

Highlander NATION



Fall Sports

October

August Review

By Tom Connolly



FOOTBALL

The Highlanders football team completed its non-league portion of the schedule in September and remained undefeated at 5-0. 3 of La Habra's 5 wins have been by 20 or more points. Quarterback DJ Mitchell has excelled as the senior quarterback has thrown 13 touchdown passes and rushed for 435 yards and scored 3 touchdowns. Wide receiver Blake Rogers is having a big season as he has caught 18 passes and has scored 8 touchdowns. Running backs Kevita Mata Utia-Martinez and CJ Dickerson have rushed for a combined 632 yards and scored 7 touchdowns.

On the defense side of the ball, led by Barrett Blied, Armando Perez, Kevita Mata-Utia Martinez, Logan Workman, and Sonny Rodriguez, the Highlanders have been equally as impressive, limiting their opponents to an average of 16 points per game. La Habra will be further tested as their Bravo League opponents have combined to register an impressive 22-3 record in the preseason. The Highlanders open their league schedule with a road game at Capistrano Valley on October 2nd.

"We're 5-0 but we still have a lot of work to do and we have a tough schedule ahead of us and we still have a lot of improvement to make," said La Habra coach Frank Mazzotta.

La Habra is currently ranked No. 10 in CIF Division 3 by MaxPreps.



Mando Perez has been a standout performer for our Football program this season and a major contributor to the team's impressive 5-1 start. As a defensive safety, Mando has consistently made an impact with his toughness, instincts, and ability to make plays on the defensive side of the ball. His preparation and competitive mindset have helped set the tone for our defense throughout the season.

Beyond his performance on the field, Mando is an outstanding leader who has earned the respect of both his teammates and coaches. He leads by example through his work ethic, accountability, and commitment to doing what is best for the team. His teammates look to him for leadership, and he continues to demonstrate the character and determination we expect from a Highlander student-athlete.

With an important stretch of the season still ahead, we look forward to watching Mando continue to make an impact as our Highlanders pursue a league championship and make a run toward a CIF Championship. His leadership, competitiveness, and dedication make him a deserving choice for our September Athlete of the Month.



BOY'S WATER POLO

After a 5-5 start to the season, the La Habra Boys' Water Polo Team has gotten healthy and the Highlanders have been on a roll. The return of ALL-CIF goalkeeper Jude Muci from an injury that kept him out of action for 12 matches has made a huge impact and La Habra has responded by winning 8 consecutive matches.

Garrett Carty is the leading scorer for the Highlanders with 110 goals thus far this season, followed by Caleb Gonzales with 41 goals, Luke Magana with 36 goals, Carter Johnson with 25 goals, and Logan Fernandez with 24 goals.

"We implemented a new counterattack system and it's taken a while for us to work out our spacing issues, but everything is coming together," said Highlanders coach Mitch Carty.

As of September 30, 2026, the Highlanders are currently ranked No. 4 in CIF Division 4 by MaxPreps.

Coach Carty indicated that the team will celebrate "Senior Day" for the Highlanders seniors on October 20, La Habra's last regular season home match.



Jude Muci is a senior who has made a tremendous impact on our Boys Water Polo program through his leadership, competitiveness, and ability to perform at a high level. After being limited early in the season by a groin strain, his absence was felt not only in our team's performance, but also in the leadership and stability he brings to the group.

Since returning to the lineup, Jude has helped lead the team to an impressive 12-2 record, including several significant victories over highly ranked opponents. His presence in the pool has provided a major boost, and his ability to compete, communicate, and lead by example has been a key factor in the team's success.

Jude's accomplishments extend well beyond athletics. He is also an outstanding student who is actively involved on campus through ASB and our Athletic Leadership Council. His commitment to his team, school, and fellow students makes him a tremendous representative of La Habra High School and a great example of what it means to be a Highlander.



GIRL'S GOLF

2026 has been a rebuilding year for the La Habra's Girl's Golf Team. The Highlanders' top two golfers from last year's squad (Sydney Verdugo and Amanda Ramirez) graduated and are currently playing college golf and as coach Cody Verdugo has put it, 'Those are big shoes to fill'. Nevertheless, the La Habra golfers have continued to battle.

