



# SUN SPORTS

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2022 Basketball State Tournament Team Previews and Brackets Inside

## Escalante Wins Double District Titles

### Lady Lobos Capture Top Overall Seed

By Ari Levin  
SUN Sports Writer

When Peñasco's girls played in Tierra Amarilla on Feb. 12, they limited Escalante to just 30 points in an upset win — coach Stanford Salazar said the team shot about 10 percent on field goal attempts.

When the two teams rematched for the district championship two weeks later, the Lady Lobos hit that mark in the second quarter; they scored 23 in just the first quarter.

"We just came in hungrier from last time," said Escalante junior Cipriana Garcia. "We wanted it that much more."

That big start propelled Escalante (20-4) to a 57-34 victory to take the District 5-2A title over Peñasco in the Feb. 26 championship game.

"We're excited to take that one more step to what we want, what we've been working for," said Garcia, who after the game was named the district player of the year.

Peñasco (18-9) defeated Mesa Vista (18-8) in the semifinal on Feb. 25.

The gymnasium was seemingly at capacity, and added more and more noise after every basket and turnover. Emma Maestas hit two 3-pointers back-to-back to give Escalante a 10-1 lead after three minutes, and they led by 13 halfway through the first quarter.

Escalante managed to hold Peñasco's three leading scorers — Analise MacAuley, Martina Tafoya and Rochelle Lopez — to just three combined field goals in the game.



Escalante High School girls basketball players, including Jayden Macias (far left), Cipriana Garcia, Brycelyn Martinez and Emma Maestas, celebrate winning a district championship.

Brycelyn Martinez scored 17 points to lead the way in the victory.

Peñasco's strong second half ended with a disappointing three losses in their final five games; but their strength of schedule was still strong enough to earn a top-four seed.

"We just weren't getting rattled," said Peñasco coach Mandy Montoya. "We started running our offense, hitting the open players, swinging the ball around."

The Lady Panthers will host Capitan (17-8) in the first round,

and if they advance will see the winner between No. 5 Rehoboth Christian and No. 12 Mescalero Apache.

"We know that we can play with anybody," Montoya said. "Everybody goes into the state tournament zero and zero."

Escalante also looks to the state tournament (see team capsules) led by Garcia as the top seed.

"I put in a lot of work, so it's believing that it's kind of paying off," Garcia said of her award. "But it doesn't really mean nothing right now. We want blue."



Escalante High School boys basketball players Ethan Stone (left) and Trey Archuleta (12) cheer after a basket during the team's Feb. 26 win over McCurdy in the district championship.

By Ari Levin  
SUN Sports Writer

After a slow start to the year, everything seemed to change for the McCurdy Bobcats boys basketball team.

"We're not even talking a 180," said Isaac Royston, coach of an Escalante boys team that saw McCurdy four times over the season. "We're talking probably a 360, the way that they came on. Compared to where we've seen them (in early January, at the Northern Rio Grande Tournament), from there to now, it's like night and day."

But the turnaround was not enough to capture a district title, as Escalante (21-5) continued a district winning streak with an 82-52 rout of McCurdy (13-12) on Feb. 26 in the District 5-2A tournament championship.

"We're just really happy," said senior Santiago Rivas. "We were in a little funk for a minute, but we pulled together and we fought as a team, and just trusted in each other."

McCurdy, as the No. 2 seed, reached the final in the tournament's ladder format with a home win over Peñasco (16-12) — who had beaten Questa (4-20) and Mora (12-15) to reach

that game — the day prior, 68-59.

The Bobcats came within three points of Escalante in an earlier matchup; but their final battle was an entirely different story.

Rivas stole the show with a dominant 37-point performance, and after the game was named the district player of the year.

"He gives the whole team confidence," said senior Gilbert Martinez, who had eight assists in the win. "We go on runs, that's how we win games."

McCurdy kept the score close, leading at the end of the first quarter, but Escalante pulled away with a 26-point second quarter. Up by 12 to start the fourth, the Lobos added 38 points in the final frame to turn a strong win into a blowout as the Bobcats ran out of energy.

"Once we started working the ball inside and working the short little jumpers, that's what got us going," Royston said. "But I think mostly our defense is what got us going."

The win, ending the season on an eight-game win streak, and 14 straight against New Mexico opponents, proved to be enough to earn Escalante the No. 4 seed, where they can host their first two games at home (see team capsules).



