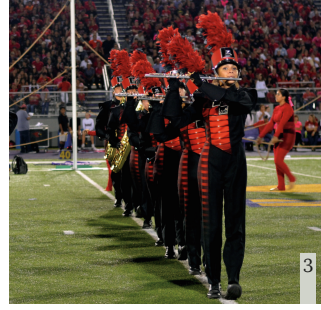


1. TO THE BOX | Aaron Balboa, 11, projects his towards the box during a marching competition. "Our show was so powerful," Aaron said. "It touched me and I hope it touched our audience." Photo by Elizabeth Oxford.



2. FEAR THE FLUTES | Flute section leader Vikki Garza, 11, performs the ballad movement during half-time at Battle of the Arroyo. "During adagio we held out a chord and it sounded like heaven," she said. Photo by Elizabeth Oxford.



3. IN STEP | Mia Rodriguez, 10, takes her first few steps at Pre-Pigskin. "I knew the show was going to be amazing as soon as we started," she said. Photo by Brittany Mendez.



4. HORNS UP | Donavon Lopez, 12, projects his horn to the crowd at the homecoming game. "It's a great feeling when you know you gave it your all," he said. Photo by Brittany Mendez.



5. ALL ABOUT THAT BRASS | Baritone section leader, Manuel Garcia, 12, performs at the Pigskin Jubilee marching competition in which the band won first place and overall grand champion. "After we perform it feels amazing when the crowd goes crazy," he said. Photo by Brittany Mendez.



STORY BY KIMBERLY RAY | Drum Major Serena De La Cruz, 12, stood on her ladder with mascara running down her face as rain poured during the band's first home performance against McAllen High School.

"I was so mad that our new uniforms were getting wet," she said.

With only eight minutes left in half time, the band remained set as the crowd sought refuge from the storm. The rain had made the turf, equipment, and instruments difficult to perform with.

"I was scared I was going to fall because it was so slippery," Jose Godinez, 11, said. "I had so much energy and goose bumps everywhere."

Mirrors on the uniforms reflected stadium lights onto the stands as red-and-black plumes danced in the wind. In full support of, the band the remaining crowd began to shout, "Let them play, let them play," to encourage their show to go on despite the rain.

"When I heard the crowd I was just like "Wow, this is why I'm in band," Krystal Moya, 11, said. "Hearing them cheer for us set my whole season."

Together, the 200-piece ensemble put the same dedication into various marching competitions. They ultimately received first place in their division and overall grand champion for each one.

"We're a pretty big deal at competitions, even though there is sometimes tension with other schools," Manuel Garcia, 12, said. "Everybody knows we are going to sweep."

Students use long practices, games, and competitions to prepare for their season's final show in the San Antonio Alamodome, where they prepare to be ranked on a state level.

"A state year is more challenging, yet more motivational, to always keep going and give it all I got," Mariela Mireles, 12, said.

All in step, the students marched onto the turf, some for the first time and some for the last. At this moment upperclassmen gave encouraging speeches to younger members to remind them the work they had invested led them to this day.

"I never thought I would end my four years of marching in dome," Amanda Olivarez, 12, said. "I was in awe looking back on my years in band as I got set."

Though the last band to perform, fans filled the stands from top to bottom. A group of red shirts chanted for band's most important performance.

"I walked off the field with a huge smile on my face," Ernesto Rojas, 12, said. "We definitely proved ourselves." ✕



6. ON THE PODIUM | Drum major Serena De La Cruz, 12, directs the band at a competition. "At the end of the show, I bowed," she said. "It was powerful." Photo by Liliana Perez.

7. SPOTLIGHT | Annie Hernandez, 10, performs at a home game against Brownsville Hannah. "This marching season was so much fun," Annie said. "I really loved the show." Photo by Brittany Mendez.

8. ONE LAST TIME | Ulyssa Rios, 11, performs at the final game of the season. "This has been the most hardworking and rewarding season yet," Ulyssa said. Photo by Brittany Mendez.

9. WARM UP | Lindsey Chavez, 12, warms up before preliminaries at the PRE-PIGSKIN competition. "I loved how our whole performance felt, everything sounded so powerful," Lindsey said. Photo by Liliana Perez.

10. PERFECT PITCH | Charlie Cruz, 10, performs during halftime at the homecoming game against Brownsville Hannah. "I love how everyone works together to make something wonderful," Charlie said. Photo by Brittany Mendez.

11. VISUAL ELEMENT | Tyler Vela, 10, begins his opening set visual at Battle of the Arroyo. "Our visuals were so fun," Tyler said. Drum line made a statement this year. Photo by Brittany Mendez.

BRING ON the reign