

half.

In the quarterfinals against Hamilton, Corona was able to get a 2-0 lead after scoring one goal in the first half on a free kick from **Laney Gordon** and then another five minutes into the second half when **Skylar Byrnes** kicked in a goal after **Abby Robertson's** shot went off the crossbar.

Down two goals with not much time left, the Huskies started to press in an attempt to score after halftime, which they did on a free kick with 10 minutes left in the game.

Corona's defense kicked up a notch and denied the Huskies another goal and the 2-1 victory.

"Our seniors played incredible defense defending our goal that second half against Hamilton," said Smith.

Jordan Freese was great in the goal and **Nikki Hoey** was exceptional playing on a sprained knee."

"Senior outside backs **Laney Gordon** and **Emily Ramsland** were mature, composed and worked incredibly hard on defense," said Smith.

The offensive players who had scored all season long played strong roles in the state playoffs as well.

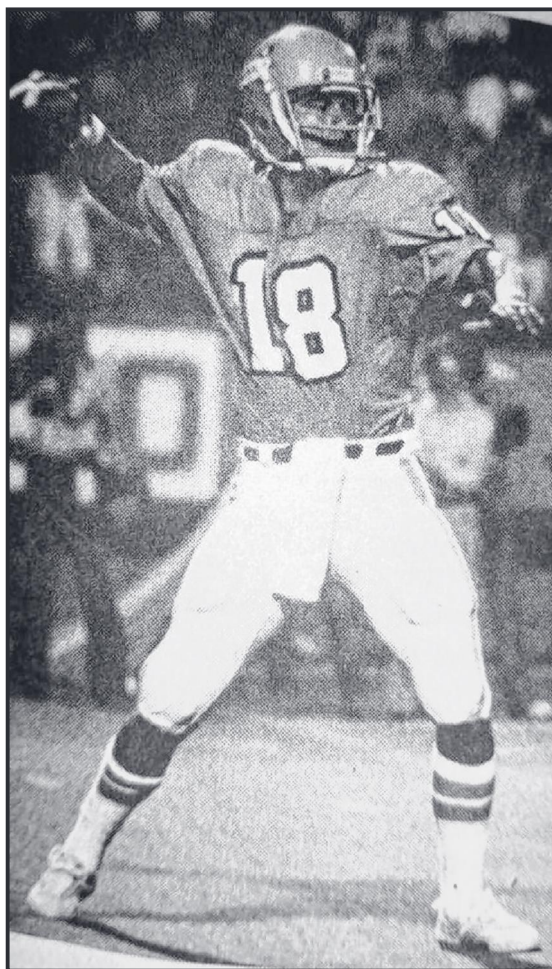
"**Olivia Nguyen** and **Skylar Byrnes** were our leading goal scorers all year and they delivered in the playoffs, as well," said Smith.

"**Abby Robertson** was dynamic in the midfield playing both offensive and defensive roles.

"On defense, **Brooklyn Marois** in the defensive midfield and our entire backline of **Hoey**, **Ramsland**, **Gordon** and sophomore **Sam Scheurer** were all great," said Smith.

"Overall, it was a fun season with a group of girls who liked each other, was played for each other and made coaching high school soccer all it should be," said Smith.

"A group of tremendous Aztecs who did themselves, their team, their families and their school proud."



Cardinals team up with Padre alum for new Marcos field

By Kody Acevedo

Oscar Ramirez Jr. still has the mentality of a high school quarterback.

He wasn't just any high school quarterback, either. He was the first quarterback in the history of Marcos de Niza High School.

"I'm an old football player, man. A quarterback with a linebacker mentality."

Ramirez is a native of the Valley. Having grown up in Guadalupe, he started high

school at McClintock and made the move to the brand-new Marcos campus in 1971.

"A few of us got chosen to pick the Padre name," Ramirez said. "We all voted on it and we came down to the New Orleans Saints colors. The other was the San Diego Padres colors. We made the foundation from way back then."

More than 40 years after he graduated from Marcos, Ramirez is returning to the field he once commanded as a player—this time as a

maintenance supervisor for the Tempe Union High School District.

"I kind of did full-circle," Ramirez said.

Ramirez has been working for TUHSD for over 30 years. His most recent project is one close to his heart.

He's part of the team that will help design Marcos' new football field, which last month received a welcome boost via a \$100,000 grant from the NFL Foundation/LISC Grassroots Program, a partnership between the NFL Foundation and Local Initiatives Support Corporation, the nation's leading community development support organization.

The Arizona Cardinals are the leading sponsors of the grant.

"When people step up like that, like the Cardinals, to me that's beautiful and it makes a heck of an impact," Ramirez said.

The grant will go toward the field itself: the grass, the sprinklers, the end zones, etc. It's expected to be ready by the upcoming 2017 season in the fall.

"It's overwhelming," Ramirez said. "It's gratifying to me to do things like that for the students and our community. Like I said, it makes a heck of an impact. People like to drive by and see something aesthetically pleasing."

"It is going to be something good, and since I came into this position here I'm going to see to it that a lot of these fields get back to how they used to be."

Ramirez has worked in the district's plant operations since the early 1990s.

He said the biggest hurdle his department has to overcome is the lack of funding to give football fields the proper care they need.

"When you get the NFL and the Cardinals doing something like this, it just overwhelms the heck out of me," Ramirez said.

He now looks forward

to giving back to the school where he built his roots as an athlete.

From Marcos, Ramirez went on to play at Mesa Community College, where his team won a national championship.

He then relocated to the University of Texas at El Paso and eventually got a chance to try out for Houston Oilers in 1979.

"I'm standing in the tunnel (at Arrowhead Stadium) as we were coming out to play the Kansas City Chiefs, and I'm going 'here's this little guy from Guadalupe, man, and look at these huge dudes'," Ramirez recalled.

After the excitement about his football career with the Chiefs began to taper off, Ramirez made a switch to baseball. He eventually landed a minor-league job as a pitcher in the Minnesota Twins organization.

"I got to meet a lot of great people, a lot of great coaches," Ramirez said. "I got to be around Tom Kelly, who won two World Series. So, it's been an exciting life. I've been very fortunate."

While pitching in Visalia, Calif., Ramirez blew his arm out and hung up his baseball spikes having fallen short of reaching the big leagues.

So, he returned to the Valley and the school district that gave him so much early in life.

Ramirez, now 60, happily celebrates his days as father of three and grandfather of 10.

And he still wakes up every day loving his job that has now spanned three decades.

With framed quotes from such legendary sports figures as Vince Lombardi and Tony Dungy hanging on the wall of his office, Ramirez continues to coach his co-workers and preaches that small acts of kindness can go a long way in a community.

"All of us can do a lot of little things in a great way," he said. "But, if we're doing our due diligence and providing safe fields and playing surfaces, we've got to do that. And when people step up like the Cardinals, that's beautiful."