



# At PMA, new coach Alexandria Maldonado adds spark to volleyball program

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**DOWNEY** — “You have to want it bad enough to suffer the losses, to suffer the obstacles, to suffer the heartache when you put yourself out there and fall short.”

The famous Olympic volleyball player Kerri Walsh once said that about the sport.

The St. Pius X-St. Matthias Academy (PMA) boys volleyball team may have lost its CIF-Southern Section first-round match last week but had a successful season with a .500 record of 12-12 and had a great first season under new coach Alexandria Maldonado.



For the girls program, she was the varsity assistant coach, and the head JV coach.

“I truly felt this was a dream come true,” Maldonado said. “Being able to coach and work as a full-time counselor in the same school was something I have been searching for the longest time.”

Before arriving on the PMA campus, Maldonado had various jobs from Garfield High’s volleyball coach for both boys and girls to the frosh-soph teams, a club head coach for the SCJV 16’s national team and she was a full-time student in a PhD program for Clinical Psychology.

“My life revolved around volleyball, school, and work,” she added. “There were many times I thought of quitting coaching all together so I can find a full-time job that gives me the financial income I need. However, throughout my coaching journey, I have found myself meeting new parents and players constantly because of the reputation I gained of being a tough but detailed coach.

“This view is something that many coaches, players, parents, and refs have stated is my asset to my coaching. I credit my tough and detailed coaching methods to all my club and school coaches. I learned how to be disciplined in life by playing competitive volleyball.”

PMA senior setter Daniel Salvador said of coach Maldonado: “If at the start of this season you told me we would be competing in playoffs, in all honesty I wouldn’t have believed you,” he said. “Coach Alex turned what to many should have been a rough transition into our most meaningful and memorable season.

“Anyone who watched us practice or play knows just how tight a ship she runs. Thanks to her tough love and coaching, we played with a new sense of understanding and discipline, having been taught not just the physical and technical aspect of the game, but the tactical and mental side also. Not only did she fight for us on the court, but off of it as well, instilling within us lessons that my teammates and I will take with us long after our volleyball careers are over.”



It was my libero's (Daniel Garcia) first volleyball season and he became the best hustler from the team

My captain, Eric Zavala was my middle blocker and stepped it up and played all around, controlling the back row and playing side by side with my libero in ease

Two hitters, Ricardo Romero and David Garcia were moved to the right side for the first time and were molded into backup setters in the back row

My second middle spot was being fought for by a new junior, Micah Gray and a freshman, David Romo, who both stepped it up and shut down many players on the net

Many of my defensive specialists, Moses Bersales, Nicholas Cabrera, and Ryan Gomez stepped it up to fight for an OPPO spot and become the backup setters

My players went through injuries, new drills, new teammates, and a new coaching staff and yet, they truly showed they wanted to be here!

"These players truly pushed through so much in this amazing season," Maldonado said. "I saw these players grow from being a group of new people with different experiences and being at different volleyball levels, to becoming a team who helped each other in practices and in the games. They showed each other the different techniques needed to advance, to enjoying their team lunches and dinners as they prepared for their games, to becoming a family that will forever be remembered amongst each other.

"There were many times when the team fell down. My captains, Eric Zavala and Daniel Salvador, stepped it up and reminded their teammates why we were here...to make it into the playoffs and win the championship."

### **Season highlights**

PMA placed second in the league, made it to the playoffs, had some amazing wins and had some great learning moments. The team kept up and challenged Division 2 and 3 teams to where they were surprised at the



“This season would have not gone this way without these 14 amazing players, my two amazing managers - Hazel Fernandez and Benjamin Hernandez and my awesome assistant coach, German Diaz,” said Maldonado of her staff. “In addition, the love and support from the players’ parents, and lastly, this would have not been possible without the support and belief of the St. Pius X- St. Matthias Academy President, Principal, Athletic Department, and faculty and staff.”

Junior libero, Ryan Gomez added: “Throughout the last three seasons of being a part of the volleyball team I can personally state that throughout this program there were many obstacles faced and changes made during the past years of playing. Aside from players leaving and joining the team I can say that this year our volleyball team has grown and improved so much compared to past seasons as we helped, watched, taught and communicated with each other to help become a better volleyball team as a whole.

As my experience from last two seasons of playing volleyball, I had only learned the basics of playing volleyball, but from this current season, I gained the confidence to try new positions in volleyball that I believed I wasn’t capable of performing but after this season not only did, I try new things, but I learned to not self doubt myself. I have a great time being a part of an amazing volleyball program, which has taught me so much as a player, student, and as a person”.

### **Team summary**

Coach Maldonado: “When you become the “New Coach” at a new school or club, there are some thoughts of “What do these players know?” “What are their views on competitive ball?” “How will they react to my coaching tactics?” I knew going into this season it would not be easy, simply because of two reasons: (1) the PMA 2023 seniors are the freshmen COVID19 players who lost their season, and (2) every player who became a returner had already gone through a couple coaches before me. Having to work around the idea that these players may not gel well with my coaching methods, could be a rocky season. However, these players have truly shown that they have the passion to play volleyball, the drive to grow and win, the





### **2023 team roster**

Victor Carrera, Sr. OH  
Daniel Garcia, So. Libero, DS, Opp.  
Eric Zavala, Sr. MH, OH  
Johnnie Esparza, RS, Opp.  
Nicholas Cabrera, SO. DS  
Luis Garcia, Fr, DS, L  
Micah Grey, Jr.  
David Garcia, Sr. OH  
David Romo, Fr, MH, OPP.  
Ricardo Romero, OH, MH  
Daniel Salvador, Sr., S, OH  
Nathan Nakayama, Fr. L, DS  
Ryan Gomez, DS, L  
Raymond Ramirez, Fr, S, RS  
Moses Bersales, Jr. S, RS, OH

### **What they said:**



overlooked is our road to each one.

“This year specifically, coach Alex was named head coach just three weeks before league play began, giving us even less practice time than that to work with. Beginning the year with virtually no preseason plus a new coach is unfortunately not a new reality for PMA boys’ volleyball. Over my four seasons of varsity volleyball, we’ve begun each season led by a different head coach.”

**Ryan Gomez, junior libero:** “When PMA announced we were going to start the new season of volleyball, I think I can speak for most of us when I say we were afraid, because knowing that we didn’t have a coach any more was very intimidating and had us questioning how the season was going to play out.

“As the school announced that coach Alex would only be assisting us, that did not stop her from coaching and pushing us hard, later making her head coach and allowing her to take our team to the next level.

“A big help towards our potential and self-confidence was when coach Alex would enter our team into numerous tournaments against higher divisions knowing that we were not sure if we were ready, but she still took action in putting our team in that position because she believed in us, which helped us believe in us as well.”



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