

SPORTS

Campus Sports • Features • Alternative Sports



Photo Courtesy of SheRocksSD

RALLY ‘ROUND THE FLAG—
So. County high schools are adopting flag football as an official girls sport.

FLAG FOOTBALL GOES URBAN

NFL attempts to market its sport to women athletes

BY ASHLEY BUENO LEON

Flag football has taken the field. Once the redoubt of rural and low-income America, the lower-contact version of football is taking hold in urban high schools thanks to a new population of players – young women.

South County got a high-profile start thanks to a Super Bowl commercial filmed at Chula Vista High School. The NFL’s FLAG 50 program is an effort to expand its American fan base by luring in girls and young women.

Sweetwater Union High School District administrators have added flag football as an official district sport. Athletics Director Alex Estrada said the California Interscholastic Federation has given flag football its blessing.

“Once (the CIF vote) was official, we ran with it,” he said. “We were able to purchase uniforms and equipment. We are proud to say that every one of our high schools has a varsity and JV team.”

CVHS senior Jasmine Araujo joined her school’s flag football team and said she loves it.

“We did not get coaches until a month and a half after school started,” she said. “I’m very grateful we have three coaches. Our new coaches are going to get the word out about the team.”

Dr. Kenneth P. Gonzalez said his experience as a kicker for Brigham Young University inspired him to coach a flag football team for his daughter. He is now the coach of the Chula Vista Shockers of the She Rocks Flag Football League.

Team sports has many benefits for young people, said Gonzalez.

“I enjoy seeing the girls get better and (having fun),” he said. “The camaraderie they develop is really cool.”

Flag football can be a confidence builder, he said.

“(I saw) a player that didn’t really know how to play flag football and become more

FLAG • PG 11

KING OF THE SPRING



Southwestern College
Jaguars
2013-2014



Texas A&M-Commerce
Lions
2015-2017 / NCAA Division II



Los Angeles Rams
2018 / NFL



Birmingham Iron
2019 / AFL



Philadelphia Eagles
2019 / NFL



Detroit Lions
2019 / NFL



Los Angeles Wildcats
2020 / XFL



New York Guardians
2020 / XFL



New Jersey Generals
2022 / USFL



Los Angeles Rams
2022 / NFL



Vegas Vipers
2023 / XFL



Arlington Renegades
2023 / XFL



Los Angeles Chargers
2024 / NFL



Arlington Renegades
2024 / UFL

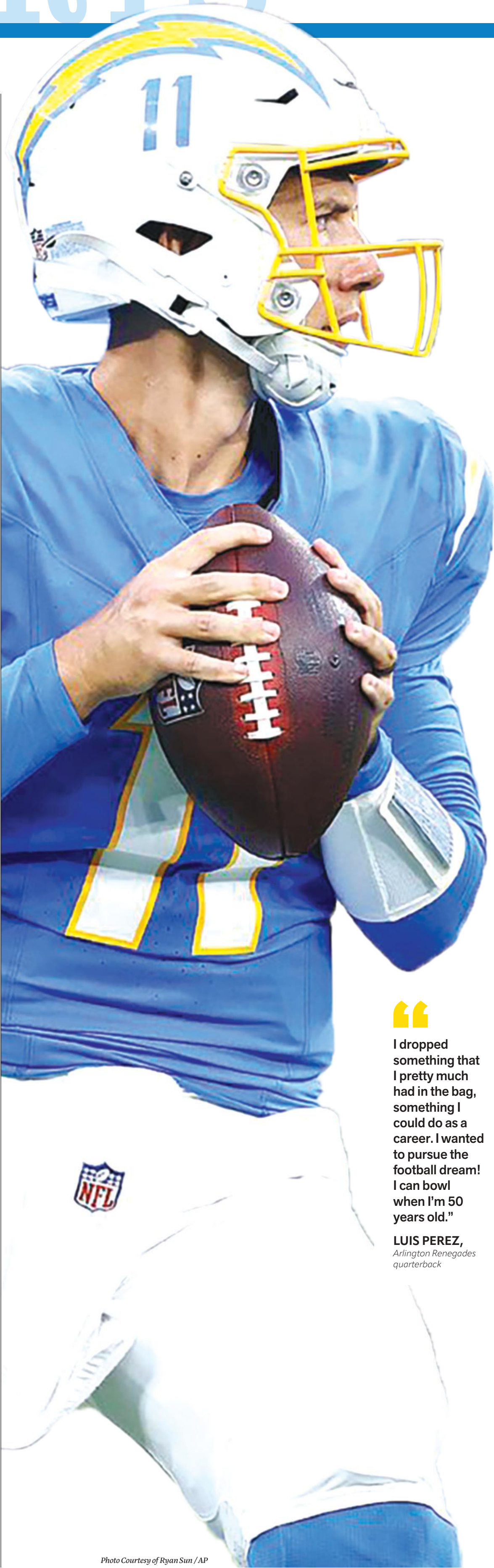


Photo Courtesy of Ryan Sun / AP

■ SWC ALUM LUIS PEREZ

FROM BOWLER TO BOWL GAMES

Cut twice at SWC, stubborn quarterback has become a UFL star

BY JULIO RODRÍGUEZ

It was a lot for a 10-year-old kid to take in.

A roaring stadium, confetti cannons, exuberant cheerleaders and the San Diego Chargers in powder blue streaming on the field at Qualcomm Stadium. The old stadium’s floor rumbled under the thunderous explosion of joy and expectation.

Craning to look over and around the large men standing in front of him, the pee wee football quarterback looked up at his father with a bold prediction.

“I’m going to be here one day.”

His dad, the retired Mexican professional soccer player Juan Perez, nodded his head.

“I believe it,” he said.

Luis Perez opened his 30-year-old eyes and peered out of the tunnel into the packed stands at SoFi Stadium and the pre-game chaos on the field. He was draped in gold, white and powder blue with the number 11 bold on his chest and the NFL Shield above. On his helmet streaked the iconic Charger lightning bolt.

Luis Perez, number 11, quarterback for the Los Angeles Chargers.

BOWLED OVER

It would be an understatement to say Perez did not follow a classic path to the NFL. His ran through Southwestern College and before then, a bowling alley. He had once left football behind due to his prodigious talent as a bowler.

By the time he enrolled at Otay Ranch High School he had already won several tournaments and seemed destined for a professional career. While his friends battled in pads and cleats, Perez rolled thunderous strikes and filled his parents’ house with trophies.

Then he changed his mind. Watching his friends prepare for their senior year of football was too much. He wanted to give bowling a break and play football again. Friends and family were mystified. Some were supportive, some not.

His most important advisor took his side. His mother said to go for it.

“I dropped something that I pretty much had in the bag, something I could do as a career,” he said. “I wanted to pursue the football dream! I can bowl when I’m 50 years old.”

Otay Ranch had a quarterback already, so Perez graduated without taking a snap. He spent the summer of 2012 learning the fundamentals of the quarterback position – on YouTube. He enrolled at Southwestern College and approached former football head coach Ed Carberry.

“He was a skinny little guy,” Carberry said. “He was a good



I dropped something that I pretty much had in the bag, something I could do as a career. I wanted to pursue the football dream! I can bowl when I'm 50 years old.”

LUIS PEREZ,
Arlington Renegades
quarterback

PEREZ • PG 11