wrestling Hall of Fame (2009) and the National Wrestling Hall of Fame (2013).

So, when he was informed his yearly contract wouldn't be renewed, he told athletic director Charles Guthrie and vice president of university advancement Robert Nava that he was happy to apply then and there.

"I don't know who would be more qualified for the position than someone who's done the job for 34 years," Jensen said in a phone interview Monday. "I'm highly upset. I haven't been able to get any sleep since it happened."

According to Jensen, his athletes were notified the head coach position was open within 20 minutes of his 1 p.m. meeting with Guthrie and Nava. By 1:37 p.m., there was a listing on the NCAA Job Marketplace site.

Jensen said he received no explanation for the decision and doesn't expect to be retained when the position is inevitably filled. If that ends up being the case, the 59-year-old will retire with 87 percent of his pension. He's three years away from stepping down with 100 percent, his goal.

Could that financial decision be a possible reason for the university not retaining him?

"I'm not going to comment, but you can come to conclusions," said Jensen, who said he's sought legal advice.

The SFSU wrestling team had a relatively down year last season, failing to send an athlete to a national tournament. Jensen blamed injuries late in the season and said a few of his best wrestlers were redshirting, setting the team up for success this upcoming season.

"We were looking forward to next year," he said.

When reached by phone on Monday, Guthrie said it's "business as usual" and stressed that all coaches are temporary appointments on annual contracts that expire June 1.

"There's nothing to report on," he said. "It's all internal discussions right now. When we're ready to make a release, we'll make a release. ... There's no news right now."

Nava said that rebuilding the athletic department at SFSU has been a priority over the past five years and that his goal is to re-evaluate the position to best ensure success.

"What we want to do is rebuild our wrestling program and bring it back to the national prominence it had years ago," he said in a phone interview Tuesday morning.

Nava wouldn't say if Jensen was a frontrunner for the opening. He also denied there was a threshold of success he would expect out of whoever takes over the position.

"We ask all the coaches to perform at their best capacities," Nava said before saying Jensen met that standard.

The outpouring of support Jensen said he's received since his position was reopened has been large and widespread. Many in his network of nearly 500 wrestlers he's coached reach out to him. And he said if he never coached again, the El Granada resident could take solace in the fact that so many of his athletes graduated.

"But what I really want is to coach until I'm ready to retire," Jensen said.

That seems unlikely at the moment. When asked for a comment on what Jensen has meant for the SFSU wrestling program, Guthrie passed.

"I'll just stay away from anything related to wrestling until we come out with a story," Guthrie said.

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