

New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight



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No Shortage of Work Ethic for Strickland

by Kevin Wilson

For somebody who feeds off the energy of a crowd, Clovis High senior Joelle Strickland spends most of her 18-hour days doing work nobody sees.

It's 5:40 p.m., and the work begins for Joelle Strickland. Well, technically, work has begun a few times today already. There was the 6:30 a.m. cardio workout with her Wildcaddette dance troupe teammates that none of the football stadium crowd will see. Then she started her school morning with the rest of her CHS classmates. She started her afternoon at Clovis Community College with dual credit classes and a work-study job, and ended just in time to start work again.

The work started 10 minutes ago ... 5:30 p.m. practice, with about two dozen girls in black dance pants and purple T-shirts with first names on the back in block letters.

It's a familiar scene for Strickland, who is in her sixth year as a dance team member and her third as a captain. She first led the Marshall Middle School team, then the Clovis High Freshman Academy dancers the following year. After two years of being one of the dancers at CHS, she's back in the captain role.

"It's a very young squad," said Strickland, who noted 18 new dancers on this year's 28-member squad. "It was most of the same girls for the (previous) two years. Now it's a whole new experience."

The light from the skylights is just as bright as the fluorescent lights on the ceiling. The wooden bleachers are empty except for gear bags and cell phones sporadically going off with text messages that won't be read until 7 p.m.

Routine choreographer Bree Monroe is motivating the Wildcaddettes by telling them if they have the routine down after this practice, there won't be a Thursday practice. Monroe sometimes has to cheat and check the back of a shirt to know who she's addressing.

She knows Strickland, though.

"Whose phone are we using to record tonight?" Monroe asks Strickland, while navigating the bleacher full of devices. Without a word, Strickland points to an iPhone in a white-and-pink case.



Before she picks up the phone, Monroe teaches moves with her “1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8” counts and a different motion in sync with each number called. She then steps aside to a fraction of the two dozen girls at practice for specific instruction.

“Make sure your arm goes behind you,” Monroe says, while showing proper arm position. “I do not want to see your palm ... at all.”

At the conclusion of each instruction, Monroe asks if everybody is clear, inviting a chorus of “Yes, ma’am.” But once Monroe steps away to turn on the routine music, there’s almost always a “Joelle?” coming from a teammate. She turns back, clears up the confusion and gets it done so everybody is in position before the first note.

Monroe knows that happens. She’s a 2010 CHS grad and a former Wildcaddette herself. She knows girls will tell the coach they get something when they clearly don’t, but she also knows they feel comfortable going to the captain for those times.

“They know she’s going to understand the question and take the time to properly answer it,” Monroe stated. Before the next practice, Strickland will have seen the video and talked with coaches about possible trouble areas. They’ll repeat the process until they get it right for the next performance, usually coinciding with a Wildcat sporting event.

Strickland, however, will go back home to finish up homework and try to get to bed before midnight ... all to get up around 5:40 a.m. tomorrow and do the same routine again.

She said it’s worth all of the work for those few minutes in the spotlight.

“I love the feeling of performing; I love the energy you feel from the crowd,” Strickland said. “You feed off their excitement and it’s nice.”

Strickland also performs in the CHS choir and has been in the school system’s honor society since seventh grade. Yep, she’s also captain -- well, president -- of the CHS Honor Society.

Sharon Dorman, an assistant coach with the Wildcaddettes, said the team works hard because their captain shows them the way.

“She practices what she preaches,” Dorman said. “She leads by example.”

Once the Wildcaddettes’ biggest performance ends - the state spirit festival in March, Strickland will start mapping out her future. Her 4.16 GPA should get her into most colleges, but she is looking into Northern Arizona University, which longtime boyfriend and fellow Clovis senior Roland Chavez is considering for college football.

Strickland, a dance teacher at Clovis’ High Pointe Ballet, plans to major in education and be a physical education and health teacher. She is the middle child of three from Joe and Jana Strickland, who came to Clovis about 17 years ago for teaching positions. Jana is a kindergarten teacher, while Joe has moved into administration and is the district’s federal programs director.