

Pursuing Victory With Honor Scholarship

CAMERON SIMMONS, Fort Sumner (Class 1A) --

Whether it's cleaning up around the church on weekends, manning the first-aid kit in the training room or congratulating teammates (and opponents, for that matter) on a job well done, this senior is a shining example of going above and beyond the call of sportsmanship duty. His athletic endeavors speak for themselves: all-state in football and track, a state champion in basketball. Away from the playing field, he is just as good: his list of achievements include awards in the Future Farmers of America, as well as time served in student government and the Business Professionals of America organization. If that's not all, he's won numerous honors in his local 4-H club and is a member of the National Honor Society. The numerous people who nominated Cameron for this award used words like "integrity" and "honesty." Fort Sumner's counselor, Pamela Richards, may have summed it up best when she said Cameron's fierce competitiveness in sports often disguises his gentle spirit and sweet disposition within the community. Those attributes have given him the nickname "Baby." It is this Fort Sumner student's goal to some day become a teacher and, perhaps, to one day become a coach.

KIMBERLY CHACON, Penasco (\$2,500 winner)

Teenagers face obstacles of every make and model. For Kimberly, hers were the kind that can easily destroy lives and ruin promising futures. What makes her worthy of this award is the fact that she has turned her tough circumstances into life-building experiences that have benefited both herself and her younger brother.

A few years ago, her father announced to the family that he'd be leaving for a job in Iraq. The added income would certainly make paying the bills easier. Little did he or anyone else know what a huge impact it would have on those he left behind.

The stress and strain of his departure led his wife, Kimberly's mother, down a path of self-destruction. She developed an addiction to drugs and soon abandoned the family. Her father remained in Iraq and asked Kimberly, then just a high school sophomore, to assume the role of financial decision-maker. She paid the bills, balanced the check book and ran the day-to-day operations at home.

Those responsibilities forced her to grow up a lot faster than any teenager should. But, as anyone knows her can happily attest, Kimberly's future is unlimited because of the drive and dedication she has developed since the day her father first went overseas.

"With maturation comes insight, knowledge, a sense of responsibility and a commitment to others," she wrote in a letter to the Foundation. "While I would not wish what happened to me upon anyone, it has contributed to making me a more serious student and person."

Of course, there's her achievements on the athletic front, as well. A 5-foot-6 forward for

Penasco's girls basketball team, she helped the Panthers win their last 11 regular season games to capture the District 3-2A championship.

On the court, referees know her as the player who never hesitates to chase down a loose ball out of bounds so the ref doesn't have to. Opponents identify her as the kid in the other uniform who's quick to lend a helping hand when they fall down or offer a word of congratulations when a nice play is orchestrated.

Her coaches laud her for being the ultimate team player, one who leads by example both on and off the court. Teammates find it easy to fall in step behind her because of her level-headed approach to life and sports. Indeed, in a small community like Penasco Kimberly has earned the title of being the perfect role model.

It is her goal to enroll as an undergraduate at either the University of New Mexico or Northern New Mexico Community College. Her grades are certainly good enough to get her in almost anywhere — her report card is littered with A's and A-plusses in subjects ranging from calculus to chemistry, trigonometry to astronomy.

"I have had both the honor and opportunity to get to know and coach Ms. Chacon her senior year here at Penasco High School and I am continually impressed and amazed with every aspect of the type of person she is," said Panthers coach David Sanchez.

SAMANTHA DUNNAHOO, Hagerman (Class 2A) --

Showing sportsmanship and strong moral character, says this Bobcats senior, isn't easy when facing one of your school's most bitter rivals. It's a good thing Samantha was able to get past all that. Because she did, opponents, teachers and teammates developed a strong respect that extends well beyond the sporting world. More than anything else, Samantha believes in fair play and holding one's head high in spite of the numerous challenges student-athletes routinely face. She was one of 2A's top volleyball players and has used sports to compliment a lifestyle that centers around treating others with respect and bringing fair play to all those involved. "As a teacher and coach, I know students like Samantha do not come along often," says Hagerman athletic director Anthony Mestas. "It has been a privilege to be a mentor to her and I will miss having her as a student-athlete." She is an A-honor roll student, has been involved in student government and her local Future Farmers chapter. All the while, she has absorbed all the academic requirements thrown at her while maintaining a 3.3 GPA.