Sophomore Sophie Oliver has been the outstanding golfer for La Habra this season. Coach Verdugo said Oliver's success should have her competing for an individual Freeway League title by the end of the season. Siena Verdugo has also been played well for the Highlanders. However, experience and depth have been a challenge for La Habra this season. Many newcomers to the program such as Mila King, Danielle Sanchez, and Reagan Fernandez have made their varsity



Sophie Oliver has been the Lady Highlanders' top golfer this season and has put together an outstanding year on the course. She has been La Habra's medalist in every match this season, consistently posting the lowest score on the team and, on several occasions, earning medalist honors for the entire match.

As a sophomore, Sophie has already established herself as a leader within the program through her work ethic, consistency, and positive attitude. She brings the same level of commitment to the classroom that she does to the golf course and continues to set a strong example for her teammates.

Sophie leads by example in everything she does. Her dedication, composure, and competitive spirit have made her a valuable part of our program, and we are proud to recognize her for the tremendous season she is having.



GIRL'S VOLLEYBALL

Despite their record, the La Habra Girls Volleyball Team has continued to battle through each match and has made significant strides. After becoming illegible to play after transferring from Whittier Christian, Mia Fielder has brought an added skill set to the Highlanders front line. Her arrival has helped increase La Habra's competitiveness.

First year Coach Zoe Herrera has emphasized that the season has been a learning process for herself and the players.

"It's a process that the girls and I are working through," said Herrera. "We started having Monday night dinners together and it has improved our bond and team unity. We get to sit around and get to know each other a little better and the girls' play on the court has improved. The girls are smart and they're learning the game. I've learned to change up my rotations, so that I'm placing the right setters with the right outside hitters and having the correct mix of players on the court. The girls have maintained a high level of energy and I also see it in the JV and freshman teams as well. The JV team has a strong belief in themselves and they're taking care of the little things. They recently finished in second-place in the Whittier Tournament and our freshman team is undefeated."

Kaitlyn Esqueda, a sophomore Libero, has consistently played well all season for the Highlanders, along with Tiffany Salo and Addison Hegedpeth.



Kaitlyn Esqueda has been a consistent and dependable presence for our Girls Volleyball team, helping us remain competitive while continuing to challenge herself to improve each day. She is one of our smartest and strongest defenders, with an excellent ability to read opposing hitters, anticipate plays, and sacrifice her body to keep the ball off the floor. Her competitive mindset and determination to win have made a significant impact on our team and have earned the respect of her teammates.

Kaitlyn's leadership goes well beyond her performance on the court. She shows up every day ready to work, compete, and help those around her get better. She is willing to step up, communicate, and do what is best for the team, even in challenging moments. She also takes pride in supporting our freshman team by offering encouragement, advice, and assistance during warm-ups, showing her commitment to the growth of our entire volleyball program.



GIRL'S TENNIS

The highlight of September for the La Habra Girls Tennis Team has been the 2 victories over Rancho Alamitos and Anaheim. The Highlanders celebrated Senior Day on September 21 with a 12-6 victory over Anaheim at home. La Habra Seniors Jazmin Martinez, Grace Beasley, Julissa Cardenas, Melanie Escoto, Samantha Sumpter, and Lily Henriquez were honored in a short ceremony prior to the match and each senior earned a win in the Highlanders victory.

"It was an impressive win for us; each one of our seniors won at least one match," said La Habra coach Derek Marshall.

La Habra captured 8 of the 9 Doubles Matches against Anaheim. Julissa Cardenas and Ella Stone and Lily Henriquez and Avery Jacoby each won 3 Doubles Matches for La Habra. Grace Beasley and Ashanty Carrasco and Ashanty Carrasco and Jazmin Martinez each won a Doubles Match. Melanie Escoto won 2 Singles Matches and Samantha Sumpter and Mia Pinedo each won a Singles Match for the Highlanders.

Since being teamed as Doubles Partners earlier in September, Avery Jacoby and Lily Henriquez have sparked the Highlanders attack. The duo has won matches multiple Doubles Matches over the last 3 weeks of September, including sweeps of Doubles Matches against Rancho Alamitos, Anaheim, and Brea Olinda. Julissa Cardenas and Ella Stone have also notched key wins in Doubles Matches. Samantha Sumpter and Melanie Escoto have continued to earn wins for the Highlanders in Singles Matches.



Since the start of the season, Grace has shown tremendous growth through her hard work, determination, and consistently positive attitude. Her improvement has been evident each week as she continues to develop her skills, confidence, and understanding of the game.

