



New Mexico Activities Association Student Spotlight

Sanders Emerges as a Leader for the Surprising Aztec Girls' Basketball Team

By Karl Schneider

The Aztec girls' basketball team is in unfamiliar territory.

The Lady Tigers are off to a 19-7 start and opened play in District 1-5A with wins over longtime rivals Farmington and Piedra Vista.

Aztec has clinched its first winning season since the 2008-2009 season and helping the Lady Tigers along the way has been Adrianna Sanders.

The 5-foot-8 senior post was named a team captain this season after serving as captain on the Aztec girls' soccer team in the fall. She's not known for lighting up the scoring column or taking over in late-game situations, but what sets her apart is her ability to lead the team, which comes by no accident.

Sanders has attended numerous leadership camps and seminars as a part of student council and this year she is serving as the president of the New Mexico Association of Student Councils. During the summer, she attended a conference in Indianapolis for the National Federation of High Schools, which makes high school regulations for athletics and activities.

"I was not a very strong-willed middle-schooler. That's when I started going to student council conferences," Sanders said. "I was pretty timid and I didn't know how to take charge of things. Being able to work with people and learning how to interact with people is something student council has really helped me to do. Being able to translate that onto the field and onto the court to help people when they are struggling, as well as build momentum together, is something I learned along the way. I'm still working on it, but it has definitely contributed."

Along with being a three-sport athlete — Sanders also runs track for the Aztec girls' team, which has won three straight state titles — and her work in student council, she carries a cumulative grade point average of 4.23.

As a part of Aztec's hot start to the basketball season, the Lady Tigers claimed the title at the Garden Grove Tournament in California, in late December.

Sanders said the experience in California was unlike any other she has had on a basketball court. The Lady Tigers went into the tournament not knowing what to expect; they simply stepped on the court and played.

"It was basketball in an entirely different sense, because we didn't know what we were walking into," she said. "You needed to get out there and play your heart out and I really liked that because there wasn't any preconceived notion of what the game was supposed to be. It was what we made it."

Aztec carried the momentum from the trip to the West Coast back to New Mexico, and during the team's home tourna-



ment, the Lady Tigers knocked off Los Alamos 40-38, which was just the second loss of the season for the Lady Hilltoppers at the time. Aztec's ability to hang on down the stretch is something that has been missing in recent seasons.

"This year we've really been focused on being more consistent and playing strong defense. It's been defense, defense and more defense. That's what we've been working on, and keeping our cool," Sanders said. "Last year, we were a first half team. We'd win the first half, then lose our cool and lose games, so we've been working on being more consistent through the entire game."

The win over Los Alamos, a high-caliber team in 5A, could be a big factor in the seeding for the state tournament, if Aztec keeps up its winning ways.

With just a handful of games left on the regular season schedule, Aztec is in position to host a first round game in the 5A tournament, a rarity for the program.

"That would be us starting a new tradition," Sanders said of potentially hosting a state tournament game. "We've been talking a lot about how our team doesn't have a vast tradition. No one around the state expects us to be a good basketball team. We want people to know we're here to play basketball and play well. We're here to compete and I think being able to host a first round game would be amazing."