



New Mexico Activities Association Student Spotlight

Barrera Exemplifies a True Panther

By Jeff Jackson

The pride and enjoyment of participating in interscholastic athletics is often seen as the most important and rewarding part of the experience.

That attitude is best manifested by the Panthers' Brianna Barrera, who, though only a freshman, has played guard on the girls' basketball team, has run the hurdles and sprinting events in track and field and also played on the volleyball team.

Even though her teams have not experienced a great deal of success in terms of wins and losses, Brianna embraces the larger picture that lies beyond the scoreboard. Being part of a team and competing has built character in her and her teammates, she said, especially with the recently concluded volleyball campaign.

"It actually does. It kind of lets me know how lucky I am to have a team this year," she said. "I wasn't too worried about winning. I was just worried about having a team. I guess throughout the whole sports year it's been hard. You just have to deal with it and try hard."

The Panthers did not win a game this season in volleyball in 13 tries. Last season they played only a handful of games before the remainder of the games were forfeited because the team did not have enough players. This season, at least, they met the minimum of six players.

Moreover, Lake Arthur's girls' basketball team, also with six players, has not won a game since February 2013, a string of 43 losses, including this season's opener on December 1.

None of this has dampened Brianna's spirit. In fact, it has made her more determined and focused.

"It gives us a lot of hope for the years ahead of us," she said with a lot of optimism. "Being a young team, we all take leadership in helping each other and helping the younger girls. We just have to teach them to get better and hopefully they'll have fun with it."

Brianna was in the same position as a middle school student playing with the older girls. One of those players was her sister, Jessica, who now is a sophomore at New Mexico State University studying sports medicine.

"She's definitely been one of my inspirations," Brianna said. "Seeing her play really motivated me. Watching her play has made me the athlete I am today."

As an eighth grader, Brianna qualified for the 2015 state track meet in the 100-meter hurdles and the 400-meter run. That experience also instilled her with character, she said, because she had to rely on herself and improve as an individual with no teammates for support.

"It's fun, but you do sometimes wish you had some help. I



really like it as an individual, but you can't rely on anybody else," she said. "I did pretty well. It was a big meet. I tried my best. It was a good opportunity to go to state at such a young age. It was kind of disappointing (not to finish high) but knowing I did my best, I'm pretty satisfied with that."

Whereas track and field is almost completely an individual activity and basketball often has one player rise above others, volleyball is the sport she enjoys most because it embodies teamwork above other sports.

"Mostly because it is a team effort. You can't play with just one person. In basketball, sometimes all you need is one star player. In volleyball, you need more of a team effort," she said.

Brianna also is a standout at Lake Arthur in the classroom as one of the school's students in a college prep program, Upward Bound.

"I'm an A and B student. It's hard to keep up with your grades sometimes but you just have to push through it in order to play sports," she said.