DANIELLA MONTOYA, Robertson (Class 3A) --

On the surface it's easy to spot Daniella in a crowd. She has been a standout basketball, softball and volleyball player for the Cardinals since moving to the varsity level in 2006. She has been named all-state in volleyball and all-district in the other sports. What gets her recognized away from the sports world is her work ethic and commitment to making those around her better than they expect to be. Daniella is a frequent volunteer at her local church, she dedicates much of her free time to coaching and caring for younger kids, and she is a solid student (3.5 GPA) in the classroom. Even more impressive is that she does it all after commuting to Las Vegas from her home town of Ribera, a small

community some 30 miles from campus. It's her involvement in sports that has given her a new perspective on life. Through sports, she is able to define the fine line between sportsmanship and character. Sportsmanship, she says, is something you display when everyone is watching. Character is what you show when no one is. It's easy to see that Ms. Montoya has embraced both definitions and translated them to everyday life.

ISAIAH BUSTAMANTE, Capital (Class 4A) --

An aspiring student in the medical field, this Capital senior draws inspiration from challenging himself by never taking the easy way out. His class schedule? As tough as anyone's. His commitments? A three-sport star, he has served as a monitor for the Special Olympics, delivered food for Santa Fe's poor and needy, been an altar boy and volunteered for numerous community and school projects. There's no doubt that Isaiah relishes at challenge because it's those trying times that makes him tougher. It made him an easy choice as team captain for this year's Jaguars basketball team. "He is to be commended for his dedication, positive attitude and work ethic," said Melanie Romero, Capital's directing principal. He's also a player that's easy to root for because he subscribes to the notion that representing one's school and family come before anything else. He takes pride in who he is and, according to those around him, the people who count on him the most. "In the end, life is not about basketball, but basketball has taught me many things that I have learned to be able to apply on and off the court," Bustamante said.

HAYDEN SCHAAP, Cibola (Class 5A) --

There were numerous times when this Cougars' name appeared in the headlines and his face was shown on the late-night TV highlight reels. That's what happens when you're the starting quarterback for one of the state's biggest high schools. He led the Cougars to city titles at the freshman and junior varsity levels and was one of the state's top players in his two years at the varsity level. What most people never saw was the person Hayden was off the field. He was recently installed as an Eagle Scout with the Boy Scouts. He is an accomplished pianist. He is dedicated to his church and his religious beliefs. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. His attention to detail and ability to reason and think critically made him an exemplary student (4.4 GPA). His dedication to helping others made him a beloved and respected figure on Albuquerque's busy West Side. "He represents himself, his family and his school in a way that can make all teachers, coaches and administrators proud," said Cibola teacher Matt George. "He is the epitome of what the NMAA stands for in looking for a student who represents the ideals of this great organization."

DEBORAH ARGUELLAS, Highland (Class 5A) --

You think you're busy? Try walking in this Hornet's shoes. Deborah has been a standout in soccer, basketball and swimming, earning seven varsity letters, as well as being named to the all-academic team in District 2-4A in each discipline. Aside from that she is a regular blood donor, she was the junior class president and is the seniors' VP, was an officer in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, she helped organize Highland's 2009 homecoming activities, ran the school's talent show and winter ball, has orchestrated one off-campus charitable organization each year while in high school, has been a part of the

Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce's youth leadership council and, as if that's not enough, she is a member of the poetry slam team. Oh, and her grades (4.02 GPA) have made her a National Honor Society member. In what little spare time she has, she has worked as a lifeguard and as a child care provider. She points to her family for providing her with such a solid foundation. "I learned that there is more to life than sports, and that being a well-rounded human being helps me keep everything in perspective," she says. What she's done with those lessons is nothing short of remarkable.

Dan & Lucille Wood/Gray Gladiator

ALLI VICTORIA RICHARDS, Texico (Class 2A)

The bowlegged kid everyone worried about all those years ago turned out just fine, thank you. Victoria has been an all-state performer in track, volleyball and basketball. She's been an honor roll student and busy participant in a laundry list of extracurricular activities. She's also volunteered in service of her church, donated time to helping the homeless and aided in the clean-up in local neighborhoods. Part of her time was dedicated to the school's charitable volleyball match this fall, one that raised funds for the Susan G. Koman Foundation and its fight to find a cure for cancer. There's also her exemplary work in the classroom. Her 4.3 cumulative GPA ranks her near the top of her graduating class. She'll enter college with 45 hours of credit thanks to the numerous AP classes she has taken at Texico. "She will definitely have a positive influence on any university she attends," said Texico principal and athletic director Keith Durham. "She will be extremely missed when she graduates in May." Adds Victoria about those early days: "My parents were often worried about me because I ran funny and was very bowlegged. I didn't really like running, but when the opportunity to compete came about, you can bet that I ran my little heart out."