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## Dulce Boys Take District Second Place



Dulce High School senior Santiago Largo dives for a loose ball during the team's Feb. 24 win over Laguna-Acoma. Largo was the team's second-leading scorer two years ago, and after the school did not play any sports in 2020-21, he has continued to be a top contributor.

By Ari Levin  
SUN Sports Writer

Dulce basketball had a tough road throughout the season, after sitting out all of 2020-21, but they came back strong for a good season, finishing with a second-place finish in the district and qualifying for state.

"Pretty much, they're still going through it," said Petago coach Erik Petago. "They're playing for one another still. They're just trying to go out on a high note."

The Hawks took down Laguna-Acoma (2-21) at home in the District 1-2A semifinal, scoring 60 points despite no player getting more than 10.

"Emotions are pretty high, pretty hype," said senior and team captain DeAundre Gonzales.

The semifinal game was the last time the team's seniors would play on their home court, finishing the district tournament on the road and having to travel through the state tournament.

"I enjoyed playing here, enjoyed the fans loving our team," Gonzales said. "It's pretty tough."

In the district championship, the Hawks lost for the third time this season to defending state champion Rehoboth Christian (21-3) 54-44.

Dulce finishes their season with a strong 15-8 record, and a

second-place finish in the district. But that was only enough to earn them a No. 12 seed in the state tournament and a trip to No. 5 Menaul (19-4) in the first round on Saturday.

Six of Dulce's eight losses came against teams seeded in the top four of the 2A bracket — the only others were early in the season to 3A's Santa Fe Indian School, and Mesa Vista back when the Trojans were the top

ranked team.

But despite winning eight of nine games in one stretch, a weaker district, with two of the four teams at 4-17 and 2-21 records, may have hurt their rankings.

"Just ready to put in work," Gonzales said. "Ready to be the underdogs. We have a pretty good team, solid team, that can really do the job. And win the whole thing."

### SUNDEVILS WIN DISTRICT TITLE



Española Valley High School boys basketball defeated Taos in the district tournament final 57-54 on the road on Feb. 26. They won two of their three matchups against the Tigers, splitting the regular season series (with both teams winning on the road) and taking down Taos in the district championship. The Sundevils had defeated Pojoaque Valley on Feb. 24, 66-45, to advance to the final. Española Valley will be the No. 3 seed in the state tournament, with their first game coming against Los Alamos.

See full story on Page B3

(SUNfoto by Ari Levin)



McCurdy Charter School freshman Amanda Tafoya (12) takes a layup during a Feb. 22 game against Mesa Vista.

## Lady Bobcats Compete through Tough Season

By Ari Levin  
SUN Sports Writer

Despite finishing with a 2-21 record, the McCurdy Charter School girls basketball team continued to find bright spots through the season.

"I wasn't expecting the Disney finish, a fairy tale ending,"

said coach Robert Nevarez. "I'm just glad that they played hard, and they have something to look forward to next year."

The Bobcats' season came to an end with a loss at Mesa Vista on Feb. 22, where despite holding the Lady Trojans to just

See 'McCurdy' on page B3

## Basketball

**ATHLETE OF THE WEEK****SANTIAGO RIVAS****ESCALANTE BOYS BASKETBALL****37 POINTS, 4 REB., 2 STL.**

The Escalante senior received his first collegiate offer, from NAIA school Ave Maria University in southern Florida. Then, he proved worthy of the offer with a dominant performance in the district title game, scoring 16 points in the second quarter alone and adding 14 more in the fourth quarter for good measure. His continued strong play will determine how far the Lobos can go in the state tournament.

**By Ari Levin**  
SUN Sports Writer

District 5-2A player of the year, Santiago Rivas, is one of the top small-school players in the state, averaging 24 points per game. But he is not alone on a Lobos attack that enters on an eight-game win streak.

Senior Chris Luna (pictured) can also have a huge game at any moment as a scorer, and sophomore Lukka Torrez has grown into a great post presence while averaging a double-double, and the team grabs over 15 steals per game.

"Trust in each other and play hard," Rivas said. "That's all we have to do."

The biggest weakness, though, is in the post — no-

body on the team comes even close to 6 feet.

And the list of consistent contributors only goes seven or eight players deep, though that has not appeared to take a toll.

