



SUN SPORTS

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Elks Continue Early-Season Stampede

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By Ari Levin
SUN Sports Writer

Inside the Pojoaque Valley High School gymnasium, banners commemorate the successes of each of the sports programs.

Some are heavily decorated, such as the state-title-winning girls basketball banner listing many district championships. The football banner, meanwhile, is completely empty. No state championships, no championship appearances, no district titles.

This year, the Elks look to change that, and they appear well on their way after two dominant victories. On Aug. 27, the Elks (2-0) had just a few difficulties in a dominant 64-12 win over Santa Fe Indian School (1-1) in their second straight mercy-rule victory.

Throughout the season, Pojoaque Valley High School football coach Pat Mares has said the only team that can beat them is themselves. Though it sounds cliché, Mares was proven right. The only two scores they let up were on a kick return and a fumble.

See 'Mares' on page B2



Pojoaque Valley High School senior Dominic Esquivel (30) made easy work of the Santa Fe Indian School defense. Through two games, the Elks look like the team to beat in the region, and possibly the best in school history.

(SUNfoto by Ari Levin)

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Star RB Honors Father, Returns from Colorado

By Ari Levin
SUN Sports Writer

Cars in the parking lot of Pojoaque Valley High School at a football game are decorated with "Do It 4 Esqui." The team's green practice jerseys all read "Esqui" on the back.

The commemoration is in honor of Daniel Esquivel, one of the creators of the Pojoaque Crush youth football program, and the brother-in-law of Elks coach Pat Mares. "Esqui" died in October 2020 at the age of 36.

But in terms of the Valley's football team, the biggest direct impact might be the newfound presence of senior running back Dominic Esquivel, Daniel's son, who is back with the Elks after being away for eight years.

"I grew up with them, I played with them, and I came back to play with them," the younger Esquivel said. "It's exactly what I hoped for."

Through two weeks, Esquivel has ran for over 500 yards and 10

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Española (0-2) 0
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Youth Cheer Team Honored by City

By Ari Levin
SUN Sports Writer

The Espaňola Spartans cheer team is back for 2021, giving youth cheerleaders a chance to perform and compete in Espaňola.

Spartans coach Alisha Duran, who also coaches cheer at Espaňola Elementary School, is excited to get back after having any chances to perform last year. Duran coaches alongside her daughter, Destiny.

España Mayor Javier Sanchez and the City Council presented the Spartans cheer team with a certificate of excellence at an Aug. 24 ceremony in recognition of their participation and performance at the county backpack giveaway.

The Spartans, ages four to 12, cheer alongside the youth football team in a Northern New Mexico football league. They also participate in competitions in the area. Duran said there are 38 girls on the team.

The start of the season was pushed back from late August until into September due to the pandemic, Duran said, and they started practicing in July. This year's competitions are scheduled for Oct. 4 and a championship Oct. 24.

"If the whole season is going to be canceled once again, I just wanted them to feel a little bit special," Duran said. "They were not able to participate in anything last year. I know a lot of them were really bummed out."

They did not get to perform during 2020 at all due to the pandemic.

Duran said she is proud of the

See 'Spartans' on page B6

Elkettes Start with Easy Win

By Ari Levin
SUN Sports Writer

The Pojoaque Valley High School volleyball team started a new and perhaps unusual tradition this year.

Normally, when announcing the team over public address, each member would grab a t-shirt or something similar to toss into the crowd. Last year, with heavy crowd restrictions due to COVID-19 (when fans were allowed into the gymnasium, none were permitted in the lower section) that did not happen.

So for this fall, they have adapted - when each player is announced, she runs to team coach Joe Rodriguez, who hands her a Pojoaque-themed face mask, and tosses it into the crowd. The masks do not fly quite as smoothly as a balled-up shirt would, but a fun tradition marks the unusual times they play through.

"It seemed fitting now that everyone has to wear a mask," Rodriguez said. "We were going to throw out food, but we can't eat in here. We just try to get the crowd involved."

The Elkettes started the year Aug. 26 with a sweep (25-17, 25-8, 25-22) over Sandia Prep, looking like a strong and polished team.

