

Navajo basketball teams win 1A, 3A Ariz. state championships

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GLENDALE, Ariz. – President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez celebrate the success of Navajo basketball players who competed in the 2018 Arizona state high school basketball tournaments. Both attended games for the 1A Conference and 3A Conference tournaments this past week.

“It’s an honor to be here watching so many of our Navajo athletes compete at this level,” Begaye said. “To see them doing so well goes to show you their commitment and dedication. I’m proud to see them representing our people.”

For the 1A Girls Championship game, the Saint Michaels Lady Cardinals defeated the Baboquivari Lady Warriors 60-44 to win the state title for the second year in a row. After the game, both Begaye and Nez carried the Navajo Nation flag onto the court to celebrate and congratulate the girls on their victory.

“Congratulations to the Lady Cardinals!” Nez said. “Back-to-back Championship wins are not easy and you’ve earned this tremendous honor along with your coaches.”

For the 3A Boys Final Four Championship games, which took place last Friday on Feb. 23 at the Gila River Arena in Glendale, the Winslow Bulldogs and the Chinle Wildcats faced off and the Bulldogs won 68-57.

“I’m glad to be part of the reservation and to show the rez that we can ball!” said Ricardo

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Villanueva (40), forward for the Winslow Bulldogs.

The Winslow Bulldogs then advanced to the championship game on Feb. 26 against the Blue Ridge Yellow Jackets where they won the state title 79-63.

“The main key to winning this game was defense,” said Darius James (10), point guard for the Winslow Bulldogs. “This season we’ve been working hard every day in practice and it finally paid off.”

Regarding the 3A Girls Final Four Championship games on Feb. 23, Begaye mentioned the significance of having all four teams hail from the Navajo Nation. They were the Page Lady Sand Devils, the Window Rock Lady Fighting Scouts, the Monument Valley Lady Mustangs and the Ganado Lady Hornets.

“We have all four teams here that are Navajo and that’s truly something special,” Begaye said. “No matter who wins, who loses, the nation is watching and cheering all of you.”

In the end, the Page Lady Sand Devils beat the Window Rock Lady Fighting Scouts 66-47 and the Monument Valley Lady Mustangs beat the Ganado Lady Hornets 38-32.

After the game between Monument Valley and Ganado, Lady Mustang Briana Gillis said about Navajo, “It’s where I come from, it’s my family. And we’re here to represent our tribe and that’s what I’m proud of.”

The Page Lady Sand Devils faced off against the Monument Valley Lady Mustangs in the 3A Girls Championship game. For much of the game the teams were neck-to-neck, then Page pulled forward in the fourth quarter and won 44-41.

“I’m proud I had an opportunity to play with [my teammates] this year—we’re state champs,” said Mikala Benally (10), guard for the Page Lady Sand Devils.

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