



New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight

Major Injuries Never Kept Romero Down

By Tyler Dunkel, Sports Information Director at the NMAA

Senior Nicole Romero of Española Valley High School is a fighter. She is a classic example of whatever life throws your way; you pull yourself together, dust yourself off and continue to fight.

A vital member of the volleyball, basketball and softball teams at Española Valley, Romero was already a team leader in all three sports by the start of her sophomore year.

"I started volleyball because my sister started doing it and I learned to love it. It's competitive and fast-paced. It makes me a better person," Romero said. "I love volleyball not only for the game, but for the friends I've made. My dad played baseball at Western New Mexico University and I want to follow in his footsteps in softball."

But one moment on the basketball court her sophomore year changed everything for Romero. While going up for a shot during a game, Romero lost her footing and her knee gave out. "I tore my left ACL during a basketball game," Romero said. "I had taken some athletic training courses and as soon as it happened I knew what was wrong. I was devastated but I refused to give up."

The road to recovery for Romero was tough but her positive outlook on the situation helped her heal in time for summer volleyball workouts. Then, the unthinkable happened. "I was two months into summer volleyball," Romero said. "I jumped up to get the ball and when I landed my knee didn't turn; my right ACL was torn."

Again, Romero refused to let her second ACL injury in less than a year stop her. "Everyone has the expectation that you should quit once you tear both of your ACLs but I am an overachiever and I wanted to make my dad proud by not giving up," Romero said. "I've come back a lot stronger. My friends and teammates are proud of me and that keeps me going."

"When she got hurt, she was comforting everyone else," head volleyball coach Damien Salazar said. "She worked hard to recover and we actually had to hold her back. It's not easy for her now. She works really hard."

Salazar continued, "She has overcome a lot of adversity over the last couple years. She's a leader in the locker room, on the court and a kid that brings energy to practice and the games. I'm proud of her. Just her initiative to say 'I'll be back no matter what' is huge; a lot of kids would have given up. Nicole has gone from the bottom of the program and she's come out on top – it's great to see that."

Romero wants other athletes to learn from her situation. "I want people and athletes to know they can do it and not to give up. Life deals us a lot of situations that are out of our control but the way you respond will dictate the outcome."

She also said that her father and teammates were great support systems for her. "My sophomore year was a hard year for me because a family member



got cancer and I was fighting with injury; it was an emotional year. My dad has always been on me to make sure I'm putting in hard work and my softball and volleyball teams helped me get through the hard times."

During her time off the competitive playing surface, Romero got involved in student council and is currently the school's president. "I like having a voice and speaking for people," Romero said. "I like making changes. I just try to be myself. I hope my peers remember me as that happy girl in high school who participated in sports and student government."

Española Valley's softball coach Robert Garcia says that Romero is a true leader, not only for her teams but for her school. "Her peers have tremendous respect for Nicole and her leadership has led to people looking up to her and asking her for help. She knew she had to pursue her dreams and never give up. She's one of the most determined young ladies I've ever been around."

Garcia continued, "She's a hard worker. Nicole had injuries but she's kept going and she's one of our leaders. I think she represents Española Valley with great pride both on the field and off."

Romero dreams of playing collegiate softball and hopefully following in her father's footsteps at Western New Mexico but says she realizes that her education is most important. "I try to keep A's and B's in school. I always try to keep in mind that the word student comes first in the phrase 'student-athlete'."