"I think it's really exciting," said senior setter Taylor Quintana. "I'm honestly so glad to be playing with all my friends again, and get the feel of the ball again."

Sandia Prep won the state championship in 3A (Pojoaque plays a classification higher in 4A) in the spring 2021 season, not losing a set in the entire state tournament, and brought back much of the same talent.

"We're young, I had my younger ones really step up tonight," Rodriguez said. "We're not very big. We pass very well, and we serve very well."

In the first set, Pojoaque let up two aces to start the match. Then, they won six straight points, and continued to pick up steam.

The Elks took a big lead early in set two, and stretched it even further with four straight aces by eighth grader Larissa Rodriguez - part of the Elklettes' 12 aces on the night.

The third set was much closer, with the Elks trailing 21-18 before rattling off five straight points to close out the match 25-22.

Quintana at setter, in her first time at the position, was consistently in rhythm throughout the match, especially with junior middle hitter Sonya Quintana (no relation.)

Sonya Quintana led the Elklettes with eight kills in the match and three blocks. Taylor Quintana had 19 assists in the match as a strong three-set performance.

"It's really exhilarating," Tay-

See 'Española' on page B6 (right)

Sundevil Volleyball Brings out the Brooms

By Ari Levin
SUN Sports Writer

The Espaňola Valley High School volleyball team perhaps misses Cameron Conners.

The senior played in the spring season with Espaňola for basketball and volleyball, as her school, Santa Fe Indian School, opted out of the sports season. Now, though, Conners can return to play with the Lady Braves.

"It's nice to be back in my home gym and be with my team," Conners said.

But it was Conners' old team that came out on top when the two faced, despite the senior's

best efforts.

After limping through the first week, the Sundevils (3-1) have hit a stride with two straight three-set wins over Cottonwood Classical Prep (0-2) and Santa Fe Indian School (0-2).

"That was the best they played, by far, all year," Romero said after the most recent win. "I'm so happy, I almost don't know what to say."

Aug. 26 the Sundevils swept Cottonwood at home, 25-16, 25-11, 25-12 with 16 team aces.

For their win two days later at

See 'España' on page B6 (left)

Bobcats Prepare for Saturday's Home Opener

By Ari Levin
SUN Sports Writer

Sprinklers are running nearly 24/7 at the McCurdy Charter School football field.

More work is still to be done before the field is ready for its first football game. Areas on the field need to be patched, grass still needs to be watered, and then lines need to be painted. But the work will be done before Saturday, and if all goes according to plan, the field will

look like new.

Saturday, the Bobcats (0-1) will play at their home field for the first time since Sept. 29, 2018 against Questa (0-0).

Their last home win - not counting a Questa forfeit at the end of the 2018 season - was in November 2017. The McCurdy faithful have only seen their team win a game at home one time since 2016.

McCurdy coach Robert Nerevez said he is less concerned

about home or away games, but Gasca said it means a lot to the team to be able to play at home, and get on the field.

"Everybody was missing it, and you could tell we were all missing it the way we come to practice ready to play," Gasca said. "It's an amazing feeling for everyone."

Questa will make their season debut this weekend

"We don't know what they

See 'Gasca' on page B3



The McCurdy Charter School offensive line practices setups during a Monday practice ahead of their second game of the season Saturday.

(SUNfoto by Ari Levin)

Football

2021 POJOAQUE VALLEY FOOTBALL

8/20  vs. Shiprock W, 52-0	8/27  vs. S.F. Indian W, 64-12	9/3  at Cuba 7 p.m.	9/10  vs. Highland 7 p.m.	9/17  vs. Thoreau 7 p.m. (HC)	9/24  at Gallup 7 p.m.	10/2  vs. Hope Christ. 1 p.m.	10/15  at Moriarty 7 p.m.	10/22  vs. Taos 7 p.m.	10/29  at Espanola 7 p.m.
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Esquibel Always been a "Great RB"

Continued from B1

touchdowns, every bit the dominant star as advertised.

"He brings energy, power, motivation, willingness to win," Mares said of his nephew. "That competitive spirit that we need. He's a hard worker in the weight room, on the field. We have a lot of players like that right now, and he just helps that driving factor."

