

# Laredo Morning Times



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## Nixon's secret weapon

For one week each year, Martin Sanchez has a different name.

The final week of the football season when bitter rivals Nixon and Martin face off, everybody in the Mustang locker room and on campus simply calls Sanchez "Nixon," as they don't want to utter the name of that other school.

It's one of the seemingly thousands of ways the 1984 Nixon graduate puts a smile on everybody's face that he come in contact with on daily basis.

"Martin is the epitome of a diehard Nixon Mustang," assistant LISD Athletic Director and former Nixon girls basketball coach Arleen Averill said. "Coaches that he knows have taken him gifts that are a Martin (High School) cap or jacket. They say 'Here's a gift for you and it has your name on it.' He won't wear anything that's not green and gold."

After graduating from high school, Sanchez joined the athletic department staff as an aide, getting coffee, doing laundry, restocking lockers and doing all the jobs that would normally drive a coach up the wall.

He's been focused on three sports: football, girls basketball and baseball. Ask Sanchez the coaches he's worked for since he started in 1989 with the school and he'll be able to list every single one, most of which he still keeps in touch with today.

He's described as the most loyal person you'll meet. Whether that's to Nixon High School, the coaches he works for or the sport currently in season. Even when the sports overlap, Sanchez — who turned 51 on Wednesday — will not move on to the next job at hand until the first one is done to the fullest.

When the Nixon football team was perennial playoff participant in the late 1990s, Sanchez was doing everything he could to help out the team as the manager. But the girls basketball season started up before the Mustangs were eliminated from the playoffs, and Averill was at times left to fend for herself until mid-November.

But she wouldn't trade it for the world.

“He added so much to my coaching time at Nixon,” Averill said. “He is just a wonderful man. I almost feel like he’s my son so to speak. He took such good care of me and what I needed and what the kids needed.”

Averill won more than 500 games in her 20-year career as Nixon’s girls basketball coach, and the banner that hangs the Mustangs’ gymnasium that honors that accomplishment includes Sanchez’s name as well.

Even the coaches of the sports he’s not a team manager for have a deep appreciation for him, and his name alone puts a smile on their face.

Nixon tennis coach Oscar Gutierrez got to know Sanchez before he became a coach. His mother was a teacher and his brother played football when Sanchez started helping out with the team. They took him in when he was younger and fed him and communicated with him before and after games. When his mother passed away, he said Sanchez was a pallbearer at the funeral.

“He sat in the front pew during the wake and every 15 minutes or so he’d get up and go over and kneel down and talk to her a little bit and then come back,” Gutierrez said. “He’s a part of our family and I know he’s a part of our Mustang family as well. He’s the cornerstone of our athletic program.”

His loyalty extends to everybody that is or has been in the Nixon community. Sanchez and Alexander head coach Joel Lopez — who was the head coach at Nixon for six years — still communicate on a weekly basis. And although Sanchez still considers Lopez a close friend, it’s a little different vibe than with the people that are with the Mustangs right now.

Sanchez was a special education student at Nixon and has helped head football coach Tommy Ramirez look at the bigger picture when it comes to coaching. His goal each year is to put together a team that is going to win football games but in the larger scheme of things the job is to produce people that are going to be productive citizens in the community.

The football team had a current special education student at practice with a football helmet on running non-contact warmup plays with the defense. But Ramirez said the fact that Sanchez was a special education student doesn’t change a thing, it’s just his personality and who he is.

“It’s a good feeling to have him around. It helps us appreciate life,” Ramirez said. “Sometimes he feels he lets you down, but he’s very sentimental. He’s the constant that keeps the Mustangs together.”

Sanchez does the laundry for more than 100 football players every day. His presence is felt, but his absence is felt as well. He’s had a history of physical ailments including diabetes and high blood pressure that sometimes require hospital stints, most of which happen during the summer. But he’s learned to curb the sometimes hard to control South Texas/Mexican diet that can wreak havoc on the body.

Recently, however, he’s been really healthy. And when he’s fit to work he never misses a beat, getting to the school at 6 a.m. and clocking out around 5 p.m.

The week leading up to the Martin/Nixon game is filled with pageantry, excitement, pep rallies and intense workouts. But it's the intimate moments when Sanchez can talk to the players as he loves to do and give them the final pep talk before they take the field that stands out.

"Everything that (Sanchez) has stood for is good and heartfelt and sincere and that's the way we feel and I know that's the way he feels," Ramirez said. "He's around people that love him and that he loves."

There are so many words that can be used to describe Sanchez, yet there aren't enough to represent the vast impact he's made on the coaches, faculty and students at Nixon and Laredo as a whole.

"His love for his school and everything associated with it is unconditional," Averill said. "There is nothing else for him except his family, his family at school and Nixon High School. And while some people may think that it's a small world, it is so large because of the number of people that he has touched."