Grace has become a dependable and supportive doubles partner who competes with great effort and brings a positive energy to the court. Her growing confidence has been exciting to watch, and the enthusiasm and joy she brings to practices and matches have made a positive impact on her teammates and our program.

Grace is a great example of what it means to be a Lady Highlander. She works hard, supports those around her, and represents La Habra with pride and character. We are proud to recognize Grace Beasley as our Girls Tennis Athlete of the Month!



FLAG FOOTBALL

After starting the season 1-6, the La Habra Girls' Flag Football Team has rebounded nicely and has won 5 of their last 7 games in September. The Highlanders defeated its North Hills League opponent Pacifica twice, recorded shutout wins against Bishop Amat and Brea Olinda and defeated Foothill, avenging an earlier loss to the Knights in September. La Habra has gotten outstanding play from Audrey Flores, Kaitlin Cauley, Presley Cannon, Layla Bartosik, Kylie Agnew (currently injured), Makenna Caffrey, Hayden Carson, Eliana Corona, Journee Costello, and Gisselle Virgen and are making a late season run for the league title and a spot in the playoffs. Presley Cannon has surpassed the 1,000 yard mark in passing for the season. Kaitlin Cauley and Audrey Flores lead the team in touchdowns and their speed has caused defenders problems all season. In what may have been the most outstanding performance of the season thus far, Kaitlin Cauley caught 6 passes, scored two touchdowns, intercepted three passes, and returned one for a touchdown, and recorded four sacks in the Highlanders 18-8 win over Foothill on September 30.

"The girls have bought into our system and after we won a few consecutive games, we saw a change and a renewed focus in them," said Highlanders Coach Robert Atanay. "They have seen that we can win and they want it to continue. We have several key games upcoming and were right in the thick of it and we want to win a league championship. We know it's going to take discipline and the team that makes the fewest errors is going to win."



Audrey Flores has been a true game-changer for our Flag Football program this season, making an impact every time she steps on the field. As a two-way starter, Audrey has contributed in a major way on both offense and defense, producing touchdowns, interceptions, and momentum-changing plays that have helped lead the Lady Highlanders to a 4-2 league record.

Her competitiveness, toughness, and relentless effort are evident on both sides of the ball. After battling back from a difficult injury, Audrey wasted no time making her presence felt again and quickly returned to being one of the most impactful players on the field.

Audrey plays with confidence, physicality, and a team-first mentality. Her ability to rise to the occasion in big moments, along with the energy and determination she brings to the team, has made her an important part of our success this season & a tremendous representative of La Habra Athletics.



CROSS COUNTRY

Boy's & Girl's

The La Habra boys and girls Cross Country Team continues to improve as the season progresses. The Highlanders are coming off their best performances of the season at the Sunny Hills Wayne Walker Invitational. Highlanders' runners earned 17 medals, including a 1st Place finish by Sophomore Sofia Ramos, who finished nearly 2 minutes ahead off the second-place finisher in the Girls Sophomore race.

La Habra runners who finished in the top 20 earned medals at the Sunny Hills Wayne Walker Invitational (Race 3.1 miles):

Freshmen Boys: Adam Olmos 2nd Place and Liam Hernandez.

Freshmen Girls: Olivia Olmos 3rd Place and Cambria Berg.

Sophomore Boys: Gustavo Alvarez, Brian Rico, Fabian Hernandez, and Joshua Rivera.

Sophomore Girls: Sofia Ramos 1st Place

Junior Boys: Aiden Magdaleno, Jacob Castillo, and Dominic Varela.

Junior/Senior Girls: Emily Flores 2nd Place, Karen Amador, and Leliah Carrillo.

Senior Boys: Isaiah Ross 3rd Place and Magana Felix.

At the Woodbridge Invitational (Race 3 miles), that included over 600 schools and 5,000 runners, La Habra runners collected 8 medals:

Freshman: Adam Olmos and Olivia Olmos

Sophomores: Gustavo Alvarez and Sofia Ramos

Juniors: Dominic Varela, Emily Flores and Karen Amador

Senior Isaiah Ross

"My goal is to keep each runner focused on November 3rd - our League Finals," said Cross Country Coach Mark Gonzales. "I'm very happy with our progress and many of the runners have continued to improve their times and our last few races have been very good."