Esquibel, first cousins with quarterback Adam Pacheco, grew up in Pojoaque, and was part of the start of the Pojoaque youth football program when he was five years old with his father and with Mares. But a few years later, Esquibel and his family up and moved to Colorado.

He said the move was to provide more football opportunities in Colorado than he could find in New Mexico. He played multiple years at Columbine High School primarily as a linebacker.

Dominic said his father's death, five days before the start of his junior season, was the impetus to moving back. Esquibel moved to New Mexico in May, and decided to play one last year with his childhood friends.

"All the kids I grew up with, I just wanted to play with them one more year," Esquibel said.

Mares said they wanted to sign Esquibel up for the track season, but the plans and paperwork fell through. He knew right away what Esquibel would bring to the football team, even after eight years.

"He's always been a heck of a running back and a middle linebacker," Mares said. "To have a great running back with speed and power, you can't ask for more."

After the game against Santa Fe Indian School - in which Esquibel ran for 370 yards and six touchdowns - all members of the first youth football team came together for a group picture. That included nearly all the team's seniors, and Mares as coach.

"We just jumped in there and started coaching these boys since they were young," Mares said. "And I kind of moved with them."

Esquibel said he does not have plans for next year, but hopes to play in college.

"Hopefully they come knocking on his door," Mares said.



(SUNfoto by Ari Levin)

Pojoaque Valley High School senior Jacob Martinez runs in a touchdown after a reverse in Pojoaque's win over Santa Fe Indian School. Elks coach Pat Mares maintained that he thought his receiving corps was the best in the state.

Hutton

2x6

NCRTD

3x6

Mares Wants to Limit Mental Errors

Continued from B1

ble deep in their own territory, and the only drives on which they did not score ended with fumbles.

Perhaps the night can be best summed up by the play immediately following Pojoaque's first touchdown, when D'sean Martinez fumbled the hold for an extra-point attempt, then took a handoff from the kicker and ran untouched into the end-zone for a 2-point conversion.

"Our goal this week was to eliminate the mental mistakes," Mares said. "We had very few last week, and we want to continue to move on that and move forward with that. This week we had a few too many."

The game narrowly avoided the lightning delays that hit all across the state, with storms staying just far enough away for the game to continue despite some light rain in the second quarter and strong winds.

Pojoaque's passing game through Adam Pacheco did not have the best night. Pacheco finished 4-10 for 90 yards and one touchdown - a 10-yard pass to senior Jose Salazar (though he also had a 68-yard touchdown pass to Martinez called back with a penalty.) Pacheco struggled with a heavy wind that picked up right as the game started, starting toward the east end zone and moving to a side-

to-side wind.

The winds were so bad that the fire unit stationed at the game had to untangle the American flag hanging from the ladder before they could leave at the end of the game.

Instead, Pojoaque kept the ball on the ground, and it was Dominic Esquibel's night. The senior running back ran for 370 yards and six touchdowns, along with four 2-point conversions to give him 44 points in the game.

"I've trained my butt off for this," Esquibel said.

On the second play of the game, Pojoaque picked up a fumble on the 12-yard line. Three plays later, Esquibel was in the end zone for the first time. On the next drive, he ran 51 yards in two plays. Pojoaque led 24-0 after the first quarter, and continued that immediately with another easy touchdown drive.

Then, with a perfect kickoff to the one-yard line, the Braves could not get out of the end zone and the Elks took two more points on the safety, and were two scores away from potentially getting to an early finish.

But on the next drive, despite starting on the 34, two penalties brought them back and they fumbled at the 11-yard line, and soon after Santa Fe Indian scored their first points. Esquibel immediately answered with a 71-yard touchdown run, but on the kickoff return

Fenyx Morningdove ran 94 yards for a score, dashing hopes of a half-time mercy rule, going into the locker room at 50-12.

Two more touchdowns by Esquibel ended the game in the third quarter, but Mares stressed that the mistakes they made would be harmful against stronger opponents.

"We want to compete for the district title, that's our main focus right now," Mares said. "We need to accomplish, week to week, our baby goals. And we can't be making those mental mistakes against better teams."

