

New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight

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Padilla Manages School, Work and Four Sports like a Pro

By Tyler Dunkel, NMAA Sports Information Director

High school athletic seasons are broken up into Fall, Winter and Spring. Even the most disciplined student-athletes find it challenging to compete in just one sport per season but West Las Vegas senior Jennika Padilla competes in four sports and is thinking about adding an unprecedented fifth to her resume.

The debate of multi-sport athletes versus sport specializing is a hot topic in today's youth athletics landscape. But, for Padilla, she believes competing in multiple sports is something that has helped her through high school.

"Being a four-sport athlete has a few advantages. First, it helped me stay physically fit which is important to me. Secondly, because I'm a student-athlete, meaning school comes first, it really helped me stay focused on my time management. I always ask for my work early so I can complete it on time. I think it really takes someone who is disciplined."

Padilla was the only four-sport letter winner, male or female, for West Las Vegas during the 2015-16 school year. She continued by saying, "All of these sports are different, track and tennis are more individual, while basketball and volleyball are team sports. They also work different muscles and have different mental challenges, which has made me a better all-around athlete both physically and mentally. I think it is important for athletes to try different sports, regardless of ability."

Padilla hasn't done it alone, though, crediting the support she has received from her mother, Monica, as another reason why she has been able to balance such a busy schedule.

"My mom is my rock. She has always supported me in everything I do, both in athletics and in the classroom. When I was younger, she pushed me to be active and I think that has really helped me find that balance to be successful in all areas of my life. She is my rock and I could not have done any of this without her. I'm very grateful."

You wouldn't think that spending all her time on the playing field or court would allow her much time to keep up with her schoolwork but Padilla currently holds a 4.11 GPA and is ranked in the top-10 in her class. She explains that school is her first priority.

"I take my grades very seriously. School comes before anything. I know that my education will take me further in life than athletics. My plan is to go into the medical field as either a pharmacist or an anesthesiologist."

In addition to taking in the entire high school experience, Padilla is also learning the inner workings of the West Las Vegas School District as well. She currently works at the district office, which she says gives her a very broad view from the administration side.



"I really enjoy working at the West Las Vegas Central Office. I assist with purchase orders, requisitions, faxing and filing."

She continued by saying, "When I first started working at the central office, I was amazed at the amount of paperwork that comes through. I was seeing PO after PO, for uniforms, buses, repairs, etc. I never realized how much money it takes to run a school district and the process of getting things done. It has given me a different perspective on how things work and I think I grasp the process better than some people. It has been a great learning experience for me and I have learned to appreciate the jobs the central office does for us as students."

Playing volleyball in the fall, basketball in the winter and running track & field and playing tennis in the spring, while maintaining a GPA over 4.0 and holding down a job would be too much for most high school seniors. Now, add in the possibility of a fifth sport in the fall (cross country), and it is hard to imagine how she would get it all done. Padilla says it is an interesting thought and is really considering the opportunity.

"I have never tried to play two sports in the fall but the idea of running cross country is very intriguing to me. The longest distance I have ever run is the 800-meter but I think I would be willing to give it a try."

One thing is for sure, if Jennika Padilla decides to add a fifth sport on top of her already busy life, she will give it her best effort, not only for herself but for her school.