

THE MIRROR | NICOLE TOVAR

Dynamic duo

On and off the court



B-BALL BFFs Girls basketball players Katya Tapia (L) and Jazmin Alejandre are tight on the court as well as off. Tapia is a guard known for sinking three-pointers, while Alejandre is a power forward known for her jump shots. The two met in middle school.

By Isabel Valles

THE MIRROR STAFF

Varsity players Katya Tapia and Jazmin Alejandre were both freshmen when they began playing for the girls basketball team.

But their connection goes beyond the court. Over the past four years, they've forged a friendship that has withstood the test of time and adversity. From the devastating loss of an entire season due to the pandemic, to navigating team conflicts and coaching changes, Tapia and Alejandre have faced every challenge side by side, proving that their bond is unbreakable.

The two seniors first crossed paths at basketball tryouts during their freshman year.

"I was scared because there were a lot of girls trying out and they were so good," Tapia

THE MIRROR | ANDREW COVARRUBIAS



DEFENSIVE MOVES Guard Katya Tapia (#2) leads the pack on defense against the San Fernando Tigers at Senior Night on Feb. 1 at home. The Wolves ended the night short, losing 55-30.

said. "They knew all the basics, they played hard and I didn't know all the stuff they knew. I felt very insecure."

Her tryout experience was filled with uncertainty and fear, as she was in unfamiliar territory among a sea of talented players. However, her nerves were immediately put to rest when she spotted a familiar face from middle school.

"I remember they told us to get into partners and I sprinted over to Tapia and asked if she wanted to be my partner," Alejandre said. "She happily said yes."

From that tryout day forward, Tapia and Alejandre have remained close friends and steadfast teammates. Tapia's role on the team is as a guard, where she excels with her deadly three-point shots. Meanwhile, Alejandre shines as a power forward, known for her impenetrable defense and accurate jump shots. The two have formed a dynamic duo on the court, complementing each other's skills and driving their team to success.

Neither girls' introduction to basketball started at the tryouts.

Alejandre was exposed to the game through her father's Sunday pick-up games and her older brother's organized games. Over time, she developed a deep appreciation for the sport, drawn in by its excitement and camaraderie. In seventh grade she put her own skills to the test and stepped onto the court. Since then, she's never looked back.

Basketball has been a part of Tapia's life since fifth grade. Growing up with a father who was a die-hard fan of the game, she felt inspired to pick up the sport and try

out for the Van Nuys High School team.

From her first practice, she was hooked.

The adrenaline rush she felt on the court, the excitement of making a basket and the sense of accomplishment that came with it all combined to create a love affair with the game. Now, as a senior, she continues to play with a passion that only grows stronger.

Throughout their time on the team, the duo has faced constant challenges and changes. One potentially destabilizing issue seems to crop up each season.

"Every year, we have a new coach," Alejandre said. "Sometimes, we didn't like how they did things."

Their current coach is Steve Eshleman. However, prior to him, other coaches came and went. While some brought new techniques and strategies to the table, others were met with resistance by the team as players grew tired of the constant repetition of learning new plays and adjusting to new coaches.

One of the biggest hurdles came during their sophomore year when the school moved to an online learning model due to the pandemic. The girls and the rest of the team turned to Zoom and virtual training sessions to prepare for when they could finally step back onto the court.

"Both Tapia and Alejandre worked really hard since the summer," Coach Eshleman said. "Neither of them got much playing time over the previous three years, so that's been a little bit of a struggle. But they have put in the time to try to improve their game. With more experience and a little bit of playing time, they're gonna get better."

"I have lost my self-motivation many times, usually because of the stress basketball brings me. The stress of feeling like I'm not finishing my academics and feeling like I'm going to fall behind because of basketball."

Senior Jazmin Alejandre

It took effort and dedication to maintain their grades and perform well on the court.

"I always get stressed with all the school assignments I have to do, but anytime I'm free I'm always catching up on homework," Alejandre said.

They had to prioritize their academics while still making time for the sport they loved.

"I go to sleep late every night, but I do have a schedule," she said. "Just as long as I get six hours of sleep, I will be alright."

Despite these challenges, Alejandre and Tapia persevered and adapted to the ever-changing landscape of their basketball journey. They leaned on each other for support and learned to thrive amidst the turmoil, using it to their advantage.

After winning their away game against Reseda High School on Jan. 20 with a score of 45-10, the girls' team qualified for the playoffs.

With this school year being their last year playing for the team, Alejandre and Tapia hope that as they play their last few games of the season, more girls are inspired to join the team.

SPORTS UPDATE

GIRLS WATERPOLO | The team dominated their way to first place in the Valley Mission League, with an impressive 7-1 record and a coveted playoffs spot. They stumbled just once when the Kennedy Cougars crushed them with a 12-5 score on Jan. 25, preventing a winning streak to boast about. But they bounced back with a decisive 12-4 win over the Santee Falcons in the playoffs. Sadly, their bubble burst against the Palisades Dolphins, where they were steamrolled with an 18-2 defeat. If the team wants to take down future playoffs opponents, they better start praying to Poseidon.

BOYS SOCCER | The boys varsity soccer team has had a season full of ups and downs. Despite taking a few hits from their opponents, they somehow managed to claw their way into the playoffs. They landed in fourth place in the Valley Mission League, which is a small victory in itself. They had a promising start to the season, winning five games in a row against Grant, Kennedy, Reseda, Sylmar and Valencia high schools. However, things quickly took a turn and they finished the season with a less-than-impressive overall record of four wins, six ties and two losses.

GIRLS SOCCER | The girls varsity soccer team overcame a less-than-stellar record of 4-7 to earn a spot in the Valley Mission League playoffs. They achieved a momentous victory over their rivals, the Kennedy Cougars, with a hard-fought 1-0 win, ending a three-year losing streak against them. The team also performed well against Reseda High School and Panorama High School, securing wins in both matches. They landed in fifth place in the league, just behind Kennedy High School. The Lady Wolves kicked off their playoffs journey with a promising 2-1 win against Monroe High School on Feb. 8.

BOYS BASKETBALL | The boys ballers missed the playoffs this season, despite their decent but ultimately inadequate record of 6-6. They can at least hold their heads high knowing they annihilated the Reseda Regents with an impressive 62-40 score on Jan. 20, as well as narrowly defeating the Panorama Pythons with a 32-25 win on Jan. 25. They showed their dominance with a 67-49 win over San Fernando on Jan. 11, and pulled out a nail-biting 41-38 victory over the Canoga Park Hunters on Jan. 30. Sadly, they had to settle for a tie with the San Fernando Tigers for fourth place in the Valley Mission League, falling behind Canoga Park.

WRESTLING | The wrestling team made impressive progress this season, including an exciting home dual victory against the Panorama Pythons on Jan. 19. The win was extra special, as it marked the team's first victory in four years, giving the athletes a much-needed boost to their morale. They also participated in more tournaments this season than last, with a total of five tournaments and four dual meets. While their overall record wasn't the strongest, the team can still take pride in their hard work and the progress they continued to make throughout the season.