After dominating the district, Escalante grabs a No. 4 seed, and can host two games. Santa Rosa will come in for the first round after struggling through district play, but notching some stronger wins earlier in the season. But with the Lions averaging 55 points allowed, the Lobos could run up the score.

"Another game's not given," coach Isaac Royston said. "Right now, you're one and done. You lose, you go home."

**1 Seed****1 Escalante**at Escalante H.S.  
Fri. (3/4) at 6 p.m.**16 Questa**

8 Menaul

at Menaul H.S.  
Fri. (3/4) at 4:30 p.m.**9 Tatum**

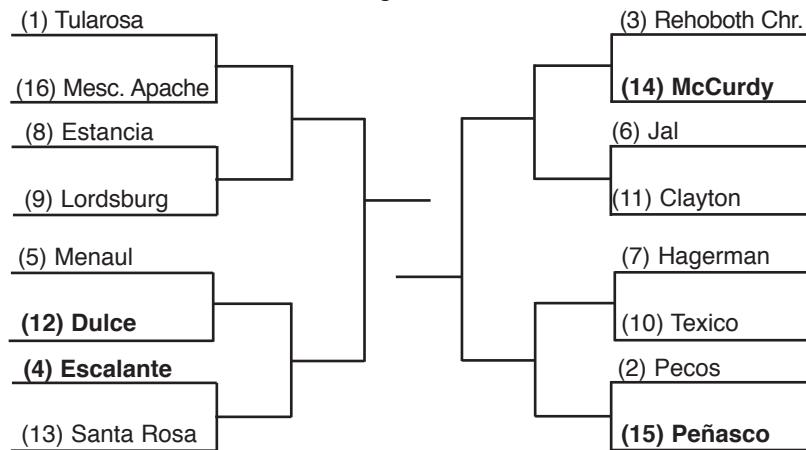
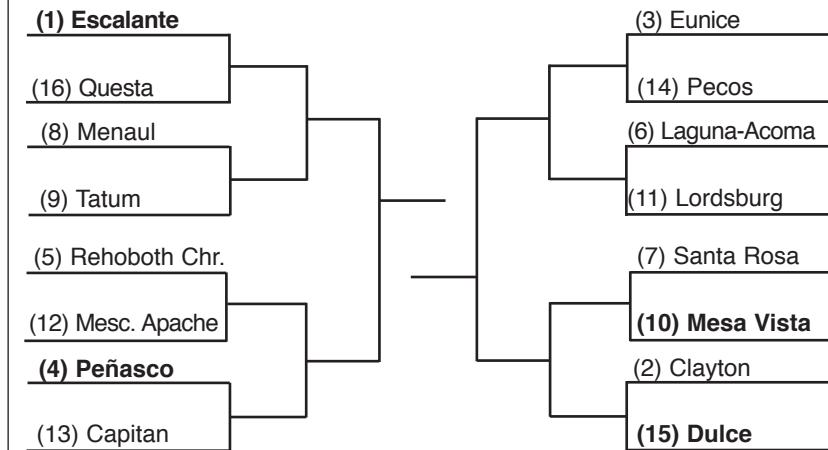
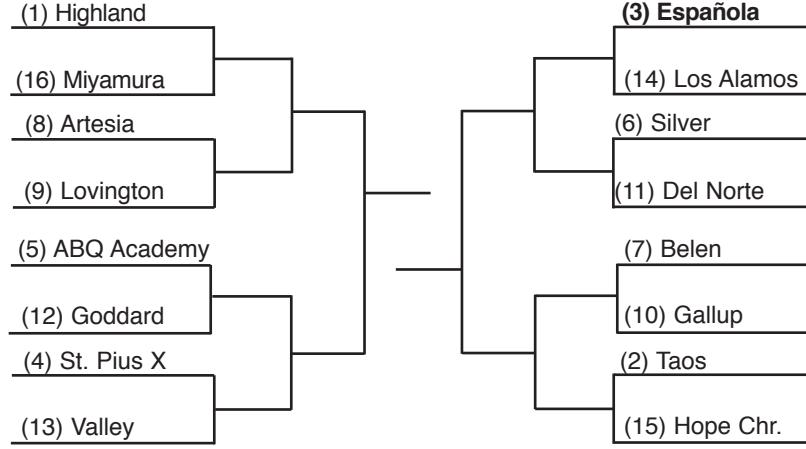
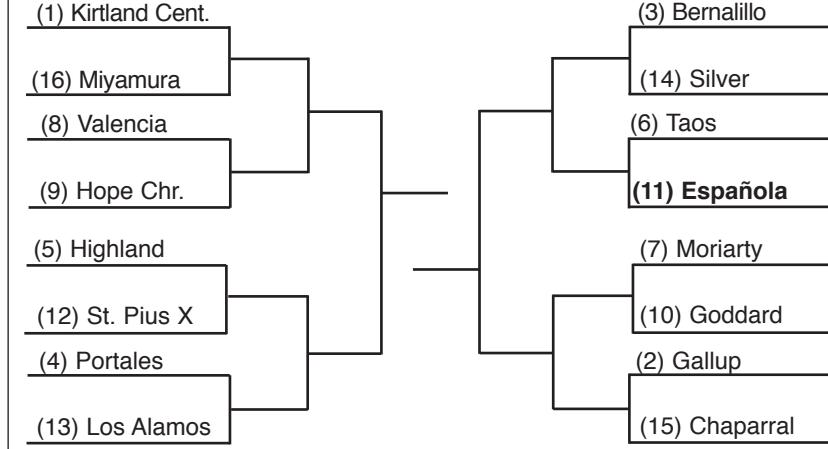
**Friday, March 4, 6 p.m.**