DANIEL AMADO PADRON, Deming (Class 4A) --

As an athlete, Daniel was an accomplished wrestler (he reached the medalists' podium four times) and football player (all-state as a senior). Off the field he was pretty good, too. He carried a 4.27 GPA and was an officer in the student government. He ranked 12th in his class of 344 in terms of academic prowess. If anything, he understands the importance of teamwork. "I have learned life lessons such as dedication, being on time, teamwork and also hard work," he said. "All of those qualities are very important in life because when you get a job or when you are in college, you're going to need all of those to do your job well." Daniel's coaches loved his work ethic. Be it practice or in games, he went full speed. He also embraced the role as leader, doing whatever he could to push his teammates and friends to reach the ultimate goal. Away from the game, Daniel became a loyal friend to classmate Derek Apodaca shortly after Apodaca was diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome. "Derek is now a totally normal 12th grader and I give Danny a lot of credit for the man Derek has turned into," says Apodaca's mother, Jodi.

CHRISTOPHER SANCHEZ, Santa Rosa (Class 2A) --

A sterling 3.74 GPA, frequent appearances on the honor roll and boxes of sports trophies

and plaques only tell part of the story for this Lions senior. Teachers regard him as trustworthy and honest. Coaches hail him as a fierce competitor with a never-say-die approach. Teammates consider him a leader. "I truly believe that Christopher has the intellectual and personal integrity, promptness, conscientiousness and trustworthiness to be successful in anything he wants to accomplish," says Santa Rosa English teacher Gene Timothy. He has been recognized by the National Honor Society and Future Farmers of America. He led the football team in tackles, was an all-tournament selection in baseball as a junior and was a state champion in the shot put in track & field. He was also team captain in football and baseball. "While a member of the NHS, Chris helped in community activities such as Thanksgiving food drives, blood drives and also was on the honor guard," says Santa Rosa football coach and science teacher Mario Trujillo. "Chris has proven himself to be a very hard working, dedicated individual. He has been a positive influence on his peers and is a pleasure to be around."

Activities

ELIZABETH FINLEY, Los Lunas (Class 5A) --

For some high school students, sports is a way to break away from the norm. For students like Elizabeth, the Future Farmers of America and student government were her avenues to success. "When I was younger, I was incredibly shy and would cry at the thought of public speaking," she says. "Everything changed in high school when I became a member of the student council and my school's FFA chapter." What she learned is the limitless potential of her untapped leadership skills. And of her own ability to experience the world around her. "She is smart, enjoys learning and has terrific follow-through," says Chris O'Conner, one of the several people who nominated Elizabeth for the Foundation scholarship. "This is true of both classroom and extracurricular settings." Once a shy kid who shunned the spotlight, she is now often the first person to volunteer her services. She has also carried that ambition to the classroom. Elizabeth carries a 3.93 GPA and ranks 11th in her senior class of 282 students. "I wanted to be involved and I quickly learned that the only way to do so was to put myself out there and let people know that I was willing to learn and work," she says.

BENJAMIN PEARCE, Tatum (Class 1A) --

Science fair, student council, Future Farmers, church groups and sports. That's the public persona of this Tatum senior. The 4.25 GPA, the college credits, the hours volunteering, the time spent helping others -- that's the side not many people know about. And that's the side that makes Benjamin worthy of the Foundation's attention. His school has taken notice, too. He was given the Herb Pior Fighting Heart Award as both a sophomore and junior for his contributions to sports through strong moral character, sportsmanship, determination and, of course, teamwork. "It is very unusual for an underclassman to receive this award," says Tatum superintendent Buddy Little. "It is very likely he will be recognized as a senior." His participation with the FFA came on three different levels, earning him state and national recognition. In sports, he played for the Coyotes' second-place finishes in eight man and he lettered in track and basketball. "Ben is a true and unselfish leader for our teams and our school," says Tatum athletic director and head football coach Gary Durham.

El Richards

MADISON FLETCHER, Manzano (Class 5A)

We've all heard the saying, "There's no 'I' in the word 'team'." This Monarchs senior learned that just a few weeks after joining the cheerleading squad during her freshman year. A gymnast by trade, Madison found part of herself once she was introduced to the team ethos. Learning to depend on others to complete a task helped her realize that the same lesson applies to life. In that regard, she became the well-rounded, polished student she is today. She has mastered time management, done well in class (she ranks 22nd in a class of 422) and adapted to performing in social and group settings. "Cheerleading has truly enriched the person I am today and has taught me numerous lessons that I will continue to learn from not just now, but also for the rest of my life," Madison says. She has volunteered with the Big Sisters organization and is a member of the National Honors Society. She has carried the highest GPA on the cheer squad two straight years and dedicates part of her free time to tutoring at the school and lending a hand at local charitable organizations and homeless shelters.

