



# New Mexico Activities Association Student Spotlight

## Tularosa's Hooten Balances Athletics and Activities

*By Jason Groves*

Gracie Hooten's accomplishments in athletics, academics and other extracurricular activities are common in rural New Mexico, but are nonetheless impressive.

Hooten is a 4.0 student, a Future Farmers of America officer and a three-sport athlete at Tularosa High School.

"It's common for a kid to play multiple sports and be involved in multiple organizations since we are so small," said Tularosa volleyball coach Kyndra Montes, who has coached Hooten since she transferred from Carrizozo two years ago. "We all work together and if things do interfere, we let the kids decide what they want to do."

Montes said Hooten's FFA responsibilities don't overlap often during volleyball season. If they do, Montes is married to the school's FFA advisor, Chase Montes. It did this season for a leadership conference and they were able to work it out so that Hooten could fulfill her obligations the best she could.

"She balances everything and the one time there was a conflict, she told me with plenty of time in advance," Kyndra Montes said. "She does a great job, is involved in so much and gives 100 percent to everything she does."

Hooten was a middle hitter for Tularosa this season as a junior, helping Tularosa reach the Class 3A quarterfinals.

She placed fourth in the triple jump last year in the Class 3A track meet and she also plays basketball for the Tularosa girls' basketball team, which is off to a 7-0 start this season, including a championship at the Santa Rosa tournament.

"I really don't have a favorite sport or activity," Hooten said. "I enjoy volleyball, basketball, track and the FFA too. That's why I keep myself well-rounded so that I can do both. Nobody likes for you to miss practice or games, but sometimes it happens."

Hooten has played volleyball and basketball since the sixth grade, steadily adding responsibility throughout her career.

"You just have to set your priorities and keep everything straight," Hooten said. "School comes first and then whatever sport is in season, you have to practice and work hard. I have to put my time in for FFA too and show my leadership skills there."

Hooten's interest in FFA and 4-H were natural considering she was raised on her family's cattle ranch between Carrizozo and Tularosa.

"She helps based on the time of the year," said Hooten's father, Robbie Hooten. "She helps us when we brand and with feeding and keeping up with the water. I think it got her into FFA. Our lifestyle influenced some of the things that she likes to do."



Hooten is an FFA officer and was in the 4-H horse judging competition last January in Denver.

“We competed at the national level for 4-H and ended up receiving second,” Hooten said. “Competing at the state level is not as intense. At the national level, there is more competition and there are more classes that you have to judge.” Judging livestock is just the end product of a long process that Hooten enjoys repeating each year, both at home and in competition.

“Being around livestock every day, I have always been interested in showing and judging,” Hooten said. “You have a bond with the animals then you go show them and do the best you can before you sell them and start to raise another one.”

Hooten will soon add National Honor Society to her list of accomplishments but she is leaving her options open.

“I don’t know what I want to do yet,” Hooten said. “I have been thinking about it but I have no clue right now.”