

“ We had one big goal—to

get past district and to go to **state.** We progressed and

got to see the out-of-town **competition.** We knew

we could be just as good.” **samantha melendez-10**

bittersweet sixteen

by **andrew molina**

A day before the McDonald's Invitational, the team goes through its usual drill—make 10 baskets and you're done. But two starters aren't there. They've dropped off their team-issued bags with their uniforms inside. They're not coming back.

What would happen the next day was anyone's guess. One thing the girls knew is that they would face teams from out of town that were bigger and stronger.

Now, the team is three points down and fighting for dominance on home court against Chicago's Morgan Park. Down by six at the end of the third quarter, the Mustangs answered with 11 points in the fourth, but it would not be enough to clinch the win. The Mustangs fell short 56-46.

“The loss of two starters didn't affect us much,” junior Julie Jacquez said. “It was a speed bump we had to face. We went in and played our game, but we just weren't able to shut down their point guard. Sure, the score wasn't what we wanted it to be, but we played as a team.”

Day two of the tournament resulted in a five point loss to Hamilton in the morning and a win over Eastwood in the afternoon. The Mustangs would win their last game, finishing third in the tournament. From there, the team enjoyed a 12 game win streak to capture the district title.

“We were so excited to go undefeated,” senior Emily Cuellar said. “But Coach [Cynthia Hernandez] kept reminding us that it was one step at a time, one game at a time.”

Trampling Bel Air 72-36 earned the team the bi-district title, but the Lady Mustangs knew the toughest part was in front of them. They would go on to defeat Dumas by 21 points and headed east down I-10 toward Odessa to take on Lake View. Again, it was a convincing win, 61-32.

The dream was intact. Making it to state was so close. Up next was the “sweet sixteen,” which the Lady Mustangs would play rated third in state. They'd face fourth-ranked Wichita Falls Rider. Holding the lead for the first three quarters, the team went into the fourth quarter up 49-34, where they maintained the lead when Rider picked up their tempo with only five minutes remaining.

“The last few minutes were nerve-wracking because they were catching up to us,” senior Mayra Garcia said. “I kept thinking that they couldn't take this away from us. When they got the lead, I tried not to lose my composure. They would shoot, and I did my best not to let them grab their own rebound. When the buzzer went off, our season was over. Our road to make it to state was over. I was sad it was over, but it was a dream to make it as far as we did.”

MUSTANG VS. MUSTANG

Avoiding the Morgan Park Mustangs' defense, senior Mayra Garcia attempts to score in the first game of the McDonald's Tournament. “They were bigger,” Garcia said. “It was nothing like playing an El Paso team, which meant I had to play bigger on offense and defense.” Three out-of-state teams took part in the tournament, which Morgan Park won.



mikey provenghi



genesis barraza



genesis barraza



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BEYOND REACH

Andress defense trails junior Natalie Sanchez down the court on her way to a score. “I felt pretty confident going into the game,” Sanchez said. “We knew we had to work on offense because Andress was faster and probably our toughest competition of the district season.” Sanchez scored 23 points of the Mustangs' 46 in the game.

SANDWICHED

Wedged between a Bowie defensive set-up, senior Denise Ramos goes in for a lay-up and scores. “I tried my best to get through the gaps of the defense,” Ramos said. “I tried to focus on the job that needed to get done and to make sure I executed plays correctly.”

NIGHT TO REMEMBER

All smiles, the Lady Mustangs claim the district trophy after beating the Andress Eagles 64-38. “I was proud of everything we accomplished,” junior Mia Lopez said. “District is never easy, but going undefeated showed everyone what we could do.” The girls won the title two games before the district season ended.



SOARING PAST EAGLES

No one in front of her, senior Rebecca Cardenas sprints across the court leaving Andress' defense behind. “I was proud of our performance,” Cardenas said. “We needed to push our offense, but in order to win, it was a matter of stopping them from scoring.” Cardenas contributed 22 points and six assists to the win. She was also chosen the district MVP since she was a sophomore and El Paso city “Player of the Year” as a senior. (photo by mikey provenghi)

UP & OVER

A fake pass forces junior Daniela Lopez to go one on one with an Austin Panther. “They never gave up, and that meant we couldn't either,” Lopez said. “We couldn't take any team lightly. We came out strong, pushing on both sides of the court. It was cool to play against the team of our former coach.” The Mustangs dominated the Panthers in both district meetings by more than 48 points.

record

DISTRICT

El Paso	82-11	W	W	73-19
Irvin	65-19	W	W	68-18
Bowie	76-18	W	W	81-31
Chapin	58-35	W	W	61-25
Jefferson	42-7	W	W	66-16
Canutillo	64-25	W	W	75-16
Andress	46-38	W	W	64-38
Austin	75-26	W	W	74-23

BI-DISTRICT

Bel Air 72-36 W

AREA

Dumas 56-44 W

REGIONAL QUARTER FINALS

Lake View 61-32 W

SWEET 16

Rider 63-56 L