No. 16 Questa vs. No. 1 Escalante

12-12	<b>Record</b>	20-4
5-5	<b>District</b>	9-1
51 ppg	<b>Offense</b>	66 ppg
49 ppg	<b>Defense</b>	40 ppg
8-4, no playoffs	<b>2021</b>	Forfeit in 1st round

Previous Meeting:  
Escalante 65, Questa 49 (2022)

**McCurdy Charter****3 x 4****NMFOG****3 x 4****State Brackets****Boys 2A****Girls 2A****Boys 4A****Girls 4A****Class 2A Boys****Escalante Lobos****4 Seed****5 Menaul**at Menaul H.S.  
Sat. (3/5) at 6 p.m.**12 Dulce****4 Escalante**at Escalante H.S.  
Sat. (3/5) at 5 p.m.**13 Santa Rosa**

**Saturday, March 5, 5 p.m.**



No. 13 Santa Rosa vs.  
No. 4 Escalante

15-13	<b>Record</b>	21-5
1-5	<b>District</b>	10-0
53 ppg	<b>Offense</b>	67 ppg
55 ppg	<b>Defense</b>	50 ppg
7-5, no playoffs	<b>2021</b>	10-2, state QF

Previous Meeting:  
Escalante 55, Santa Rosa 48 (2013)

**Class 2A Girls**  
**Escalante Lady Lobos**

shooting guard Emma Maestas can score from anywhere and will rattle off a string of buckets at any moment.

All four are players that any coach would kill to have. And they go far deeper than that. The Lady Lobos run the floor at full speed, looking to score in transition — which they usually do easily; 20- or even 30-point quarters are not a rarity.

As top seed for the first time in school history, Escalante figures to be the team to beat in The Pit.

"Pressure's always there," Salazar said. "Bullseye's always on your back. Everybody wants to beat number one."

Their road starts at home against Questa, whom they beat twice in the regular season. But to be the last team standing, they will have to live up to sky-high expectations.

"We really don't think about it," Garcia said of the top seed. "We just take it step by step."

**Friday, March 4, 6 p.m.**



No. 16 Questa vs. No. 1 Escalante

12-12	<b>Record</b>	20-4
5-5	<b>District</b>	9-1
51 ppg	<b>Offense</b>	66 ppg
49 ppg	<b>Defense</b>	40 ppg
8-4, no playoffs	<b>2021</b>	Forfeit in 1st round

Previous Meeting:  
Escalante 65, Questa 49 (2022)

**1 Seed****1 Escalante**at Escalante H.S.  
Fri. (3/4) at 6 p.m.**16 Questa**

8 Menaul

at Menaul H.S.  
Fri. (3/4) at 4:30 p.m.**9 Tatum****NMFOG****3 x 4**

## Basketball

# Class 4A Boys

## Española Valley Sundevils

Saturday, March 5, 6 p.m.

