



WHITTIER UNION

HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Dec. 5, 2024 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Pioneer High School Celebrates First-Ever CIF Southern Section Football Championship

WHITTIER – When the Pioneer High School football team struggled during a mid-season slump, coach Ramon Juarez inspired his players by telling them they were on the cusp of greatness if they never stopped believing in themselves.

Pioneer shook off decades of frustration and disappointment by capturing their first-ever CIF Southern Section (CIF-SS) football title, after defeating San Gabriel High by a final score of 13-6 in the Division 14 championship game on Nov. 30. The game was played in front of 2,000 passionate supporters at Dick Torres Memorial Stadium, which included Titan alums from as far back as the 1960s.

The Pioneer football season continues in the CIF SoCal Regional Division 7-A Championship Bowl Game. The Titans will face Panorama High School, the CIF Los Angeles City Section Division 3 champion, at 6 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 7 at Dick Torres Memorial Stadium. The winner will move on to play in the CIF State Division 7-A Championship Bowl Game scheduled for 11 a.m. on Saturday, Dec. 14 at Fullerton Union High School District Stadium.

In the CIF-SS championship game, the Titans were led by junior wide receiver Jose Rojas, who caught two touchdown passes, and a stifling defense powered by senior linebacker Joshua Morlet, who had two sacks and made the play of the game when he instigated a fumble at the Pioneer one-yard line to abruptly end a potential San Gabriel scoring drive.

The triumph was especially sweet for Juarez, the former Titan coach from 1997 to 2011, who was coaxed out of retirement to return to the Pioneer athletic department in 2020, first as athletic director and then as varsity head coach, and now will cap a nearly 30-year career as an educator and coach with a CIF title.

"I am so incredibly proud of this team. They never stopped working, they believed in themselves and they earned this," Juarez said. "This is a great day for Pioneer athletics. We are writing a new chapter and establishing a legacy that we hope will last for years and years."

The best finish for Pioneer football before this CIF-SS championship was a league title in 1998. Prior to this season, Pioneer had never played in a CIF-SS semifinal, let alone a championship game. But coming into the 2024-2025 school year, Juarez recognized he had a very athletic team that had an opportunity to do something special.

– MORE –

During the summer, Juarez worked closely with assistant coach Chuck Willig to host voluntary weekend workouts for the players, where they worked on fundamentals, strength training and technique.

Juarez also intentionally put together a tougher non-league schedule, which included District rival Santa Fe High. Although Pioneer struggled during these games, the extra work and higher level of competition paid off during their playoff run, when the Titans played their best football of the year.

“This championship would not have happened without the support of Pioneer administrators and coach Willig, who has been a godsend to this program,” said Juarez of Willig, who served as head coach of the program from 2012-19. “We have different styles but complement each other perfectly. Chuck is more of a co-head coach. Chuck knows the kids and, between us, we have more than 60 years coaching high school football.”

In 2020, Juarez, who teaches world history at Pioneer, was asked by then-principal Lilia Bozigian to fill the school’s vacant athletic director position and help rebuild an athletic program that had been devastated by the pandemic. Though Juarez was looking toward retirement, he accepted the offer. When their varsity football coach stepped down after the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, Juarez agreed to return to coach the Titans.

For Juarez, who played football at Dorsey High School, Whittier College, and in Europe, seeing his players grow and develop into leaders on and off the field is just as rewarding as winning championships. He praised his team captains, including Rojas, quarterback Amiri Resendiz, center Nathaniel Madden, and tight end Eduardo Gonzalez.

“Congratulations to our Titans! This achievement is huge for the football program, our school, and our community,” Pioneer High principal Mary Chapman said. “Ramon and his staff have been amazing. It is impressive to watch the team maintain its determination and motivation and remain steadfast and calm through this historic moment.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

WUHS_PIONEERCIF1: The Pioneer High School varsity football team celebrates its first-ever CIF Southern Section championship after a 13-6 win over San Gabriel High on Nov. 30, in the Division 14 final. The game was attended by 2,000 passionate Titan supporters, including alumni from as far back as the 1960s, who filled the stands at Dick Torres Memorial Stadium to cheer on their team.

WUHS_PIONEERCIF2: Pioneer High School head football coach Ramon Juarez proudly holds up a victory plaque after the Titans win the CIF-SS Division 14 championship, defeating San Gabriel High 13-6 on Nov. 30. Juarez, who coached the team from 1997 to 2011, returned as Pioneer’s athletic director and head coach in 2020 and will cap a nearly 30-year career with a CIF-SS championship.

###

OUR MISSION

The Whittier Union High School District provides all students with an engaging, quality standards-based instructional program delivered by a well-trained staff resulting in improved student achievement. Whittier Union High School District works to achieve and maintain excellence in providing a comprehensive education for all students.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Gary Mendez
President

Josefina E. Canchola
Vice President

Irma Rodríguez Moisa
Clerk

Dr. Russell Castañeda-Calleros
Member

Jaime López
Member

Dr. Monica Oviedo
Superintendent