Mares said the crowd at the game, with bleachers full of students and fans alike, was bigger than he had ever seen.

"Honestly, I don't think I ever thought it was going to be like this," Esquibel said. "To see this is, I think it's important to us. It plays a big role."

Pojoaque's next game is against another lower classification opponent, but their first time on the road as they travel to Cuba on Friday.

But at 2-0, even facing weaker opponents, the Elks look unstoppable, and hope to carry that momentum through the year.

"I think it's going to be a very special group," Esquibel said. "It's big for me, because Pojoaque's never been (district champion) ever. And I think we're on the road there. Definitely."

Cybermesa

1x4

Century Bank

5 x 4.5

Gasca Leads Bobcats as Senior Quarterback

Continued from B1

look like, so we're going in to that game kind of blind," Nevarez said. "Basically, we focus on the mistakes from last week. I'm confident enough that if we clean up what we can control, we'll be fine."

Nevarez said they found in the second half of the first game that they would have more success.

The Bobcats now come under the leadership of senior quarterback Marcos Gasca. Gasca said it "feels amazing" to play competitively after years away from football.

"He's the kind of kid that you can't keep off the field," Nevarez said of his quarterback. "He's a dynamic player, both the quarterback and free safety positions. But more importantly, because we have such a young team, that senior leadership."

Through most of the summer, Gasca had planned to focus on basketball and not risk a football injury.

"It's just my senior year, and I wanted to do every sport I nor-

mally do," Gasca said. "Friends encouraged me to stay going. It's my senior year, so why not do all the sports again?"

Junior Markus Martinez was expected to be the team's starting quarterback. But shortly before the season, he opted to focus on baseball and left the football team.

"Big shoes to fill," Nevarez said.

Nevarez said 25 players traveled to their first game, a respectable number for a small school, especially one with basically a fresh start to the football program.

McCurdy lost their first game of the season on Aug. 27, 28-0 at New Mexico Military Institute.

"We did better than I thought we were going to do at first," Gasca said. "Just the way everybody stepped up and played. They all played their hardest. We all played as a team."

In a scary first-quarter moment, senior Jericho Miera was hit on a kickoff return that broke his femur. The game was stopped for 30 minutes as an ambulance drove onto the field.

Nevarez said Miera had suc-



McCurdy Charter School's Marcos Gasca (blue shirt) tosses a pass during practice drills after McCurdy's first game. Gasca's late addition to the team could lead to major success for the Bobcats with his strong arm and leadership as one of the few seniors.

cessful surgery in Roswell, and is recovering and expected to return to Española this week.

The Bobcats fell down 14-0 early, and were down 21-0 nine seconds into the second. But from there, they settled down. Though they did not score, they held the Colts to just seven more points the rest of the game.

Nevarez said at first they were nervous about their first game, and "starstruck" about being in a bigger stadium with so many spectators and cadets watching.

"They started to realize, 'Hey,

we can run with these guys,'" Nevarez said. "We can run just as hard, we can run just as fast."

Nevarez said he was impressed by the team's resiliency in the second half. Gasca injured his shoulder (but is ready to go for this weekend) and freshman Jeremaya Roybal stepped in at quarterback, and was effective leading a running game.

"The amount of confidence that Jeremaya got in himself, and the confidence that I have in him, I have no problem with him going in," Nevarez said.

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

DOMINIC ESQUIBEL

Pojoaque Valley Football

13 Car., 370 Yds., 6 TDs.



over the season.

Esquibel has been the biggest part of an Elks team that has outscored opponents 116-12 through two games as they look to win the school's first district title.

SPORTS ON DECK

Wednesday, Sept. 1
Volleyball



Espanola Valley



Laguna-Acoma

After losing to the Hawks to start the year, Espanola looks for revenge against a 2A team that is stronger than it appears. If the Sundevils' last week is to believed, this will be an easier win.

Thursday, Sept. 2
Football



Socorro



Espanola Valley

The Sundevils looked strong week one, but cratered in their second game. Socorro will be another tough challenge as an early 3A title contender. Espanola needs to be strong to prove they are improved from last year.