No. 14 Los Alamos Hilltoppers vs.  
No. 3 Española Valley Sundevils

15-2	Record	20-7
5-3	District	6-2
53 ppg	Offense	58 ppg
54 ppg	Defense	44 ppg
8-4, no playoffs	2021	10-4, state semifinals

Previous Meeting:  
L.A. 47, Española 40 (2022)

## 3 Española

at Española Valley  
Sat. (3/5) at 6 p.m.

14 Los Alamos

## 6 Silver

at Silver H.S.  
Sat. (3/5) at 4 p.m.

11 Del Norte

By Ari Levin  
SUN Sports Writer

The Sundevils lost just two starters to graduation last year; then they lost one to a preseason injury, one who did not return to the team, and one who was dismissed from the team in December, forcing Española to nearly start from scratch.

Then, the team had to contend with a gymnasium on fire before the season, and then coach Gabe Martinez had to miss key games and practices after long-term COVID-19 complications.

Española had a high point in the season in winning the Al Armendariz Tournament in early December, but will have to hope that wasn't the team's peak.

The biggest strength of the team is its halfcourt defense, as it has been throughout Martinez's tenure. The players know the system on offense and defense.

Outside of an early-season trouncing at Santa Fe High School, all of Española's losses have been within seven

points. They come into the week having won nine of their last 11 games.

"We're doing really well," Martinez said. "We're battle tested. We've played some really good programs."

The scoring has come from the guards, with Jayden "Jet" Martinez, and then Marin Rodriguez (pictured) and Andray Pana as lethal spot shooters.

But the play of posts Joshua Coriz and Melaki Jones will be the difference on how far the Sundevils can advance.

They will get tested right away against No. 14 Los Alamos, who used size to wear down the Sundevils in a February win (Española beat them 67-40 earlier in the season).

And while Martinez will only look one game at a time, the bracket did Española no favors; should they win, their second-round game will be against either No. 6 Silver, who went 25-2, or No. 11 Del Norte, the same team that beat Española in overtime in last season's state semifinal game en route to a championship.

District Tourney Champs

Girls 2-4A: Taos



Girls 5-2A: Escalante



Girls 1-2A: Rehoboth



Boys 2-4A: Española



Boys 5-2A: Escalante



Boys 1-2A: Rehoboth



Boys 7-1A: Legacy



# Sundevils Beat Taos in Grudge Match

By Ari Levin  
SUN Sports Writer

Andray Pana hit two free throws in the final 10 seconds after a defensive stop, icing the game by giving Española a three-point lead, and Taos could not hit a 30-foot shot to tie.

Española (20-7) beat Taos (21-6) 57-54 on Feb. 26 to claim the district tournament title.

Sundevil coach Gabe Martinez said fans from Española took up about one-third of the gymnasium for the game, but had a majority of the energy.

"It almost felt like a home game environment," he said. "It was electric in there."

Española won in Taos in the regular season, 58-55 in early February. Taos returned the favor two weeks later in a 62-56 thriller in Española, claiming the top seed in the district tournament.

The Sundevils had to win at home against Pojoaque in the district semifinal, but had no issues in a 66-45 victory. The Elks reached that point by beating Los Alamos on the road earlier in the week, led by 19 points from Derek Sanchez, and beating Moriarty to start the season.

Martinez said that both Melaki Jones and Joshua Coriz, the team's posts, had big games — a necessity to compete with the size that Taos brings. Both had a double-double, and Coriz was the team's leading scorer with 17 points.

"They really played well for us," Martinez said.

The next day, parents, players and coaches attended a watch party at the high school with a full food spread (including a cake proclaiming their district championship), and watched Española Valley claim the No. 3 seed in the state tournament.

# McCurdy Coach Hopes to Return

Continued from B1

abbreviated Spring 2021 season at 0-9, with seven of the nine losses coming by at least 35 points and none closer than 18.

McCurdy broke through for a win over Monte Del Sol in December, their first since February, 2020. After some closer losses over the season, they came out ahead again on Feb. 16 for a district win, defeating Mora 25-24.

Nevarez pointed out that at one point in that game, the team had an eighth grader and four freshmen on the court. And senior Lorena Pacheco played through a high ankle sprain she had suffered just days earlier from her last game.

