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State qualifiers

ALEXANDER TRIO REFLECTS ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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Different strokes



Photo by Danny Zaragoza | Laredo Morning Times

Hernandez, Kazen and Mohammed take unique paths to state success

By CLARA SANDOVAL
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

Laredo is full of great athletes that accomplish many accolades and distinctions at the district, area and regional level, but only a handful have been able to reach the state level.

The Gateway City currently has seven state qualifiers from three different sports in the public

school system and they all just happen to attend the same school, Alexander. In a two-part series, we will be taking a look at the state qualifiers from Laredo who are still in high school.

This exclusive club includes seniors Rebekah Hernandez and Claire Kazen and sophomore Ayeesha Mohammed who are the most accomplished of the seven state quali-

fiers.

"I feel really proud not only for myself but for Rebekah and Claire for doing so well in their respective sports and the way that we have been able to represent Alexander and Laredo at the state level," Mohammed said.

The queen of cross country

Hernandez has made

her name in the cross country world as one of the best long distance runners to come out of Alexander. She has owned the sport since the day that she stepped on campus four years ago.

Hernandez concluded her high school career at the Region IV-5A track and field meet in San Antonio two weeks ago, placing fifth in both the 1,600-meter run and the 3200-meter

run.

The queen of cross country in Laredo made three trips to the UIL Class 5A state cross country championships during her freshman, sophomore and senior seasons. Hernandez has been named to the Laredo Morning Times All-City cross country team for the past four years and was named the Most Outstanding Runner this fall.

"I am really blessed to be part of this group," Hernandez said. "Being part of the cross country team at Alexander has helped me grow as a person. I feel that all the hard work from my freshman year through my senior has paid off."

The senior runner was also named to the All-state cross country team in 2013 and has been named to the all-region team three years



in a row. Hernandez won the district cross country title in 2012 and 2013.

Hernandez has the distinction of the three state qualifiers in helping the Lady Bulldogs capture the Region IV-5A cross country championships in 2011.

She was named the Laredo Morning Times female athlete of the year for the 2013 year. Hernandez holds the school record in the 1,600-meter run and the 3,200-meter run.

The high jumper

Kazen made her name in track and field in the high jump. She is a four-time regional qualifier in the event and earned her state appearance in 2012 when she placed second at the Region IV-5A track and field meet to punch her ticket to UIL Class 5 state track and field championships.

Kazen is a three-time District 29-5A high jump champion and won the shotput her junior year.

She is a back-to-back Area Champion in the high jump and set the record in 2013 after she cleared 5-6.

At the regional meet she placed eighth as a freshman, second as a sophomore, fifth as a junior and fourth during her senior year.

She is a Border Olympics track and field champion winning the high jump for the past three years after placing third her freshman year. She also won the shotput this year.

Kazen competed at the prestigious Texas Relays this year after meeting the standard in the high jump. She holds the school record for high jump at 5'6 and is part of the school record for the 4x200-meter relay at 1:47.2.

Next year she will be competing as a heptathlete, high jumper and javelin thrower at the University of Colorado.

"I have worked hard since I was seven years old when I started running track," Kazen said. "I

would go out in the morning and high jump to get my jumps and I am glad that it really paid off. Even though I did not make it this year, I am really glad that I made it (to state) my sophomore year."

Pool power

Mohammed is the youngest of the group but is the most accomplished of the three. She is only a sophomore and already is a two-time Class 5A swimming state qualifier and a five-time regional champion and has been named by the Texas Interscholastic Swimming Coaches Association Class 5A All-State swim team for the past two years.

Mohammed is a regional champion in the 100-meter butterfly, 100-meter backstroke and 200 individual medley and anchored the 400-yard freestyle relay. She has also earned eight regional medals.

At the District 29-5A meet as a freshman, Mo-

ammed took the gold medal in the 100-meter butterfly with a new district record, won the 100-meter backstroke and anchored the winning 400-yard freestyle relay. For all her accomplishments, Mohammed was named Swimmer of the Year for District 29-5A.

At the Region VIII-5A meet, she took gold in all three events to earn her first state appearance as a freshman. She was named the Female Athlete of the Region and also Most Valuable Female Swimmer of the Year for UISD.

Mohammed did not slow down this year and took gold at the District 29-5A meet in the 100-meter butterfly and 200-Individual Medley relay while also anchoring the 400-yard freestyle relay. At the regional meet, Mohammed took gold in the 100-butterfly and 200-Individual Medley to earn her second state appearance.

She was named the Rio Grande Valley Swimmer of the Year for the second year in a row and holds five out of the eight UISD school swim records and all three relay records.

While all three state qualifiers have walked the halls of Alexander, they really have no interaction between them with the exception of Hernandez and Kazen who are on the same track team, but they are usually working on their respective events.

"I really do not know how these girls do it for so long," Kazen said. "Rebekah is crazy for running three miles, her warm up pace is me going at it full speed. The other day I tried to do a swimming work out and I have no idea how Ayeesha does it. It is crazy and I am very impressed."

When they came together for this article, they were finally formally introduced to each other and

were able to be in each other's natural environments.

"It was definitely interesting because I am not really in those environments," Mohammed said with a laugh. "When I was walking to the track, I had to ask Claire for directions because my life is spent in the pool. It was fun to get a taste of where they train everyday and they were able to come to the pool where I train everyday."

"It is really interesting talking to these girls and knowing that they work just as hard as I do in their sport and different environments," Hernandez said. "Their personalities are amazing and I just like meeting people like them, hard workers and go-getters. It is honor to be part of this elite group."

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Photos by Danny Zaragoza | Laredo Morning Times