

HIGH SCHOOL TRACK & FIELD

HIGH ACHIEVER

Valencia joins SJA fraternity of pole vault state champs

BY ROY HESS

THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

Luis Valencia is leaving St. Joseph as a member of an elite group of champions. The school has produced a select number of state champions in the pole vault, most notably in recent years Carys Matar for the girls and Jonathan Gulley and Tom Rusteberg for the boys. Other past state champions in the event from SJA include Bart Zavaletta and Luis Jasso. Valencia, a 2012 SJA graduate, is a two-time TAPPS state title-winner in the event, having won it as a sophomore in 2010 with a clearance of 13 feet, 6 inches, before claiming the state crown again as a senior May 5 in Waco with a 13-0 height. "It was close because I didn't clear my personal best (of 14-0)," Valencia said of last month's competition at the TAPPS state meet in Waco. "It was to the point that if the guy after me would have cleared the next height, I would have maybe gotten second place."

Still, he emerged as a state champion again. Not many, if any others from SJA, have won the event twice at state. He took second place in the pole vault in Waco with a 13-6 clearance as a junior.

He wasn't entirely satisfied at state last month, however, even though it was another state crown. "I felt pretty good that I got first place, but not so much that I didn't get to my personal best," the 6-foot, 170-pound Valencia said. "I feel proud to be part of the school (and one of its state champions)."

Teddy Lopez, who has coached the pole vault at SJA since 1992, said Valencia deserves to be included in the group of previous state champions in the pole vault from his school. "Luis fits in right in (with those previous winners) pretty well," said Lopez, who is also the SJA athletic director. "We've never had anybody win the pole vault (at state) more than twice here at St. Joe, so he's at the top of that (list). We're really proud of the way he's worked for more than four years."

"Luis is a good listener, and he's a great kid," Lopez added. "He's probably the sincerest and most humble kid I've ever coached. He's just a flat out nice person, and I'm very proud of him. As good of a pole vaulter that Luis Valencia was for us, his qualities as a person outshine his qualities as a pole vaulter. It's meant a lot to me to be around him and be a part of his life."

Valencia plans to study biology and attend the University of Texas at Brownsville for one year prior to transferring to the University of Texas at Austin. He'd like to eventually work in the medical field, possibly as a doctor.

"I guess, being able to share the experience (of winning state) with the other ones who did it (at SJA) is great," Valencia said. "The ones who did it before me (in the pole vault) were amazing."

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St. Joseph's Luis Valencia won the pole vault at the TAPPS state track & field meet in Waco. Valencia, a 2012 graduate, is a two-time TAPPS state winner in the event, having won it as a sophomore in 2010 at 13 feet, 6 inches, before winning it as a senior at 13-0.

HIGH SCHOOL TENNIS

TENNIS ACE

Vallejo enjoyed winning 2nd TAPPS tennis title in SJA history

BY ROY HESS

THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

Since St. Joseph Academy switched from TCIL to TAPPS in 1998, there have been only two individual state champions in tennis for the Bloodhounds, according to school officials.

Bernardo Vallejo, a 2012 SJA graduate, is one of them. Carlos Olea was the first in 2010.

"It'll be my best memory (from SJA)," said Vallejo of winning the boys singles title at the TAPPS state tournament April 25 and 26 in Waco.

Vallejo, seeded second, had to win four matches at state to capture the boys singles crown. In the final, he triumphed over top-seeded Joey Molina of Dallas Bishop Lynch 6-1, 6-3.

"My forehand (strokes were working well in the final)," Vallejo said when asked what helped him defeat Molina. "It feels really good to do something like that, especially in my last year of high school."

"I felt pretty comfortable with myself (going into the state tournament)," he added. "I expected to at least get to the finals."

Teddy Lopez, SJA athletic director and assistant track coach, said the school has produced a number of individual state champions in other sports such as track and field, swimming and cross country, so it's been nice to add first Olea, and now Vallejo, to that group.

