



## *Striving for **SIXCESS**:* Panther Softball

This New Mexico softball team won six straight state championships

BY **KEVIN WERTH**

*Head softball coach, Piedra Vista High School*

**W**hen I took the job at Piedra Vista High School in the summer of 2004, I never imagined that seven years later we'd be six-time Class AAAA State Champions. Farmington, New Mexico, has a rich tradition of baseball and softball, so I always knew that there was talent in

this town. The question was how to mold this talent into a team and give our Panthers something to make them great.

When we started in '04, most of the girls were unfamiliar with the weightroom, so we had to start from scratch. I am not a fitness guru by any

means, but I did know that hard work in the weightroom would translate into success – whether in more wins or just seeing the kids improve on the field and feel better about themselves.

I laid out my plan, introducing them to the BFS Total Program, and they were on board with it. This group

of girls decided they wanted a little more time to get ready for school, so they asked me if they could lift at 5:45 a.m. instead of 6:30 during the season. That time has stuck to this day.

That season we went on to win 14 games with 12 losses, and we placed third in our district – but consider that we'd started with just one senior and one junior. The future looked bright, but never did we imagine it as bright as it has turned out.

### String Theory: Softball Style

The following year all our offensive statistics climbed and we found ourselves playing for a district championship, though we became runner-up due to a tie-breaking system that is no longer in use. Then we went on to the state tournament as one of the hottest teams in the state. We were young and had no state tourney experience because this was the first year the Panthers had qualified for the state tournament, but we knew all our hard work in the weightroom had prepared us for this situation.

We were awarded the number 3 seed and ran the table; we defeated Capital High School in round one; defeated the number 4 seed, Artesia, in the quarters; St. Pius X in the semis; and then in the final we beat Farmington High, which had won eight state championships. In all four games we didn't give up a single run.

While many kids would have wanted to take some time off, my kids came to me and asked, "Coach, we're lifting Monday, right? We've got to get ready for next year." As such, Monday after the state championship the girls were back in the weightroom, hoping to get an edge on the competition for the 2007 season. In the district championship game we beat Farmington 12-3 and then faced St. Pius X in the state title game. Their D1-bound pitcher kept us off balance until senior Alyssa



The six state championship teams from Pieda Vista High School. Can they win a seventh?

Henderson took a pitch over the center-field wall for a two-run homer and a 3-0 lead in the fifth inning. We held on to win the title and were nationally ranked 23rd by both *USA Today* and NFCA. Once again, after the game the team asked, "We're lifting Monday – right, Coach?"

The 2008 team was a special group of four seniors who had all started with me as freshmen, and it was one of our strongest teams to date. They hit 45 home runs and played only eight full games, as the rest were shortened due to run rules. They were all highly dedicated in the weightroom, and it showed on the field. By this time they all knew the importance of the BFS system. This year the softball program switched to a double elimination format; thus we had to win five games to win the title. That is exactly what these girls did, defeating Artesia 9-0 in the title game.

By 2009 we were seeing significant numbers in the weightroom, especially with our smaller girls. Our starting catcher, Chanel Ewing, was 5'3", maybe 120 pounds bodyweight, and was able

to clean 135 pounds and bench 155 pounds. The other girls followed suit and tried to break their own records every day. This proved once again to be the difference in the state tournament.

Cruising through the first four rounds and six innings, we found ourselves three outs away from our fourth state title and a complete shutout in the state tourney. Although a scrappy Silver High School team scored three runs in the seventh, we were able to prevail with a 4-3 win for a fourth win in a row. And yes, we lifted the following Monday.

Another fantastic season followed in 2010. Having beefed up our schedule in '09, we decided to continue our strong schedule by traveling as far away as California to play some of the best teams in the nation. Our brutal schedule, along with our hard work in the weightroom, had prepared us well: We won our fifth straight championships title, winning by scores of 13-0, 9-2, 10-0, and 7-0 in the championship game. When we arrived back in town, there was no question that we'd be lifting on Monday.

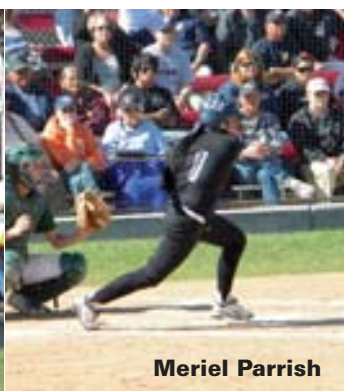




**Karysta Donisthorpe**



**Rachael Ward**



**Meriel Parrish**



**Brittany Sofka**

PHOTOS BY CATHY CHAVEZ

When the girls came into the weightroom Monday morning, on the board was the quote “Striving for SIXCESS.” From then on, these girls made it a mission to accomplish what was once thought unthinkable – winning six state championships in a row!

In the preseason the Panthers were ranked number 16 in the nation. We had seven seniors who had spent five years in the weightroom, many shattering school records and their own personal bests. One of our seniors, Brittany Sofka, participated in a bodybuilding challenge and won it. Our centerfielder, Meriel Parrish (about 5'2" and maybe 120 pounds bodyweight), benched 145, power cleaned 135 and squatted 245. In fact, all our seniors showed their prowess in the weightroom, as each was able to power clean and bench 135 pounds or better. Aurelia Sandoval, Karysta Donisthorpe, Rachael Ward, Brittany Sofka, Jourdan Ensign, Meriel Parrish and Kelsey Laughlin have set the bar high for any senior class that happens to walk through the doors at PVHS. We finished the year 26-5 and won our sixth straight title, outscoring our opponents 43-2.

We have been fortunate to be able to send 76 percent of our graduating seniors on to play at the next level by earning college scholarships. All have returned to say the BFS program prepared them well for the

college level.

We have a great principal in Ann Gattis, who provides us with the support we need to be successful. We have a great coaching staff helping these girls to do their best and be successful on and off the field:

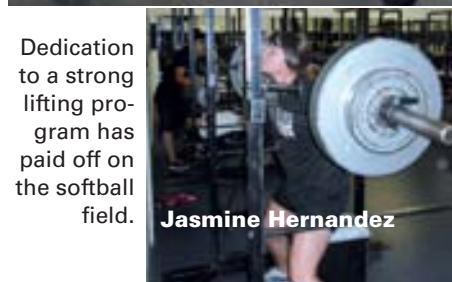
Frank Whalen, Tommy Ward, Bryan Chavez, Julie Lovato and Pete Yazzie. We have been blessed by solid kids who dedicate themselves year-round to weight training. We are looking forward to continuing our tradition of excellence in 2012. **BFS**



**Rachael Ward**



**Meriel Parrish**



Dedication to a strong lifting program has paid off on the softball field.

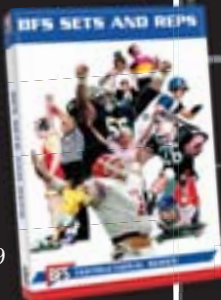
**Jasmine Hernandez**





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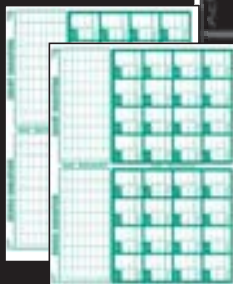
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