Friday, Sept. 3
Football



Navajo Prep



Escalante

Both teams come in to the game having only beaten opponents by 50-plus and looking for a real contest. On paper, Navajo Prep should be better as having been traditionally strong at a higher classification, but the Tierra Amarilla crowd is sure to come out in force.

Saturday, Sept. 4
Volleyball



Pojoaque Valley



Moriarty Tournament

The Elkettes were disappointed with last season's result, and the loss of a core group of seniors hurts the team. But based on early results, that may not much matter. This weekend will give more insight to their strength.

Saturday, Sept. 4
Football



Questa



McCurdy

McCurdy's home debut is sure to excite the local faithful. After last week's shutout loss, the Bobcats want a win against a district opponent in a non-district game.

GCU

3x11

RGS

3x11

Española (3-1) 26-25-28
SF Indian (0-2) 24-19-26

Continued from B1

Santa Fe Indian, the blocking game stepped up, including six blocks by junior Robyn Garcia.

"I feel powerful up there," Garcia said. "The faces on those girls, when you block them, they look crushed. And it's a good feeling, I won't lie."

Romero said she can leave Garcia alone as a coach because of her athleticism.

The Sundevils fell behind early in the match, and trailed 14-20 in the first set. But they came back to take the lead, and won the set 26-24.

Española again trailed in the second set at 16-18 before winning seven straight points and nine of 10 to win the set 25-19.

Set three was back-and-forth the whole time. Senior Daphne Talamantes had three aces on multiple extended service runs, and twice the Sundevils fought off set point before taking the set and match at 28-26.

Seniors Roxane DeLeon and

Española and Pojoaque Sweep the Week

Sandia (0-2) 17-8-22
Pojoaque (1-0) 25-25-25

Daphne Talamantes tied for the team lead with six kills.

"The practice and the attitude that we've been having lately, it's helped a lot," Garcia said. "We're starting to communicate a lot more, and kind of connect and click as a team. And it just feels nice that we're finally starting to get that chemistry."

Earlier, the freshman team lost 25-13, 21-25, 15-6. The junior varsity Sundevils won 25-10, 11-25, 15-13.

Connors said for her, the biggest challenges are in playing with teammates who were away from the game for a year, and adjusting to a more complex system run by Lady Braves coach Brian Gurule.

Española has a chance to avenge their one defeat of the year on Wednesday (9/1) against Laguna-Acoma. The Lady Braves will have a chance for a rematch in Española Oct. 9, giving Connors a chance to play at Edward Medina Gymnasium once more.



(SUNfoto by Ari Levin)

Española Valley High School senior Roxane DeLeon attacks
 a double block in the Sundevils' sweep of Santa Fe Indian School. With two straight three-set wins, Española looks on track to contend for the district championship and possibly more.

Continued from B1

Ior Quintana said. "We get really excited when Sonya gets down on that ball. It's a really good feeling."

The game boasted a relatively small but vocal audience - especially from many members of the football team who stayed in the gymnasium after their practice let out. Their loud chants, especially in the third set, gave Pojoaque a new energy late in the match.

"A lot of students don't usually come to our games," Taylor Quintana said. "It's nice to have that support from our school."

"That's something you can't recreate," Rodriguez said, and they would return the favor at the football game the next day. "Their energy, their voice. It did help. The girls appreciated that, too."

Taylor Quintana said the teamwork and dedication was the biggest part of their early success.

Pojoaque is rebounding from

the loss of a talented senior class, including setter Ayana Aguirre and middle blocker Alicia Quintana (Sonya's older sister) among others.

"Honestly, that kept me up at night," Rodriguez said of finding their replacements, and the lack of success they had for their senior year. "You don't. That's every year. You know what, you compete with what you have."

The younger Pojoaque teams similarly rolled through their opponents in sweeps. The 'C' team won 25-3, 25-10, and the junior varsity team was victorious 25-20, 25-9.

The Elkettes continued their season Tuesday evening against Robertson, another successful 3A program as the state champions in 2019, with the game not completed by press deadline. Pojoaque next plays Friday at the Moriarty Tournament - and Rodriguez is excited for them to compete in tournaments throughout September.

