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Superstar DT was fourth in nation in QB sacks last season

NAVAJO, N.M. – Nabahitachiini Nez, a student athlete at Navajo Pine High School, is the latest area athlete to be accepted to play at the Down Under Sports Tournament in Australia. The annual tournament takes place over the summer and includes student athletes from all over the world.

A graduating senior, Nez, 17, was a standout defensive tackle for the Warriors for four years. He played offensive when necessary, but Nez anchored a Warriors team which was at times short-handed and overmatched.

"I was totally shocked. I was surprised," Nez said of getting the chance to go to Australia. "It's a great opportunity. I am honored to be an ambassador of not only my community and state, but also our country."

Nez, who wants to study engineering in college, could go down as the best football player ever at Navajo Pine, located on the Navajo Nation and a 20-minute drive north from Window Rock, Ariz., the capital of the Navajo Nation. Pine is a Division 1-2A school that ended the past season with a 1-11 record, which was par for the course for Warriors' football teams over the years. Nez is considered a local hero and a "can't miss" prospect by most scouting agencies.

In every sport, there is that one player that simply stands out from the rest of the team. The 6-feet-4 inch tall, 286 pound Nez, was fourth in the nation in quarterback sacks this past season. Nicknamed "Bona," Nez recorded 41 solo tackles, 69 total tackles, 35 sacks and 22 quarterback hurries for the 2015-16 football season. Toward the end of the 2015 football season, Nez led the nation in sacks.

William Nez, Bona's father, said his son is being recruited by a host of Division I and II schools, among them Texas A & M, New Mexico Military Institute, Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, Brown University in Rhode Island, Willamette University in Oregon and Western New Mexico University, among others.

"I don't want him to go to college just to play football," William Nez said. "It's important that you get a good education while there. Right now he's leaning toward (New Mexico Military Institute)."

Bona agreed, saying that he's established a relationship with NMMI coach Drew Thatcher. "I like what I see in the school. If I need help academically, I can get it there. At a bigger school, that may not be possible."

But for right now the Nez family wants to put its focus with getting 'Bona' to Australia for the sports tournament. "One of the things I'm going to do is sell raffle tickets," the younger Nez said of potential fundraising. "It's going to cost over $3,000, but I think I will be going."

Nez, who began playing organized football in Gallup's Tony Dorsett Youth Football League, said he was selected to go Down Under because of his on-the-field accomplishments the past few years. He said he's never been out of the United States, but looks forward to meeting new players and coaches and friends.

Charlton Long, athletic director at Navajo Pine High, said Nez is the first Warriors student athlete to go on such a long trip. He said such a trip is something he knows 'Bona' appreciates.

"Everybody's very happy for him," Long said. "He's had four different football coaches since he's been here. He's got the athleticism. He's got the intelligence. We will help him get there in every way that we can."

Nez said he's actively looking for sponsors to make the Australia trip, which takes place from June 24 to July 9 and after Nez plays in New Mexico's annual all-star football game near Albuquerque. He said he'll be accepting financial donations and contributions over the next month.

The Down Under Sports Tournament includes competition in football, cheerleading, wrestling, volleyball, golf, cross-country, basketball and host of other sports.

Miyamura High School wrestler Bennie Baca, 17, was selected to go. Baca has said that he'll spend the rest of this year fundraising to make the trip in 2017.

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