The Highlanders ended the month of September by dropping a close dual meet against crosstown rival, Sonora. All levels and grades of girls ran in one race and the boys ran in a second race. The following La Habra runners earned a medal by finishing in the top 7 positions:

Girls: Sofia Ramos 4th Place, Emily Flores 5th Place and Olivia Olmos 6th Place.

Boys: Gustavo Alvarez 3rd Place, Isaiah Ross 5th Place, Adam Olmos 6th Place, and Noah McCullough 7th Place.



Isaiah Ross is a dedicated senior who has distinguished himself through an impressive combination of academic excellence, athletic achievement, and a strong commitment to hard work. He currently maintains an outstanding 4.16 GPA while continuing to excel as one of the top runners in our Cross Country program.

Isaiah consistently sets a strong example for his teammates through his competitive spirit, discipline, and desire to improve. His work ethic is evident in the way he approaches each practice and competition, always challenging himself to perform at a higher level.

Beyond his athletic accomplishments, Isaiah is a leader by example. His consistency, positive attitude, and commitment to both academics and athletics make him an important part of our program and someone his teammates can look up to. His ability to succeed in the classroom while competing at a high level reflects his character, determination, and pride in representing La Habra High School.

Where are they now?

Tom Davis



Tom Davis was born in Orange, California and grew up in La Habra. He graduated from La Habra High School in 1993. Initially, Davis wanted to play football at La Habra but his parents wouldn't allow him. He chose to play Water Polo and swim. He said it took 2 years to learn how to tread water and understand the game of water polo, but ever since the game has had a major impact on his life and he lives and breathes water polo. Davis credited La Habra coach Jeff Hopkins for turning the Highlanders program around. Under Hopkins, Davis developed into an 2-time ALL-CIF goalkeeper and the Freeway League

MVP in his senior year. He had several offers to play college Water Polo and choose UC Irvine.

Davis was the Anteaters starting goalkeeper for 4 years (1994-97) and still holds the record for most consecutive starts. He played under legendary coach Ted Newland and was a 2-time All American. Davis earned his Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science.

Following college, Davis has been a successful entrepreneur, starting businesses in financial services, marketing, advertising, online retail, and sales. He even spent time as a professional Poker player. Davis humbly attributes his success to education experiences and contacts he established at La Habra High and UC Irvine. "Some of the best teachers I ever had were at La Habra High School and everything I've been successful at, I owe to La Habra and UC Irvine," he added.

He has remained extremely active in the Water Polo community. Currently, he is in his 9th year as head coach of Buena High of Ventura. In September, Davis brought his team to La Habra High and the two teams played an exciting match that the Highlanders won in the final seconds, 16-15.

Currently, Davis is the Club Director for the Channel Islands United Water Polo Alliance, one of the largest and most successful water polo clubs in the USA. He also serves as a member of the Coastal Zone Board and is the head of the boys Olympic Development Program. In addition, Davis serves as the Commissioner of the USA Men's National League that promotes continued growth and evolution of premier domestic Water Polo competition.

One of his main goals is to help young high school players get recruited into college. 17 players from his club are currently playing for NCAA Division I Water Polo Programs.

Davis and his wife of 27 years, Alexis, whom he met at UC Irvine, live in Ojai, California and have three children, a son at USC and a son, who plays Water Polo at UC Irvine, and a high school daughter. Davis still competes in an over 50 men's water polo league.



'Coaches' Corner'

Athletic Trainer

Harrison Garcia



Harrison Garcia is a fixture at La Habra High sporting events and is a vital part of Highlanders sports program. He is the first full time athletic trainer in La Habra High School history. When an athlete goes down with an injury, Harrison is the first responder on the field to assist the athlete. He is currently in his 4th year as Athletic Trainer for the Highlanders and has served the athletes with professionalism and great pride. He is highly regarded by the coaches, players, administration, and the fans for his work and goes about his business in a humble manner.

As a result of his hard work and dedication to the La Habra High School Athletic Department, staff and athletes, Harrison received a Character Award from the California Interscholastic Federation Southern Section. The award was presented to Harrison at the 21st Jim Staunton "Champions of Character Awards" Dinner at the Grand Hotel in Long Beach on September 29, 2026. Congratulations to Harrison for his outstanding service and dedication to the La Habra High School Athletic Department.