"I consider it a pretty big event, a pretty big deal," Lopez said. "Our boys have had some good (tennis) teams the last few years."

"Yes, we're real proud of Bernardo," Lopez added. "We were hopeful (he might win state) because he was having a good season." Vallejo now plans to attend the University of Incarnate Word in San Antonio. He is going to attempt to play tennis for the Cardinals. He is undecided on his major at this time, he said. Vallejo, who played tennis for the Bloodhounds as a sophomore and a senior, said he very much appreciates having had the experience of being a member of the SJA team. "Playing on a team is a lot better than playing by yourself in tournaments and things like that," he said. "The team gives you a lot of support. I really enjoyed it."

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St. Joseph Bloodhounds tennis player Bernardo Vallejo became just the second athlete in school history to win a TAPPS state championship in tennis. Vallejo, who went into the tournament as the No. 2 seed, won four matches and beat Joey Molina in the final.

High School Track & Field

State title run helped Cardenas cap career



BY ROY HESS

THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

Putting it all together to record a personal best and set a school record in one's final high school race is something few athletes have the good fortune to experience.

It happened for St. Joseph Academy's Andres Cardenas at the TAPPS state meet in Waco on May 5 as he came from behind at the end to win the 300-meter hurdles in a school-record 39.62 seconds. It was a defining moment that Cardenas, a 2012 SJA graduate, will remember a long time.

"It felt great closing the chapter (of my life) at St. Joe on such a good note," said Cardenas, a 6-foot-1, 165-pounder who also played basketball for the Bloodhounds. "I have great memories (of participating in sports) here at St. Joe, and I'm looking forward to (one day) telling my sons, or my kids, about it."

Cardenas didn't have one of the best qualifying times coming into the event at the state meet, and he was assigned to Lane 7, which made things even more challenging. But he put into practice just what he had been instructed by his coaches, and it allowed him to come from third place before clearing the final hurdle to surge ahead to victory, winning by a narrow margin.

"Even though I had finished second at regionals and I was running in Lane 7, I had the confidence that Coach (Meme) Garza and Coach Ben (Sandoval) had sculpted me to perform my best and to give it all I've got in a race (at state) where there's the most pressure," said Cardenas, whose previous best in the event was 40.0 seconds recorded earlier in the season.

Cardenas had been battling back from injuries since basketball, so his showing at the state meet made it all even more rewarding. "I remember thinking as I was approaching the last hurdle that what my coaches had taught me was being put into effect," he said. "I felt that on the last hurdle I was able to go off (and clear it) perfectly so that I could win. I cried a little bit because I was so overjoyed after I saw my time (and realized I had won)."

Garza said Cardenas couldn't have run a better race. "You plan, you practice and you envision the perfect race," said Garza, who just completed his 37th track season guiding the Bloodhounds. "It hardly ever happens the way you have it planned. But for Andres, everything aligned correctly, and he did run the perfect race for him on that day. What a great way to cap off your four years (at SJA)."

"He knew exactly what to do under the circumstances, and he did it correctly," Garza added. "Anybody could have won that race had they run the perfect race, but they didn't. Andres was the one who did, and that's a memory he'll keep for the rest of his life."

"He had the sixth fastest time (in the event) coming into state, and he wins. That's pretty exciting. In order to do that, he had to understand how to run the race, know what to do, make the right adjustments and attack that last hurdle perfectly. He did everything he needed to do to win."

Cardenas' future plans include studying business at the University of Texas at Austin with the intent of one day becoming a corporate lawyer.

"I'm looking forward to applying what I've learned at St. Joe through track to my future goals and aspirations," he said. "St. Joe will always be in my heart."

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St. Joseph's Andres Cardenas won a state championship in the 300-meter hurdles at the TAPPS state track & field meet in May in Waco. He recorded a personal best and set a school record with a time of 39.62 seconds in his final high school race.

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