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Barragan balances life, school, baseball at Mesa CC

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By Cynthia Esqueda/For The Sporting Nation

Mesa, Ariz. -- Homework, school projects, baseball practice, locker room conversations, those are some of the daily hobbies of Mesa Community College student Alfonso Barragan.

Barragan plays as a catcher for the community college. His day consists of going to class, attending practices, completing homework and doing what he loves most, playing baseball.

Barragan is considered an exceptional student by his coach Anthony Cirelli. He believes that he possesses an extraordinary skill that has given him a well-earned position with the Thunderbirds baseball team. "Not only is he immensely talented in the sport but he has also excelled academically by maintaining a 3.8 GPA, something incredible," said Cirelli.

Cirelli, who has been coaching Mesa Community College for 25 years now and has been an assistant coach for 15 years, views a bright future for Barragan. "Alfonso is a high quality student and player. He is willing to put in the time and effort to make his team go far in every game. He has what it takes," said Cirelli.

"He is a student that I am proud of to have in our team, he proves day by day that with determination and effort everything is possible. He is a great asset to the team, he brings the best of him in each game and in practice," Cirelli said.

Barragan has been playing baseball since the age of seven. The Mesa sophomore's favorite pastime was to go out and play and size didn't matter, what he wanted was to play and compete.

Barragan is six feet tall and has a batting average of .230 for the season.

"Baseball was my play time, all I wanted to do is be the best of the best. I was not aggressive I just enjoyed being competitive. I wanted to be the best catcher, the best hitter, and best pitcher out there. I found what I knew was mine," Barragan said.

Mesa Community College and Coach Cirelli have given Barragan an opportunity to show his skills in the field.

"Every game day is about giving it my all, Coach Cirelli often reminds us to be true to ourselves and be confident. He makes us feel capable and talented enough to win any game. But he also holds us accountable when we don't give it our all," said Barragan.

His consistent play has earned Alfonso a starting position on the Thunderbirds baseball team. Coaches say his work ethic and dedication has been proven off and on the field.

"He is the first one here and the last one to leave, he puts in his time," said Cirelli.

Barragan's work ethic and play on the field has earned him respect from his coach as well as his teammates.

"Alfonso has a great GPA and he works hard to maintain it. He also maintains a job outside of school and is an athlete, it just shows how dedicated he is," said Johnny Gilleres, a teammate for the baseball team.

Barragan has a special relationship with his team; he is admired for the hard work he puts in the field to help his team move forward.

"He wants to be here, in the middle of it. If he is not playing that day he is trying to help us in any way he can," said Esteban Martinez, another player for the team.

Baseball has always been part of Barragan's life. Moving from Southern California at a very young age to Phoenix, he has found in the right role models to help follow his dream.

Balancing school and playing baseball has been a challenge although not impossible. Alfonso is the first of his family to go to college and play baseball. His family has given him the support needed to continue on with his dreams.

Since a very young age his parents have educated Barragan that with hard work anything is possible as long as you put in the work. "From a young age I was always raised that nothing is going to come easy, if you want something you got to work for it," said Barragan.

"They couldn't be more proud to see me do something that I really love and have really worked hard for from a young age."

He serves as a role model for his family members and his teammates are very supportive and impressed of his hard work.

"I simply admire him, I don't know how he does it all. He works hard for everything that he loves. We all know that he is here to stay and prove to us that anything is possible with hard work. He is really important to all of us, even coach Cirelli," said Martinez.

His family is proud to be witness of his determination.

"I have been honored by the opportunity to attend college, my parents had to work. This is not only my dream it is also their dream to see me follow my dreams and attend college. It means a lot to see them happy as well as proud for all my hard work," Barragan said.

Alfonso says college is challenging. He's managing a job, studies, and playing baseball.

Meditation has played a big role in his career as a student, employee, and baseball player. He meditates consistently

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before and after a game and before taking exams. "I meditate to control my emotions, it can be a lot of pressure at times. Learning to control my breathing and my thoughts has helped me enormously," Barragan said.

Coach Cirelli has reinforced (reinforced) the importance of meditation to the team. Barragan has found that practicing meditation and incorporating meditation has improved his focus and performance in the field.

"Learning how to control your emotions is a very important role as an athlete. The completion (competition?) can take control of you if you are not mentally prepared, that's why it is important to step back and exhale doubtful and negative thoughts," said Barragan.

Sometimes the pressure of being a student can be very challenging and Barragan has used the meditation techniques he has learned from coach Cirelli off the field.

"You have to take a step back and take a breath. As far as an anxiety, you have an exam or you have a big game or whatever may be that's normal. That's part of being a human. But once you're in the moment you start realizing I belong here, I need to do this and this is my job." (who said this?)

The fence around the baseball field bears the names of those that have moved on to the pros from the Thunderbirds team. It serves as a constant reminder to these young athletes as well as to Barragan to swing for the fences and that with hard work and dedication anything is possible.

Barragan has a younger brother who he hopes to inspire and guide when he approaches college or potentially play any sport.

His plans are to continue to attend college and transfer to a four-year school in the future. Barragan plans and envisions in continuing to play baseball and follow a degree in science and health.

"My advice to the all the youth is to follow your passion, there is no stopping. Don't let the excuses of attending work, homework and exams get in the ways of your dreams. If I can do it then anyone can," said Barragan.

During the summer Barragan plans to continue to practice and also enjoy some time with his family. "Although the semester is almost over I still plan to continue to improve and give it my all. This break is not really a break, baseball is what I enjoy, there is no stopping," said Barragan.

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