RIO ARRIBA SPORTS ROUNDUP

Bernalillo 54, Española 0

A week after nearly pulling an upset win against Los Alamos, the Sundevils were outmatched on the road at Bernalillo Aug. 27 to fall to 0-2.

Española trailed 41-0 at halftime, and the Spartans scored two more touchdowns to finish the game.

The Sundevils let up three touchdowns through the air and three on the ground in addition to a kick return touchdown and interception touchdown. The Spartans sacked Española seven times in the game.

Española has a chance to get a win Friday at home but will need to be strong against Socorro. The Warriors are 2-0 and coming off a 51-6 win against Miyamura.

Escalante 56, Tohatchi 6

The Thomas Royston era (and the post-Dusty Giles era) got off to a roaring start Aug. 27 with a dominant victory.

The Lobos scored 14 points in the first quarter and 36 in the second, and scored again late in the third quarter to

end the game with a 50-point lead.

Senior quarterback Isaac Archuleta was 3-for-7 passing for 40 yards and one touchdown, while the Lobos made their biggest impact on the ground.

The quarterback ran 16 times for 179 yards and three touchdowns, while sophomore Trey Archuleta ran 12 times for another 126 yards and three scores.

Senior Ethan Stone also recovered a fumble for a touchdown, one of five eight fumble recoveries in the game.

The Lobos will look to continue their hot streak Friday night against a more challenging opponent in their first home game in nearly two years. Navajo Prep sits at 2-0 this year, starting the year with 53-0 and 52-0 victories.

Logan 60, Dulce 0

The 8-man Hawks team fell in their first game of the year on the road. The Longhorns put on 30 points in the first and second quarters each.

The next game for the Hawks comes Friday against Melrose, with both teams looking for a win.

Waldorf 3, McCurdy 0

The McCurdy Bobcats volleyball team started the year slow at the Wolf Tournament. McCurdy finished in fourth place after a pair of three-set losses to host Santa Fe Waldorf (25-22, 22-9, 25-17) and to Monte Del Sol later in the afternoon Aug. 28 (25-13, 25-22, 25-22).

The next scheduled game against McCurdy comes against Pecos at home on Sept. 7.

Escalante 3, Tohatchi 0

The Lady Lobos started their year with a win on the court, sweeping the Cougars 26-24, 25-23, 25-20.

The win marks a triumph in Escalante's first match since 2019, after they opted out of the 2020-21 season. A talented group faced with Santa Fe Indian School Tuesday after press deadline, and next will play Sept. 7 at Cuba.

Questa 3, Dulce 1

In their first hosted sports match in

nearly 18 months, Dulce volleyball fell at home to Questa, 25-18, 17-25, 25-23, 25-10. With new head coach Selenarose Hammond, the historic Hawks program looks to rebound at Mesa Vista Tuesday, and will play at Piedra Vista Friday.

Pecos 3, Mesa Vista 2

The Lady Trojans started their year with a five-set home loss to Pecos, dropping the fifth set 15-11.

Mesa Vista played Tuesday after press deadline against Dulce, and will play Sept. 7 at Coronado, and look to improve on last year's 3-7 record.

Pojoaque 4, St. Mike's 2

The Elks took revenge over the Horseman after an Aug. 23 loss by the same score. On Aug. 28 at the Taos Tournament, the Elks came on top for the win, and defeated Taos 7-6 the day prior. The Elks move to 2-2 this year, and host Robertson in their next match Sept. 7.

Spartans Cheer Back for 2021

Continued from B1

way that everyone shows up to practice regularly, multiple times per week. Duran herself has to balance being the team coach with a job at the hospital.

"I'm just really, really proud of them," Duran said.

For this year, Duran hopes that they are able to cheer at all seven football games, and attend competitions in October.

Councilor Peggy Sue Martinez was part of the group that gave the Spartans the certificate, saying how disciplined and organized the team was.

"For me, it makes me happy to see that we did something," Duran said. "We put on a show. It just makes me happy to see how far they've come."

SD

2x10

Church Directory

4x10