BERNADETTE SANCHEZ, Goddard (Class 4A) --

Setting goals and soaring past them is something this Rockets dancer has gotten used to. As a freshman, Bernadette wanted to graduate near the top of her class, wanted to be a part of the school's drill team and wanted to run track. She's done all three -- and then some. A regular honor roll student with a 3.8 GPA, she has lettered in dance since her sophomore year. She also has four years of soccer experience and earned a black belt in karate. And then there's this: she will become the first family member in a generation to attend college. She plans to major in aerospace engineering and become an Air Force pilot upon graduation. The outlook wasn't always so rosy, however. Bernadette was cut during dance team tryouts her freshman year. Undeterred, she enrolled at a local dance studio and came back more driven than ever as a sophomore. She made the team and became a leader soon thereafter. She says participating in extracurricular events has given her a purpose in life. "People look up to me because I do not give up and I try my very best," she says. "If it wasn't for my fellow teammates, I would not be the person I am today."

Extraordinary

JUSTYNE McMATH, Fort Sumner (Class 1A) --

By this Foxes' calculations, she has shed 4.2 liters of sweat during 2,088 hours of practice and 578 hours of competitions during her time as a varsity athlete at her high school. And that doesn't include the time she has dedicated to the student council, Future Farmers and everything else in between. Oh, and the hours she spent rehabbing torn ACLs in both knees. It was through those brutal rehab periods that she found the inner strength to move ahead, to not give up. "I can boldly walk into competitions knowing I have put enough time and practice to make me successful," she says. "Yet I know any success that does come my way is not through my own actions." She points to teachers, coaches, family and friends for keeping her on the right path. She eventually became a Wendy's High School Heisman state finalist after leading the Foxes to the volleyball state title last fall and the track team to the championship as a junior. Her 4.14 GPA puts

her at the top of her graduating class and her college entrance exams open the door for several opportunities at the next level.

LINDA ESQUIBEL, West Las Vegas (Class 3A) --

The Esquibel family never had much. It started with a one-bedroom house where the bathroom was little more than a shack in the back yard. The one thing the Esquibels did have, however, was the foresight to go beyond the boundaries of a high school education. Salomon Esquibel and his wife have had 10 kids. Linda is No. 9. The eight siblings who came before her all went to college. She will be the ninth. Some day her younger brother, Moses (11), will make it double-digits.

"It's a pretty nice story, you know?" says James Esquibel, Linda's older brother and her track coach at West Las Vegas. "Our parents never let us settle for anything. All of us always knew we were going to try something else after high school."

When Linda attends the University of New Mexico next fall, she will pursue a degree in physical therapy. A sampling of the career paths taken by her older brothers and sisters: dentistry, civil engineering, forestry, human resources, social services and electrical engineering.

"My parents always emphasized doing school work ahead of sports because they believed that going to college was better for you long-term than playing a game," Linda says. One of the top students in her class, Linda is also an accomplished athlete. She won the triple jump at last year's state track meet and has excelled in basketball, cross country and volleyball; she also hopes to carry the Lady Dons to a state title in basketball.

"My brother, he never lets me slack off," Esquibel says. "He knows the ability I have and, besides, he's usually the one giving me a ride home after practice."

Away from it all Linda is the quintessential honor student. She loves to sing and recently helped the West Las Vegas choir squad finish second in a state competition.

"She is truly a role model at this school," says West teacher Richard Tripp. "She had an influence over other kids. You look at her younger brother. When they told her about getting this scholarship, he said he wanted to grow up to be just like his big sister." Esquibel is considering a shot at walking on at UNM in either track or hoops. If it doesn't work out, it only means another chapter of her life is ready to open. After all, sticking to the academic game plan is more important than anything else at this point.

"I like playing sports, but that's not what it's about," she says. "Right now it's important, but going to college is what I really want. I've got a lot of people in my family to look up to."

And as for the Esquibel house, Saloman eventually added onto that one-room house. With the help of his kids, the family has built a home that serves as more than just a place to eat, sleep and grow up. It's an unofficial launching pad to college success. The kids

who walk through the home's front door are seemingly destined for a higher calling.
"Our parents, they always kind of pushed us in the right direction," James Esquibel says.
"Now I'm glad Linda's a part of that."