

The Education of a Pro Soccer Player

How Anisa Guajardo turned her passion into a profession

BY LAANNA CARRASCO, MA

When Anisa Guajardo started her junior season playing soccer at Pepperdine University, she decided it was time to go from being a bench player to a playmaker. Guajardo says, “I analyzed the situation and asked myself: Are you going to quit and give it all up, or work harder?”

beautiful soccer you must be creative, and I love the fact that I can learn something new every time I touch the ball.” She speaks with a passion for the game that is part of the national culture in Mexico.

It’s true that Mexican sporting culture has been traditionally dominated by men’s soccer, with women’s soccer

the local soccer culture she loves. “On Wednesday nights you can find us playing in the gym of the local church, then on Thursday we’ll be at the rec center playing indoor soccer. When Saturday night rolls around, you can find me and my friends playing under the lights at the nearby high school’s tennis courts, where makeshift goals and 25 cents per

“If you want to be successful not just on the field but in life, you have to ask yourself, am I a fake, or can I give more?”

—Anisa Guajardo

She chose the latter, and her junior year turned into the pivotal season that would lead Guajardo to a place on the Mexican National team and then to the Boston Breakers of the National Women’s Soccer League. In her final two seasons at Pepperdine, Guajardo was the leading goal scorer and played almost every minute of every game, leading her team to a 14-7 finish and a berth in the NCAA tournament in 2012.

“The fact that I am allowed to play the sport I love longer than the average soccer player is a blessing,” Guajardo says about being a pro. “To play

viewed as inferior. But Guajardo and other players living in the US who have dual citizenship with Mexico are helping to change that reality, while taking advantage of the hunger for soccer that dominates Latin America.

Guajardo describes the power of the Latin soccer culture best: “By putting on my Mexico jersey, I no longer played for myself, or a school. I played for millions of deserving and hardworking individuals whose passion for the game extends back through time.”

In the off-season Guajardo goes home to Fresno, California, where she trains and hones her skills within

30 minutes of lights mark a street soccer tradition that has been going strong for over six years now.”

In this interview, Guajardo shares what it’s like to play professionally and how a strong mental game raises her play on the field.

BFS: *What do you enjoy most about playing soccer?*

AG: I love the idea that when the ball is at my feet, the possibilities are endless. The best players in the world create art with their play; high-quality, skillful soccer that has you “ahhing” and “oohing” is nothing less than a masterpiece.



In her final two seasons at Pepperdine, Anisa Guajardo was the leading goal scorer.

BFS: *What does being a pro and national team soccer player mean to you?*

AG: The realization of a childhood dream, as well as the product of hard work and dedication. It makes the sacrifices – like early morning wakeups and skipping out on social events because of workouts – worth it.

There is also a great deal of pride associated with these accomplishments. To represent a nation is one of the most humbling experiences, and one that I don't think I can ever get used to.

BFS: *What are the biggest challenges you face as a professional soccer player?*

AG: Proving to yourself and to others that you deserve to be there. For me, the mental aspect of the sport and of the professional atmosphere has been my greatest struggle. Before you try to convince others that you are truly good enough to play pro, though, you must first convince yourself. I've wrestled with this internal battle for many years, but it's through these struggles that I believe I have grown as a person and as an athlete.

BFS: *How does mental preparation play a role in competing?*

AG: The game is mostly mental, and negative thoughts are debilitating. I have found that when you are having a bad practice or a bad game, the best way to get out of that funk is to encourage your teammates and use your energy to build them up. You will begin to notice that your teammates will reciprocate, benefiting the team as a whole.

To create a positive-thinking habit is not easy to do. Adversities in your athletic career are inevitable, but you can be better prepared to battle them when you have mentally trained yourself. In hard times, tell yourself that this struggle can't last forever – there is a



Photo by Pepperdine Athletics

Guajardo's goals include playing in a world cup and in the Olympics.

light at the end of the tunnel.