"I am deeply humbled by this award," said Harrison. "To be honest with you, I was completely in shock when our AD notified me of the award. I thought it was a mistake. It feels great to be appreciated for the work I've done for the athletic program. I owe a great deal of thanks to Mrs. Osgood (LH Sports Medicine teacher), all the coaches, the staff, and the student interns at La Habra. They are the reason I have been successful. It's a blessing to work with each one of them." This season, Harrison continues to cover all La Habra sports home games. He also travels to all the away football games. In addition, he has also covered numerous away games for multiple La Habra sports.

Harrison was born in Long Beach and raised in Cypress. He attended Los Alamitos High school where he played soccer, ran Cross Country and track for 4 years and graduated in 2017. Harrison went on to San Diego State and earned his Bachelor's Degree in Athletic Training in 2021. While he interned for SDSU for the football and soccer teams in 2019-2020, he also interned at the University of San Diego (2020-21) for Women's Volleyball and Rowing. After graduating from SDSU, Harrison attended Northern Michigan University & earned a Master Degree in Exercise Science in 2023. He currently resides in Huntington Beach & started working for the La Habra Athletic Department in 2023. While at Northern Michigan, Harrison worked at the Olympic Training Center for the Greco Wrestling & Weight Lifting teams.

Favorite Sport: Soccer

Favorite teams: Manchester United, Pittsburgh Steelers, and Los Angeles Dodgers

Favorite Athlete: Ronaldinho Gaucho (Brazilian Soccer Player), and Troy Polamalu (retired Pittsburgh Steelers safety)

Favorite Dodger: Nomar Garciaparra

Favorites Food: Ramen

Favorite hobbies: Running, Harrison has run 5 Marathons and has a personal best time of 3 hours 52 minutes (at the LA Marathon) in 2026. He also enjoys riding his bicycle with his girlfriend, Mandy, at the beach. Harrison loves to travel and plans to attend a Pittsburgh Steelers football game, in Pittsburgh, in the near future.

Favorite Movie: The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (2013).

Family: Has an older sister, Conner, who lives in Sequim, Washington and is employed as a Social Worker. His parents, Ron and Patty still live in Cypress.





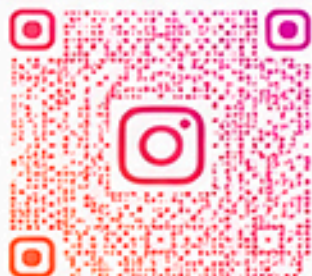
La Habra HIGHLANDERS

FOLLOW OUR TEAMS

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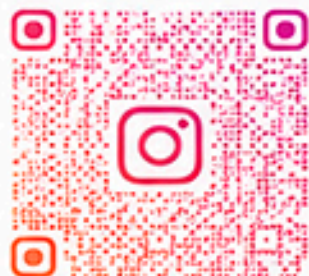


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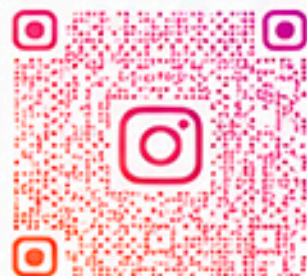
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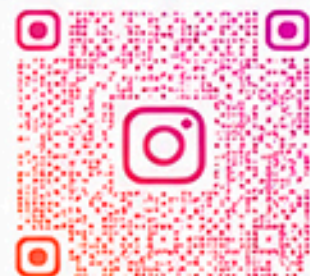
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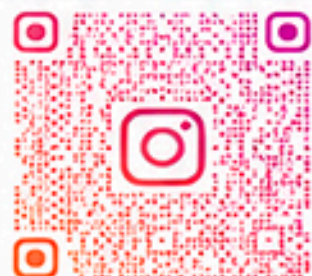
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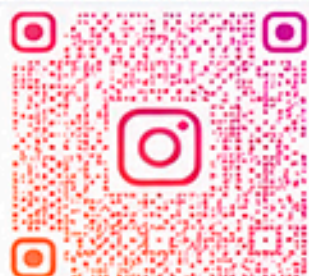
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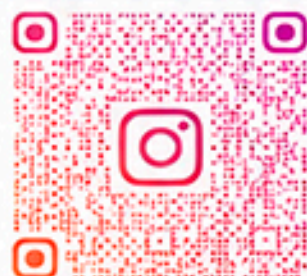
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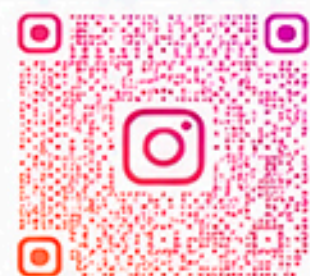
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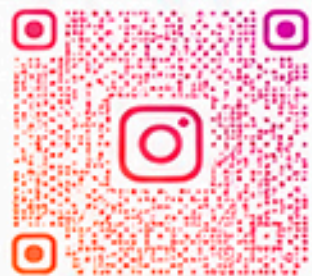
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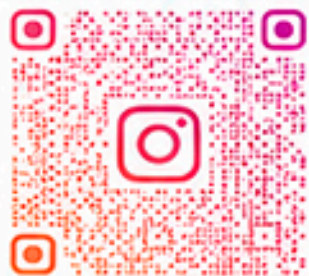
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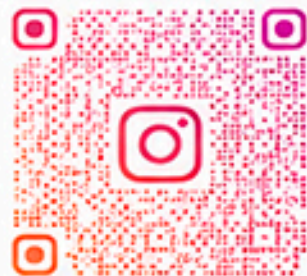
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BASEBALL



