

El Monte Union High School District

Community Committed to College and Career



PRESS RELEASE

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El Monte Union Class of 2026 Scholar-Athletes Recognized by National Football Foundation

EL MONTE – When El Monte High School Class of 2026 graduate Emmy Betancourth and Rosemead High School graduate Linda May learned their schools would field girls flag football teams for the first time during the 2025-26 school year, the scholar-athletes eagerly embraced the opportunity. Already known for challenging themselves in the classroom and in athletics, Betancourth and May quickly stepped into leadership roles as members of their schools' inaugural teams.

Betancourth and May were two of just 28 students from the San Gabriel Valley to be recognized with the National Football Foundation (NFF) Pasadena/San Gabriel Valley Chapter's inaugural Scholar-Athlete Award for Girls Flag Football, representing El Monte Union's athletic program.

Betancourth and May received their awards during the NFF Awards Reception, held May 17 at the historic Rose Parade Tournament House.

"It feels so good to receive this award. I didn't expect it at all," Betancourth said. "I had never played flag football before this year, and I really didn't know much about the game, so I decided it would be fun to try it out. It's something new, and I got to share the experience with my classmates. My positions were running back, quarterback, and defensive back."

Betancourth, who was named team captain of the Lady Lions squad and also served as a member of El Monte's girls basketball and track and field teams, has distinguished herself academically throughout her high school career. Betancourth, who graduated with a 4.1 GPA, will attend UC Davis in the fall, looking to major in human biology on her way to a career as an occupational therapist, with the goal of moving into pediatrics.

May played wide receiver for Rosemead, helping the team to an 11-4 record and the first round of the CIF playoffs. After a season in which she had 25 pass receptions and seven touchdowns, May was named second team All-League in the Mission Valley League.

May also excelled on the basketball court, helping lead the Lady Panthers to a Mission Valley League championship in 2026 while earning first team All-League, Offensive Player of the Year, and Senior Athlete of the Year honors. Beyond athletics, she volunteered with the school's Red Cross program. May will attend Cal State LA, where she plans to major in criminal justice.

"Linda is a truly great person, outstanding scholar, and hard worker," Rosemead High Athletic Director Amanda Gendron said. "Our Head Flag Football Coach Omar Barbosa nominated her for this recognition with the National Football Foundation and we had the honor of letting Linda know. She is much deserving of this recognition."

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El Monte High Class of 1997 graduate Joel Sanchez, who helped to nominate Betancourth, returned to El Monte High as a physical education teacher in 2001 and is a longtime member of the NFF. A football star for the Lions, Sanchez attended Azusa Pacific University, and played for the college's 1998 National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) championship football team.

"The NFF has celebrated SoCal boys prep football scholar-athletes for more than 50 years. With the advent of flag football, the NFF will now recognize the achievements of the girls too. They put in the work, and they deserve to be honored," Sanchez said. "Emmy and Linda were perfect choices for the inaugural awards. They are tremendous athletes, outstanding students, and campus leaders."

By partnering with the Tournament of Roses, the NFF was able to kick off its new awards program in style, while providing \$500 scholarships to four of the 28 scholar-athletes. Sanchez says the NFF is looking to expand the program moving forward by acquiring more sponsors to honor more students, and provide more money for scholarships. To qualify for the award, a student must maintain a 3.0 GPA, be an active member of the flag football team, and be nominated by their school.

"As participants in their schools' inaugural girls flag football programs, Emmy and Linda set a strong example for future student-athletes through their dedication in the classroom and on the field," El Monte Union High School District Superintendent Dr. Edward Zuniga said. "We are proud to celebrate their achievements and this well-deserved recognition."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

EMUHSD FLAG FOOTBALL SCHOLAR ATHLETE 1: El Monte High School Class of 2026 graduate Emmy Betancourth was one of just 28 students to receive a Scholar-Athlete of the Year Award for girls flag football from the National Football Foundation.

EMUHSD FLAG FOOTBALL SCHOLAR ATHLETE 2: Rosemead High School Class of 2026 graduate Linda May was one of just 28 students to receive a Scholar-Athlete of the Year Award for girls flag football from the National Football Foundation.

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The vision of the El Monte Union High School District is to empower and motivate our students to be resilient, college and career ready, lifelong learners and contributing members of our global society.