BFS: *Can you describe a time when mental toughness has made you a better player?*

AG: Going into college at Pepperdine, I remember being incredibly shy and low in confidence. I didn't think I belonged, I didn't think I was good enough. So, that being my mentality, I wasn't good enough.

During my freshman and sophomore years, my training sessions were mediocre and I still wasn't anywhere near my potential. It was the summer

between my sophomore and junior year that I analyzed the situation I was in and asked myself: What are you going to do about this?

I trained harder that summer than I ever had before. I lifted more, and became more positive. My junior year turned out to be my best season. I was the leading goal scorer and played almost every minute of every game. I knew what I wanted: I wanted to play. I wanted to be an asset for my team. I wanted to win games for my team, and in my heart I believe I did that.

I have never known a hardworking (and I mean a really hardworking) person to be unsuccessful. There's a definite difference between fake working hard and truly working hard. I won't lie – I have faked it at times. I don't think there is an athlete out there that at one point or another hasn't faked it.

But it's the best athletes that realize it, come to terms with it and fix it. If you want to be successful not just on the field but in life, you have to ask yourself, am I a fake, or can I give more?

BFS: *What advice would you give to young female athletes who are interested in playing a sport in college?*

AG: Ask yourself if you're doing it because it's what you want or if it's something you feel pressured to do – whether it's parental pressure or expectations from others. The experience is more enjoyable when you really want to be there. It takes a great deal of commitment and heart to go out every day and give it your all, especially when at times you're getting nothing back from your sport.

Patience plays a huge role in succeeding in college sports. Sure, some kids can show up to their first college practice or game and be the star, but for the majority of new college athletes who aren't as fortunate (myself included) you have to grind through the bench sittings, the lack of playing time, the travel roster exclusions, and more.

Keep working hard every single day and never give up on yourself. Your time will come, but you have to stay positive and supportive of your team until then.

BFS: *Do you have any tips for young high school athletes to survive the college recruiting process and make a good school choice?*

AG: Coming from a

not-so-well-known soccer town in central California, I had no clue about how the college recruiting process worked. I didn't get recruited until my senior year of high school, and I was very fortunate to have been noticed by Pepperdine.

My advice is to educate yourself. Ask around; what's the best way for you to be seen by the schools you're interested in? Research your favorite schools; send emails out to their coaches as soon as you can. Attend their soccer camps; follow up with the coaches' emails.

Stay diligent, hungry and passionate. You have to work for what you want. Assertiveness is key. And remember that no matter your background or where you come from, don't ever think you can't make it to the school of your dreams. There will be plenty of people out there telling you that you won't succeed or that you're not good enough. Don't give in to their empty words.

Have faith in yourself and your dreams. You want to play at the top college? Go for it.

BFS: *How has weightlifting made you a better soccer player?*

AG: I am a firm believer that my weightlifting regimens have made me a better soccer player. I started lifting when I was in fifth grade, and ever since then, I noticed that while all the other girls were injuring themselves, I stayed healthy. To this day, I have yet to have a major injury that has kept me out for more than a week. I attribute this feat to my weightlifting.

Lifting has also given me a lot of assurance over the years. I wasn't always the fastest or quickest player on the field, but I made it a point to be one of the strongest. I pride myself in being one of the best in the weightroom, and it does make me stand out, thus improving my confidence. Whether on the field or in the weightroom, my

advice is to identify something you're good at and embrace this skill, all the while improving overall.

BFS: *Do you have a favorite lift?*

AG: I love doing Olympic lifts. I did a lot of them in high school, but not a lot in college or after college. Doing hang cleans are my favorite. The movements involved in this lift are challenging and make you really focus on your technique in order to lift heavier weights.

I've also always been a fan of back squats because I could lift a lot. In high school I lifted more than a lot of the boys, and that would always shut them up. With back squats I felt like I could always do more and more. I loved challenging myself. In college we did more of front squats, and then in my pro training we did a lot of squats, but it was more with free weights or sandbags than with the barbell.

