Lassen College wrestling coach Rex Branum will take seven wrestlers to the National Junior College Athletic Association Championships this month in quest of winning his fifth national title in seven years. "We've definitely got a chance, but were going to have to surprise some people," Branum said. "We have to put three guys in the finals and win with champions. Twice weve won it with individual champions and twice we did it in the wrestle backs. I don't think this is a year we can do it in the wrestle backs."

The nationals will be held Friday-Saturday, Feb. 16-17 in Rochester, Minn.

Qualifying for nationals at last Saturdays NJCAA Southwest Regional held in Susanville were Vougar Orudjov (125 pounds), Oliver Vasquez (141), Brandon Cleaves (149), Al Daniels (157), Junior Liberal (165), Richard Paulikonas (197) and Randall Brown at heavyweight.

Liberal advanced by injury default and Cleaves will be Lassens wildcard entry.

Against Pima College (Ariz.) in the regionals, Orudjov pinned Jesus Isca in 21 seconds; Daniels defeated Tom Nelson 12-4; Paulikonas pinned Jon Donahue in the first period, and Brown got his pin with 58 seconds remaining in the first period.

“Regionals went how I expected. There were no surprises,” said Branum, who led the Cougars to a fourth-place finish last year.

Lassen entered regionals ranked fifth in the national, behind North Idaho, Ricks College, Iowa Central, and Northwest College respectively. Branum said North Idaho and Ricks College appear to the front-runners for a title.

"Those two teams are probably more balanced than us. That's why we have to win in the finals," he said.

Lassen won national titles in 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998.