"These girls have come so far," Nevarez said. "We went from no wins to two wins. We didn't come close to winning games last year."

McCurdy finished the

# Class 4A Girls

## Española Valley Lady Sundevils



## 11 Seed

Bobs LP

Security Finance

Friday, March 4, 6 p.m.



No. 11 Española Valley at No. 6 Taos

12-14	Record	21-6
4-4	District	8-0
45 ppg	Offense	47 ppg
46 ppg	Defense	38 ppg
13-2,	2021	8-4, no finals

Previous Meeting:  
Taos 50 Española 48 (2022)

NMPA

2 x 4

2 x 4

2 x 4

Bobs LP

2 x 4

Security Finance

2 x 4

## Basketball

**By Ari Levin**  
SUN Sports Writer

The Lady Trojans went through unimaginable tragedy this year.

Their coach, Leonard Torrez, died of COVID-19 at the age of 37 in January. His father, the team's assistant coach, passed away the night before, leaving the team reeling emotionally.

But they managed to keep winning, and continue to fight for their late coaches.

The Lady Trojans won 63-22 over McCurdy and 53-43 over Questa to reach the district semifinal, where they could not quite pull off a road win over Peñasco in a 50-43 loss.

Despite no seniors on the roster, the Trojans were undefeated the first half of the season, starting 9-0 up to January. A February rough patch (and tough schedule) cost the team four of six games.

"We just lost to teams that we shouldn't have, I think we just had really bad games" said point guard Bella Boies,

whose quickness and ball handling as a new player to the team have been a major part of its success.

But they seem to have rebounded to finish strong entering the playoffs.

"I saw it in their eyes," said acting team coach Jesse Boies. "Our focus is back, we're engaged."

Amarissa Quintana and Tana Lopez (pictured) average 13 points, while Anna Pena and Bella Boies both also have the ability for huge outputs on any given night.

While they do not necessarily push the fastest pace every possession, their trademark for success is a run of backcourt steals on multiple possessions, turning into at least 10 points in a minute or two, quickly turning the tide of a game.

Their first-round game against No. 7 Santa Rosa will be on the road despite the teams being essentially tied in ranking criteria. Mesa Vista lost there in January, but were not playing their best at that point. They could very well get through, and even put a scare into No. 2 Clayton.



## Class 2A Girls

### Mesa Vista Lady Trojans

# 10 Seed

Friday, March 4, 6 p.m.



No. 10 Mesa Vista Lady Trojans vs. No. 7 Santa Rosa Lady Lions

18-8	<b>Record</b>	15-10
6-4	<b>District</b>	4-2
56 ppg	<b>Offense</b>	47 ppg
44 ppg	<b>Defense</b>	38 ppg
3-9	<b>2021</b>	4-4

Previous Meeting:  
S.R. 52, M.V. 42 (2022)

## Class 2A Boys

# 12 Seed

### Dulce Hawks

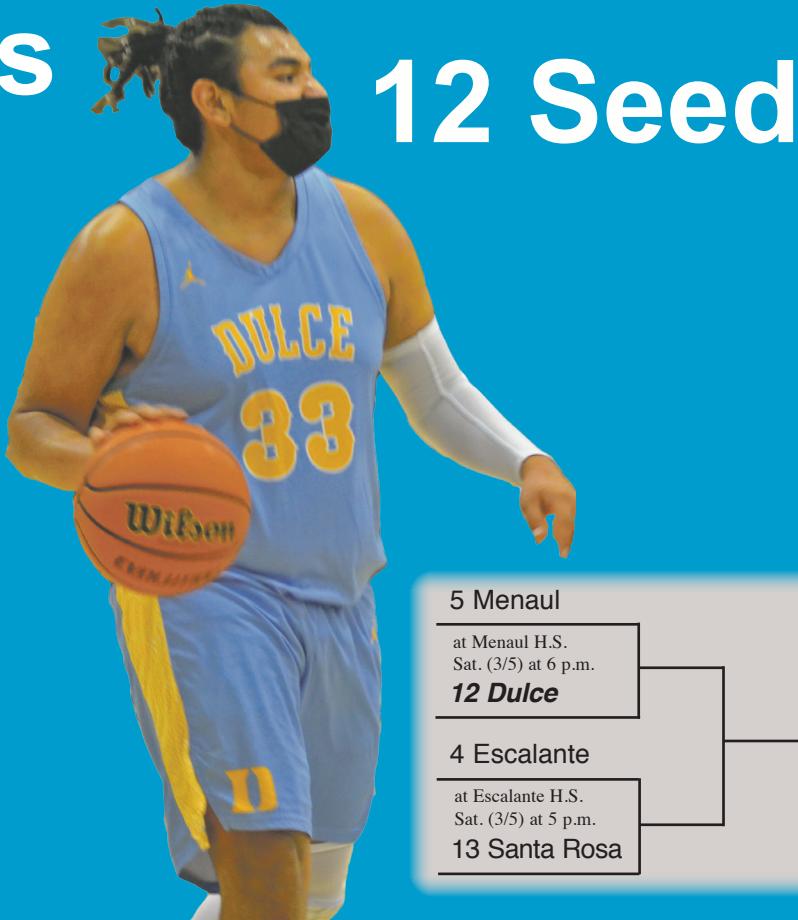
Saturday, March 5, 6 p.m.



