



New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight

Not Far from Home

By Lauren Roussel, NMAA

Danielle Peshlakai, a senior at Wingate High School, knows the feeling of being homesick all too well. Peshlakai has been living 150 miles away from her hometown of Cuba, N.M., to attend Wingate High School since she was 14 years old. Not having her parents around, she has learned to be more responsible and independent.

Danielle's day starts and ends with school. She has a packed schedule that only allows her minimal time to eat and sleep. From volleyball to soccer, Danielle keeps herself busy. "I've learned to manage my time being on my own," Peshlakai said. When her week isn't jam-packed with school and sports, Danielle likes to go home to visit her family, although making the 300 mile round trip happens only once every month or two.

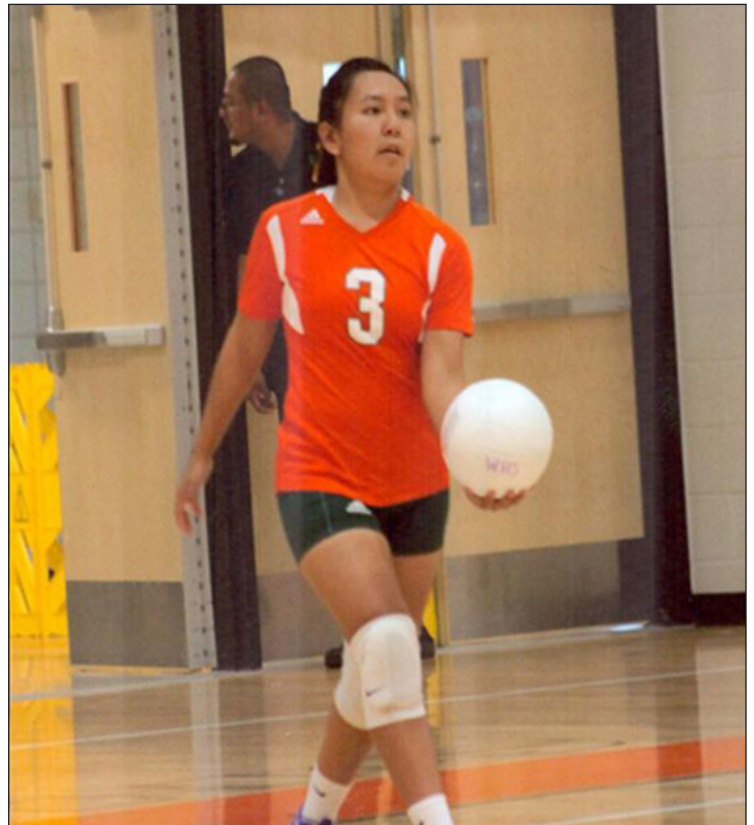
Danielle made the decision to attend Wingate High School in 7th grade. "I chose Wingate because some of my family members went to school here," she said.

"I try not to think about home too much, I am focused on my future," Danielle said about being far from home. When she is feeling homesick, Danielle can call her sister, who also attends Wingate. "My sister says I'm her role model so she is following in my footsteps," she added.

Throughout her high school career, Danielle has maintained a 4.0 GPA and is on the honor roll. She is a member of the National Honor Society and started the Library Club at Wingate High School. With 20 members, Wingate's Library Club hosts book fairs, takes care of and cleans up the library, goes on educational trips and exchanges books among one another. "I wanted to make a few changes and I wanted to get students involved instead of them going back to their dorm after class," Peshlakai stated.

Al Martinez, Wingate's Athletic Director, said, "Danielle is an academically strong student, very knowledgeable, always getting high scores in class. I've watched her grow and develop over the years; she has a big heart." While Danielle loves sports, her main focus is academics. Peshlakai wants to become a medical doctor or work in the medical field somehow. "I want to give something back to my community," she stated. She is currently looking at schools in neighboring states such as Northern Arizona, Fort Lewis and the University of Colorado. She is not ruling out University of New Mexico, however.

Danielle challenges herself academically, but also athletically. "She gives 100%. She hasn't always been a



starter, but she is constantly cheering and supporting her teammates,” Martinez acknowledged. By helping her teammates in any way she can, she is the glue that holds the team together. She is willing to contribute in any way she can. “She has always been a leader,” Martinez stated.

The staff at Wingate is always cheering for Danielle and praising her accomplishments. Danielle understands how Wingate works and how the boarding school emphasizes the importance of independence and becoming a well-rounded student. “We are really proud of her here at Wingate. She is one of those kids you quietly cheer for and you say, ‘I wish she could start, I wish the ball would bounce her way; because she’s just one of those kids you can’t help but love,” Martinez expressed.

“I hope they look at me and feel like they can do whatever it takes to meet their goals,” Danielle said about influencing her fellow teammates and classmates. Danielle works hard to encourage others while reaching her own goals. She is independent and determined. “Bigger and better things will come for this lady,” Martinez smiled as he spoke about Danielle’s bright future.