

New Mexico Activities Association

Student-Athlete Spotlight

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Mescalero Apache's Aguilar Looks for Big Success Ahead

By Tyler Dunkel, NMAA Sports Information Director

Ariel Aguilar is goal oriented. She has a vision for every aspect of her life, from sports to school to dreams of becoming an actress. It is certain that the Mescalero Apache senior is poised to finish her final months as a high school student with the same drive, determination and desire to achieve as she always has approached her interscholastic experience.

The oldest of four children, Aguilar grew up in Las Cruces, then moved to Ruidoso and attended Ruidoso Public Schools as a seventh grader before transferring to Mescalero Apache before the start of her junior year. During her sophomore year in Ruidoso, Aguilar was inducted into the National Honor Society and is currently a member of the National Society of Student Scholars. She also serves as Student Body Vice-President this year.

Aguilar participates in her favorite sport, volleyball, and her family's favorite sport of basketball.

"In my family, basketball is number one. We love basketball but I have grown to love volleyball even more. Even though I'm better at basketball, I still enjoy volleyball more. I just haven't had as much training in volleyball. I started playing volleyball in Ruidoso, so when we moved here I continued to play. When my family found out that volleyball was my first love it was a little surprising but they have supported me in whatever I do."

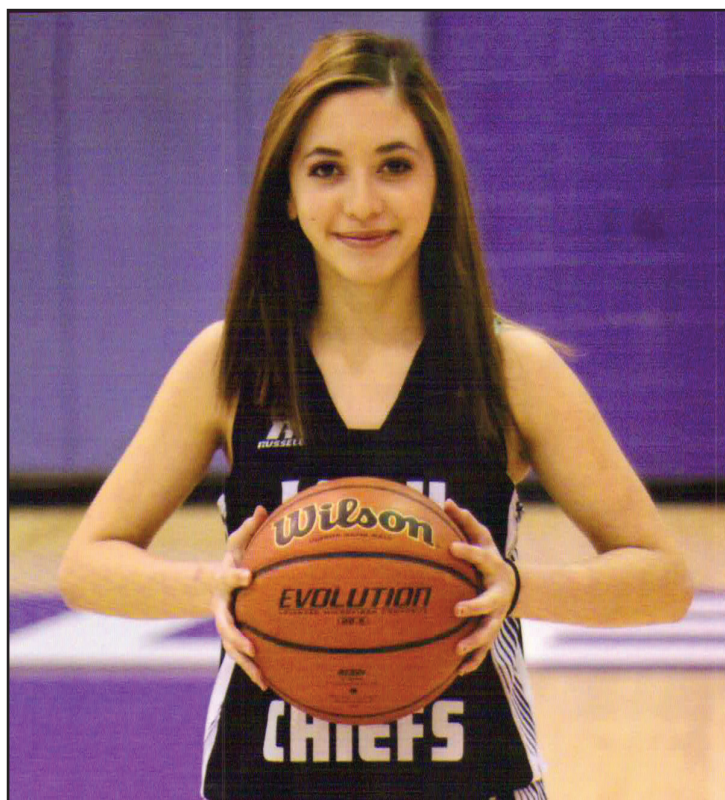
She continued by saying, "Basketball is an exciting game. I love the fact that at any point the game can change, whether you are up by 10 or down by 10. It keeps you on your toes and helps you be a better decision maker."

Over her high school career, Aguilar has earned Academic All-District honors in all sports she has played and was named to the All-District team in basketball in her sophomore and junior years. Last year she received honorable mention in volleyball. Aguilar was named the school's Chemistry Student of the Year in 2015-16, earning a laptop for her hard work.

Currently, Aguilar ranks first in her class, with a 4.2 GPA. Most seniors with her academic resume usually need two or three classes to graduate and this is true for Aguilar as well. Instead of taking the minimum class load and having an easy senior year, she has her eyes set on a bigger prize or maybe two.

"In general, family, academics and then sports is how I look at the importance of things in my life. My parents have always pushed the importance of academics. My senior year, all I needed was three classes and I could have taken half days but it was important to me to keep my GPA up, so I decided to take a full load this year so I can graduate number one in my class."

"My goal is to be Valedictorian. I don't want to jinx it but that is my goal. My parents told me that if I graduated Valedictorian they would buy me a brand new car, so that is an incentive for me to keep working hard." She laughingly continued, "I



have my eye on a sports car.”

In addition to her busy sports schedule and holding down the top ranking in her class, Aguilar is also trilingual, speaking English, Spanish and Apache. Although she feels that she is far from fluent in Spanish and Apache, she sees it as a unique quality to possess.

“When I was younger, we lived in Las Cruces and I was in a bilingual class until fifth grade. The class was in English one week and the next week in Spanish. Then I moved to Ruidoso and continued to take a foreign language class. When I moved to Mescalero, I started learning Apache.”

She continued by saying, “Apache is my tribal language. I wouldn’t say I’m fluent but I do my best to try and learn as much as I can from my elders. I know more Spanish than Apache though.”

Aguilar is very proud of her Apache heritage. Her mother, Elena Artiaga, is the Chief Financial Officer at the Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino and her uncle is the Vice-President of the tribe. As she explains, both are very involved with Native American students, helping them to further their education after high school.

“The Inn of the Mountain Gods and the tribe are very involved with the Native American students in all three schools in the areas (Tularosa, Ruidoso and Mescalero Apache). One thing my uncle was involved in was making sure each Native American who graduates high school receives a laptop. Then, students with the highest GPA’s at all three schools receive an iPad as well. So, they are very involved with trying to get Native American students to continue their education after high school. They also help with funding for school and scholarships. They do all of this so that one day we will hopefully come back to the community and be an influence to others.”

After high school, Aguilar plans to continue her education at New Mexico State University but has dreams of the big stage and becoming an actress or possibly going into the nutrition field.

“For the longest time, I’ve really wanted to be an actress. I know it sounds crazy but that is my dream. Like sports, it’s an art that you really need to devote the time to. When I was at Ruidoso, they had theater but I was too involved in sports to devote the time. So maybe I’ll take acting classes in college and see where it takes me. I have also thought about a career in the nutrition field.”

Whether she makes it big on Broadway or returns to the community of Mescalero as a nutritionist, Aguilar seems destined for success.