BFS: *What are your soccer career goals?*

AG: I want to play in a world cup and in the Olympics. I have yet to do either. That has been my goal ever since I was a little girl – we're talking about 10 years old. Having the ability to play soccer in college and then play professionally is absolutely fantastic, but I won't be satisfied until I experience the world's favorite sport on the two largest stages. **BFS**



Guajardo currently plays for the Boston Breakers of the National Women's Soccer League.

Photo by Mike Girdley / Boston Breakers



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Date	Location	City	State
11/20/13	NYSAPERD	Verona	NY
1/18/14	St. Olaf College	Northfield	MN
1/18/14	White Plains HS	White Plains	NY
1/18/14	Bryant High School	Bryant	AR
1/26/14	SUNY Cortland	Cortland	NY
2/1/14	Monte Vista	Spring Valley	CA
2/10/14	Montgomery City HS	Mont. City	MO
2/22/14	Dulaney HS	Timonium	MD

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2/22/14	St. Marys HS	Medford	OR
3/22/14	Manchester HS	Manchester	MI
3/22/14	Shorecrest HS	Shoreline	WA
4/26/14	Fitchburg HS	Fitchburg	MA
5/17/14	Ripon College	Ripon	WI
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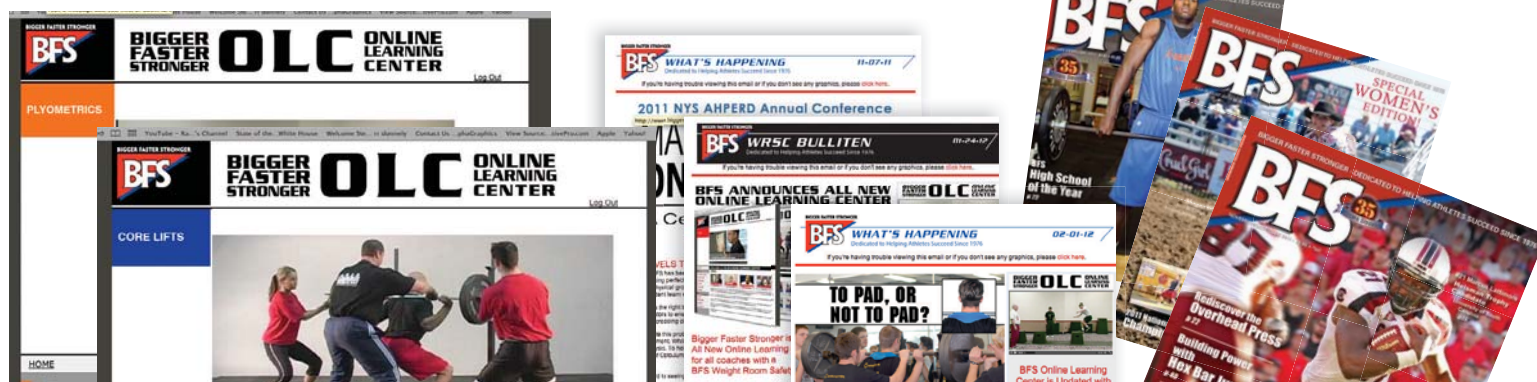
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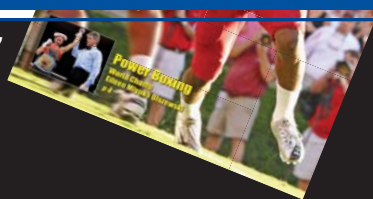
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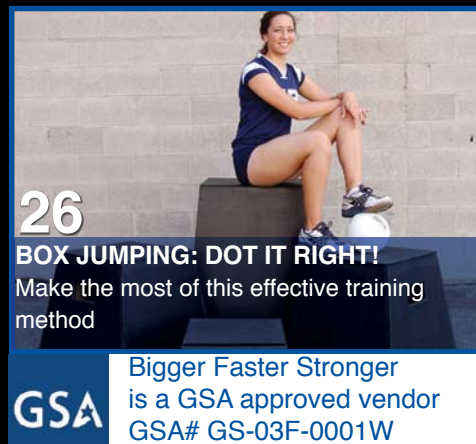
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