

# New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight



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## Leekela Excited to Give Back

By Tyler Dunkel, NMAA Sports Information Director

Zuni High School senior Alexis Leekela has never been one to back down from a challenge. She takes every opportunity to make a difference not only in her own life but in the lives of those around her.

A three-sport athlete for the Thunderbirds, Leekela is much more than a student-athlete. In fact, she is also involved in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program at Zuni and is a big sister to a young girl named Heidi.

“I was introduced to Big Brothers/Big Sisters through Coach Carroll. I thought it was a great opportunity to give back, so I filled out an application and was selected to be a mentor to a young lady named Heidi. Heidi and I are a lot alike. We both enjoy sports and we really hit it off from the start.”

She continued by saying, “The whole experience has been very rewarding. I remember asking her who her role model was in sports and she said it was me. I was a little surprised but at the same time, it made me realize I was making an impact in her life.”

Leekela would be the first to tell you that playing sports has been a major part of her development as a person, playing volleyball, basketball and softball for the Thunderbirds. Her dad, Anson, was a softball player himself and his experiences have really helped Leekela be a better ball player.

“I used to run cross country in middle school and I enjoyed running but then my friends started to play volleyball so I decided to give it a try. I miss running sometimes but my experience playing volleyball has been great.”

She continued by saying, “I started playing basketball in fifth grade and have excelled but softball was the sport I have enjoyed the most, probably because of the connection I have with my dad. He was a fast pitch softball player, so I have been able to lean on him over the years for advice.”

To follow in her dad’s footsteps on the softball field has meant a lot to Leekela but his support has been the one thing she has cherished the most.

“It makes me really proud that I have been able to follow in my dad’s footsteps. It has been helpful to have him there to watch me and give me tips on my game. However, I would say his encouragement has meant the most to me.”

Leekela has lived in Zuni her entire life and says that life has had its ups and downs but that she is proud to be a part of the community.

“Living in Zuni my whole life has been good at times and at



times it has been hard. Over the last few years I have lost people close to me and those experiences have helped me realize how I should live my life.”

She continued by saying, “It means a lot to wear the Zuni name across my jersey. It means that I’m representing my community, my family and my fellow students. I’m proud to be a Thunderbird and I give everything I have on the court or in the classroom to make sure that I’m doing my part to help Zuni be at the top.”

So, how does she keep it all together, with sports, school and other activities? Leekela explains that her support system at home and school have been a huge part in helping her maintain her focus.

“I feel I have a good grip on my time management with school and sports. I think having a good support system has been the key for me. My family has always been there and given me every opportunity to succeed. My education has always been important and my parents have pushed me to strive for success not only in sports I play but in the classroom as well.”

Following graduation in May, most kids are just looking forward to the college experience but Leekela has her sights set on much more.

“I’m planning on attending New Mexico State University and double majoring in chemical engineering and pediatric nursing. I hope to one day be a pediatric nurse and work at the UNM Hospital or return to Zuni and help my community as a nurse. To have the opportunity to bless my community that has supported and blessed me my entire life would be a challenge I would love to tackle and make a difference.”

Regardless of the future, you can bet that Leekela will meet whatever challenges lie ahead, as she tries to make a difference in the lives of people around her.