



From Madrid to the Mat

by John Bishop

Timothy, Nathaniel, Omar, Joshua, Christopher, James, Ester, Aryan...wait a second. Ester?

Yes, **Ester Berrocal de Castro '19** was Lawrence Academy's lone female on the varsity wrestling roster this winter, and while a "girl wrestler" is no longer news unto itself — LA's own roster has featured females previously — her path to the mat is unique.

"I'm from Spain — Madrid," she said during a recent visit to the Communications Office in the Schoolhouse, a visit where Ester confessed that she didn't know anything about her sport before coming to LA.

"We don't have wrestling," she said, begging the question, how did she end up on the mat wearing the Spartans red, white, and blue singlet?

"In Spain I play rugby," she said a-matter-of-factly, implying she had experienced a high contact sport previously.

And Lawrence Academy doesn't have a rugby team, so...

"I heard about wrestling and I wanted to try," she said. "And I liked it!"

Watching Berrocal de Castro's hard, determined face as she approaches a match belies the word "like." The sport is now a passion for the rising junior.

"That's my wrestling personality," said the ever-smiling Ester, with a chuckle. "I'm nice outside."

But on the mat, the grit she brings to the Stone Athletic Center is respected by her teammates and most opponents.

Ester confided that although a couple of teams weren't quite up to snuff, "the rest of them, yes they are."

"But It's easy [to gain respect]," added the wrestler with a wry look and noting that the boys still need to compete with her.

However, Ester explained that it took some time for her to get up to speed in the sport, and some butterflies arrived with her on her first day at practice.

"I was nervous because I didn't know what to do," she said. "But then [Coach] taught me a few things I needed to know."

From there, incremental success helped Ester gain confidence.

"My first game was against a girl and I did pretty well," she continued. "But my first match against a boy, it was bad.

"I got pinned in five seconds, I think, so I was really sad.

"But I got another [chance], and I said to myself, 'No, I am going to win,'" added Ester, who currently wrestles at 126. "I lost that one, but I lasted six minutes and I said, 'Oh, this is nice!'"

It's been more than nice. Anyone who sees the determination on Berrocal de Castro's face is impressed by her sheer presence. But Ester's focus remains on the moment.

"I'm thinking about what I have to do; what to do when the ref starts the match," she said, expressing a love for the technical aspects of the sport, and her thought process as she steps into the circle. "You have to do a lot of practice to know what to do first, and what not to do."

For Ester, wrestling is an all-encompassing positive aspect of her experience at LA; an experience she wants to continue.

"I like exercise," she said, initially, but added, "I like the team. I love being around the boys because they are so funny. The team is so nice as well.

"We have wrestling [practice], but we also have to be in shape. So, we run stairs and we do a lot of things — it's really hard sometimes.

"After the practice, when I am tired, I think about that," she said, adding, "[Working hard] is what I want to do — I love sports."



"I want to be that Girl!"

However, it's not just the team that Berrocal de Castro likes about Lawrence Academy. Athletics is important, yes, but her love for the place extends beyond the Stone Athletic Center and it's not hard for the young woman to point out examples.

"The people here...my friends," said Ester, who spoke of her dormmates in Pillsbury House, "You can go [anytime] and have a laugh."

In addition to the school's social aspect, chemistry is Ester's favorite class at LA.

"Ms. Moseley, recently she let us investigate on our own," said Ester. "These past few days, we've been doing an experiment of hers that we wanted to do. She gave us the topic, but then she said, 'You decide what to do. You gather the data.'

"That was so interesting," said Ester. "I had a lot of freedom doing that."

And beyond Ms. Moseley's science lab, Ester loves LA's campus.

"It's so big," she said, noting some favorite hangout spots, before adding, "and the people here are really nice."

Looking ahead, however, chances are good that wrestlers from other campuses may not think Ester Berrocal de Castro is very nice; no, not at all.

As a junior, Ester hopes to compete for a top spot in the ISL.

"This year, there was this one girl Naomi [Hunt, a senior from Middlesex School, who was crowned the first female champion in league history]," said Ester. "It really inspired me.

"I want to be that girl."



A victory