

Sammy C's hosts 'Lobo Meet & Greet' in downtown Gallup

Written by By Boderra Joe Sun Correspondent
Friday, 23 March 2018 10:27



Lobos fans, students, youths, staff and City of Gallup officials filled Sammy C's Rock N' Sports Pub & Grille as both the University of New Mexico's athletic director and the head coach for the men's soccer team presented themselves March 21.

Sammy Chioda, owner of Sammy C's, welcomed and introduced the sports leaders. Chioda and city officials have worked together in the past to invite UNM athletic coaches to visit Gallup.

This year, Chioda was pleased to introduce UNM's new athletic director, Eddie Nuñez, and UNM's head coach for the men's soccer team, Jeremy Fishbein.

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MORE THAN A GAME

Originally, Chioda and the city invited UNM's men's basketball coach and men's baseball coach to Gallup. But Chioda said they wanted to do something "really cool" with soccer because Nuñez had such success with the soccer program at the university.

Nuñez was given the top post in the athletics department Aug. 31, 2017 and is UNM's thirteenth athletic director. The title dates back to 1911, when Ralph L. Hutchinson was named the school's first athletic director.

Nuñez' number one priority at UNM are the student athletes. His goal is to ensure that student athletes are supported, and receive all the resources they need to achieve ambitious goals both on and off the field.

"It's been exciting and challenging," Nuñez said. "It's about the people."

He mentioned that it was an honor to have been selected to be UNM's new athletic director and to represent New Mexico.

"I'm here to represent UNM institution and not UNM athletics," he said. "That's just the reality to my job as I'm an ambassador to the university. I want to meet new people and be out there and here from you."

Fishbein enters his seventeenth season at the helm of the Lobos soccer program in 2018. He is the program's all-time winningest coach and has built New Mexico into a perennial power in college soccer.

Fishbein mentioned that his players have more than just passion for the sport – they also have a huge impact in their own communities as role models. Of all the team's achievements, Fishbein said he is most proud of that one.

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"We have guys going on to be successful in their community," Fishbein said. "We have guys doing everything: doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers, and some are fortunate enough to play professional soccer."

He mentioned that there are 30 players on the team. Of those, there are five who are now playing in Major League Soccer, a professional league authorized by U.S. Soccer. Some play in Finland and Sweden.

"Hopefully they can be role models for the youth that are here," Fishbein said.

FUTURE GOALS

Fishbein addressed the youth that were in attendance to "shoot high and never limit yourself." He also said that he has two New Mexican players, one from Las Cruces and one from Albuquerque, who recently signed a professional contract. One is playing for Germany and the other is playing for Real Salt Lake, MLS.

"New Mexico kids can do it," he said. "Put in a lot of hard work, be a good student, be a great teammate, learn leadership goals. You can achieve your goals."

Four of the youths in attendance were from the Gallup Soccer U13 Traveling Team, Thunderbird. Three of those players were Mateo Juarez, 11, Khalid Mostafa, 11, and Liam Bia, 12.

"We all want to play for UNM men's soccer team," Mostafa said.

Another attendee was Michaela Henry, the sports facilities events coordinator at UNM-Gallup. She said she wants to do some networking with Nuñez and was thrilled to meet him.

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"I read [Nuñez] bio and he's all about student athletes," Henry said. "He's new too, so it's exciting."

Pertaining to the Gallup Soccer League, Alejandro Murillo, the league's head coach, and Delfino Sanchez, its vice president, were both in attendance.

The two felt that being present with UNM's coach and athletic director was a way to get things started for the city's own soccer league.

"We want to bring more awareness and bring the soccer level up here in Gallup," Sanchez said.

Murillo agreed, and added a few of his own ideas for how to get local children and students involved.

"We want to bring a soccer camp," Murillo said. "To feed kids, teach them fundamentals to play in the high school and the college level."

BEYOND MEETING & GREETING

Chioda reflected on the importance of introducing collegiate level coaches and directors to the Gallup community – and introducing the Gallup community to them.

"There's a lot of Lobo people out here," Chioda said. "A lot of alums, a lot of Lobo fans reaching out to the Lobo nation. Let people know that Gallup exists out here. People have been supportive by coming out to the event."

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