



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 15, 2025

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Bonita Unified Color Guard Earns Gold Medal After Yearlong Competition Hiatus

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – The San Dimas High School Color Guard took its program to new levels when it earned a gold medal at the Winter Guard Association of Southern California (WGASC) Color Guard championships in April, a stunning turnaround for a program that took a yearlong hiatus from competition only to come back stronger than ever.

Performing a show inspired by the System of a Down song “Toxicity,” the San Dimas team – which featured three Lone Hill Middle School students – gave a stirring performance that earned first place in the Scholastic AAA division and gave the Color Guard its first gold medal since 2010.

“This is a monumental accomplishment,” San Dimas High band co-director Lance Beckford said. “To arrive at this point after not competing a year ago is a huge testament to our program and our kids, who stuck with it through the toughest moments. A big shout out to our coaches Dylan Martin and Mariela Hernandez for their incredible work in turning the program around and returning us to the championship level.”

The San Dimas Color Guard was sent reeling when its previous coach resigned before the start of the 2023-24 school year, resulting in the team cancelling its performance and competition schedule for the season.

Martin and Hernandez, who are married, are longtime color guard coaches with considerable high school experience who came to San Dimas with a simple plan: build the team’s faith in the coaching staff, and bring in fresh ideas that would stimulate the program. For San Dimas High senior and Color Guard captain Sydney Martinez, it was a winning combination.

“I knew it was going to be different right from the start,” Martinez said. “I thought this would be more of a rebuilding year, but we came up with a solid show that began placing in the top three at competition. It was a real challenge to come back, to practice, to train new members. This year is everything you hope that color guard can be. I am so proud to be a captain of this team.”

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The return to form began in the summer, with team members attending guard camp in June and July, then going through a rigorous band camp in August. The camps not only allow teams to brush up and add to their skill set, but also provide ample opportunity for the students to bond with each other, a key element when putting together a new routine and enduring twice-weekly practice sessions that can last anywhere from eight to 12 hours.

"I have made so many new friends in color guard," San Dimas junior and captain Janeane Gomez said. "When I joined color guard, I was shy and scared to try out. But now I'm a captain and I want to help to create a safe and welcoming environment for the new members. I have so much love for this."

San Dimas High junior Zoe Carlton said she was not sure how well the team would bounce back after a year of inactivity. But a belief in her teammates and new coaches, combined with a love of performing, helped to bring the best out of Carlton.

"It makes me excited to see how the crowd will react," Carlton said. "Being out on the floor performing gives me an adrenaline rush and makes my performances better. Plus, I have so much trust in my teammates. We rely on each other and help each other out."

Color guard combines flag-twirling and rifle- and saber-spinning with a choreographed music routine which often tells a story. Martin, who joined color guard at 14, began coaching after high school and has performed with Riverside City College's Marching Tigers band. Coming into this season with San Dimas, Martin knew he and Hernandez had a tough assignment. They opted for a simple approach: having conversations with the team, outlining expectations for the year, and instilling confidence in the program.

"We sat down and told the kids, this is how we teach, this is how you learn. We emphasized a family dynamic," Martin said. "Mariela and I come from high schools that had big marching band rivalries, and we knew that employing humor and love was the key to winning the team over. Mariela is the yin to my yang. We couldn't do this without each other."

PHOTOS:

BUSD_COLORGUARD1: The San Dimas High School Color Guard celebrates its gold medal during the WGASC championships in April, a stunning turnaround for a program that sat out the 2023-24 season.

BUSD_COLORGUARD2: The San Dimas High School Color Guard earned its first gold medal since 2010 during the recent WGASC championships in April.

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