

DISCOVERING RESILIENCE

SPECIFIC MOMENTS PUSH TEAM TO PERSIST DESPITE COURTSIDE CHALLENGES

STORY BY BRITTANY MENDEZ | Elvira's eyes grew wide when she described the expressions of her fellow teammates when she spiked a kill during practice one day. It was an unexpected moment, she said.

"I was standing there watching them, thinking to myself, 'What did I just do?' Elvira Fraga, 11, said. While most teammates sigh in relief when practices are cancelled, Elvira goes home to practice because she hates missing any opportunity to improve.

"I remind myself that this sport isn't all about physical strength," she said. "It also involves mental strength, because if you say you are tired, you are going to be tired."

She remembered her sophomore year seeing the varsity team weep after losing to Brownsville Rivera when she was on the junior varsity team. She vowed to work her hardest to move her team forward once she made it to varsity.

"You are your individual goals and your team goals," she said.

Anabel Ricardo, 12, was out in the beginning of the season due to an ankle injury.

"I would sit on the sideline to get treatment, and that was the moment I finally got to see what my coach was talking about, all the little mistakes we were making," she said.

This was not a setback for her, but instead a step forward to help the team see their goals realized, displayed the main gym in the shape of a banner.

"It brought me down, but opened my eyes to the reality of the game," Anabel said. "Which was to get through it with intensity and the desire to do better."

The lessons Seniors have been taught my their coaches finally clicked in their final year. What they have learned is not lost, but passed down to their younger teammates, senior Sabrina Garza said.

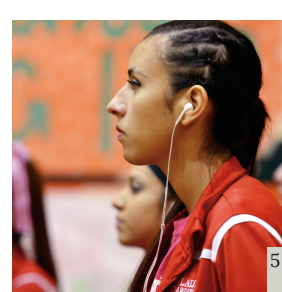
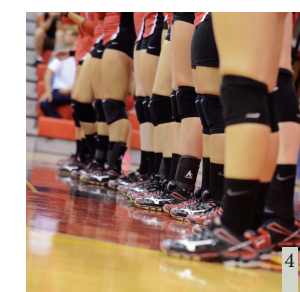
"I do everything for my teammates so that we come out victorious," she said.

Their team is an extension of each player's individual and team goals. Losing streaks, ankle injuries, and rough patches seem negative in the eyes of others, but for these girls it is nothing more than the source of sheer power. ✕

PASSING STRENGTH | No. 6 Arianna Corona, 12, sets the ball during the Battle of the Arroyo on October 24. "Communication with the team is important so I know who to pass the ball to," she said. Photo by Adrian Barrera.

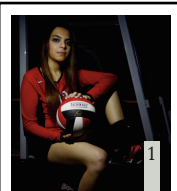


1. OPEN CHANT | Starters run down the aisle to help motivate themselves on the court. "Doing our chant in the beginning of the game gets us ready and prepared to do what we need to get done," Grizelda Ortiz, 12, said.
2. POWER SPIKE | Addison Dickey, 11, brings back her hand to make a spike against South. The Lady Cardinals won the rival game. "I am glad I took part in helping the seniors win their final Bird Bowl," Addison said. Photos by Haley Ponce.



3. HITTING TENSE | Jennifer Nieto, 11, starts off the Battle of the Arroyo game with a strong serve. "I have to read where the hits are coming from to get to my position," she said. Photo by Adrian Barrera.
4. RUNNING NERVES | As each player lines up, they mentally and physically prepare for the game against San Benito. "I can feel the anticipation and see in their faces what they want and by their actions," Ashley Lute, 12, said about the team. Photo by Haley Ponce.
5. HEAD IN THE GAME | As the song Second Coming plays, Christina Borquez, 12, gets ready for her first move. "My music gives me expectations and the motivation to what I need to fulfill on the court," she said. Photo by Haley Ponce.
6. SERVING BASICS | Anabel Ricardo, 12, serves the ball against the Grey Hounds. "Throughout the game you have to earn the points, but with serving it's handed to you," she said. Photo by Adrian Barrera.

ONE PLAYER, ONE WORD



1. RELENTLESS | "I have learned to overcome adversity because after I was injured, I had to work myself back into playing shape. Not giving up built my character and made me stronger on the inside," Deeandra Gathright, 12, said. Photo by Savannah Canales.



2. SELFLESS | "I'm more of an independent person, but I can trust and rely on my teammates to learn how to play better as a whole. If you can work well together you will succeed," Linda Zuniga, 12, said. Photo by Brittany Mendez.



3. FEARLESS | "I used to be scared going into a game, and I realized you have to not be scared. If you are scared, you are never going to go anywhere. If you believe in yourself there is not stopping you or your team," Kaycee Banuelos, 12, said. Photo by Savannah Canales.

Journey TO THE CENTER OF THE GAME

STORY BY BRITTANY MENDEZ | As parents and students make their way into the gym, girls are on the court preparing themselves for what they know they can achieve.

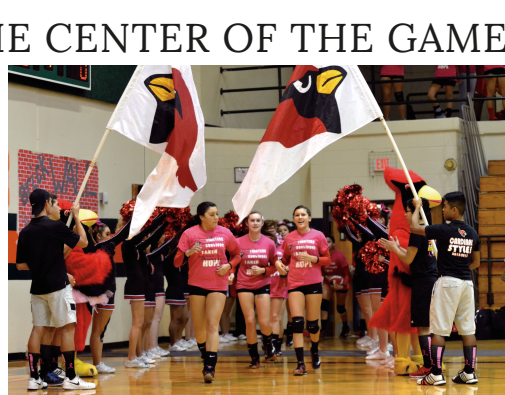
"You go in humble but confident humble but hungry," Alexis Arriaga, 12, said.

When they finish warming up, they come together to raise their hands in prayer, and each say a goal they want to accomplish.

The beginning of the game requires the ability to keep focus throughout five sets. "Depending on whether if we are down or not, you can't lie to yourself about the momentum," Alexis said.

Not allowed to hit the ball more than once, different people with different skills are needed to keep the game going.

"Towards the end, the crowd gets quiet and you feel calm while questions go through your mind about who is going to win," Ashley Lute, 12, said. ✕



"We have bruises, several cuts on our lips, tears on our jerseys, but it's just a passion the whole team has," Anabel Quilanton, 12



7. CHEERING FOR THEMSELVES | Savannah Butters, 12, celebrates at the point made by her teammates at a home game. The beginning of the season did not start off right for the girls. She said that the chant built a fire that kept them going. "I did not get to play much this season, but I felt like they needed me," she said. "I felt like I was there on the court with them."
8. HIT WITH DESIRE | As the ball comes toward their side of the court, Elizabeth Holder, 12, slams a spike during one of the most important games of the season. "It doesn't matter how tall or how hard you hit, but how much you want it," Elizabeth said.
9. SET IT HIGH | Arianna Corona, 12, jumps up to set the ball up for the hitter, senior Anabel Ricardo, during the South game. "A setter needs to react on impulse and be quick," Arianna said.
10. DIVING TOWARDS THE WIN | Grizelda Ortiz, 12, dives for the ball. Before the game against South, Coach Martinez emphasized to work their hardest so the ball wouldn't touch the ground. "It is important to listen because they know what they are telling you," she said. Photos by Haley Ponce.

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