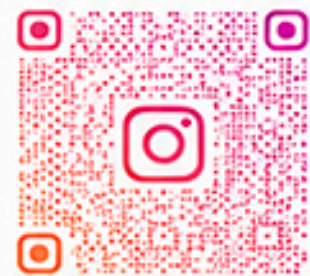
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VOLLEYBALL, GIRLS



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VOLLEYBALL, BOYS



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BASKETBALL, BOYS



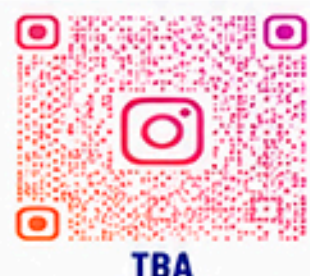
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SOCCER, GIRLS



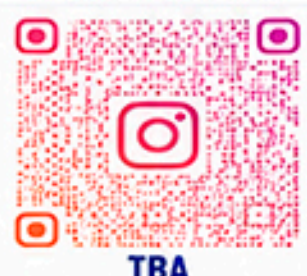
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WATER POLO, GIRLS



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**TRACK & FIELD,
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Highlanders

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COACHES

2026-27



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SPORT	LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	EMAIL
ATHLETIC DIRECTOR	CAFFREY	PAUL	pcaffrey@fjuhsd.org
ASSISTANT AD	WALLIS	JASON	jwallis@fjuhsd.org
BASEBALL	BROOKS	JACK	jbrooks@fjuhsd.org
BASKETBALL, BOYS	BARRY	EVAN	ebarry@fjuhsd.org
BASKETBALL, GIRLS	BURRESCH	JOSHUA	jburresch@fjuhsd.org
CHEER	MARISY	ALLISON	amarisy@fjuhsd.org
SONG	MENDOZA	HANNAH	hmendoza@fjuhsd.org
FLAG FOOTBALL	ATANAY	ROBERT	ratanay@fjuhsd.org
FOOTBALL (11 PERSON)	MAZZOTTA	FRANK	fmazzotta@fjuhsd.org
GOLF, BOYS & GIRLS	VERDUGO	CODY	cverdugo@fjuhsd.org
SOCCER, BOYS	TBA	TBA	TBA
SOCCER, GIRLS	GONZALEZ	DIEGO	dgonzalezdominguez@fjuhsd.org
SOFTBALL	MORALES	ROBERT	rmorales@fjuhsd.org
TENNIS, BOYS	MARSHALL	DEREK	dmarshall@fjuhsd.org
CROSS-COUNTRY/ TRACK & FIELD, BOYS & GIRLS	GONZALES	MARK	mgonzales@fjuhsd.org
TRACK & FIELD, BOYS & GIRLS	TBA	TBA	TBA
VOLLEYBALL, GIRLS	HERRERA	ZOE	zherrera@fjuhsd.org
VOLLEYBALL, BOYS	TBA	TBA	TBA
WATER POLO, BOYS	CARTY	MITCH	mcarty@fjuhsd.org
WATER POLO, GIRLS	MOLTHEN	WEDGE	wmolthen@fjuhsd.org
WRESTLING, BOYS & GIRLS	GONZALEZ	ALEXANDER	agonzalez@fjuhsd.org

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