No. 12 Dulce vs. No. 5 Menaul

15-8	<b>Record</b>	19-4
4-2	<b>District</b>	9-1
54 ppg	<b>Offense</b>	68 ppg
47 ppg	<b>Defense</b>	43 ppg
N/A	<b>2021</b>	2-2

Previous Meeting:  
Menaul 67, Dulce 64 (2016)



**By Ari Levin**

SUN Sports Writer

The Hawks missed the entire 2020-21 year after the school elected not to participate in any athletics.

But that would be hard to tell from watching the basketball team throughout the year.

A deep and talented roster looks like it has barely missed a step.

"It's been pretty lit," said senior DeAundre Gonzales.

Gonzales, and sophomore Dainien Gonzales are two of the team's top scorers. Santiago Largo (pictured) is a team leader and one of the top post players in the region. And Isaiah Reval is one of multiple players who can get hot and score in droves.

"Just keep playing together, trusting one another," said coach

Erik Petago. "Just leaving out everything that they can on the court."

Perhaps the story of the season has been the development of sophomore James Johnson, a forward over 6 feet tall with fantastic athleticism. At the start of the year, he would be lucky to play five minutes in a game. But he grew into a starter and one of the team's top contributors, with fantastic abilities in scoring, rebounding and shot blocking.

"We go 1 through 13," Petago said. "All these boys can play."

Dulce goes up against No. 5 Menaul, a tough team whose wins include 4A contender Albuquerque Academy, and champions in a competitive district.

**By Ari Levin**

SUN Sports Writer

For a team with a mid-season upheaval, the Lady Hawks managed to make an impressive turnaround to sneak into the playoffs.

Four games into the season, their first games since the start of the pandemic, their new head coach stepped aside due to medical issues. Alyssa Veneno took the promotion in stride. A 2-5 start masks the fact that they played strong through the second half of the season, and finished tied for first place in the district.

The Lady Hawks have a

résumé stronger than it appears at first glance. They beat No. 5 seed and district champion Rehoboth Christian twice, and went to overtime with No. 6 Laguna-Acoma and No. 4 Peñasco. All of their losses came to teams in the tournament field.

That overtime road loss to Laguna-Acoma cost them a shot at the district championship, despite finishing tied at a 4-2 record. They started the week with a 61-22 win over Navajo Pine.

An up-tempo offense leads the way, though inconsistent rosters after a four-

week break before district play has been a burden.

Bailey Vigil is one of the top scorers at the wing, and Samantha Redwine (pictured) can shoot well. And center Sidneyanne Becenti has also had strong scoring games.

But that tough strength of schedule and sub-.500 record (which could have been significantly different if their overtime games went the other direction) led to a No. 15 seed. As a result, it will be a long trip to play No. 2 Clayton, who enters on a 10-game win streak.



## Class 2A Girls

### Dulce Lady Hawks

Friday, March 4, 5 p.m.



No. 15 Dulce vs. No. 2 Clayton

10-12	<b>Record</b>	18-5
4-2	<b>District</b>	6-0
48 ppg	<b>Offense</b>	46 ppg
49 ppg	<b>Defense</b>	33 ppg
N/A	<b>2021</b>	7-4, state semis

Previous Meeting:  
None since 2007

NCSWA

3 x 6

MANNM

3 x 6

