

MARCHING ONTO THE COURT FOR MARCH MADNESS 2024



Photo by Eliza Lotterstein

By **Kasey Lee** and **Oliver Yuval**

Students and staff around the school are excited for the school's annual March Madness tournament to take place, March 11 through March 22, with 19 teams of students competing for the number one spot.

"The idea of playing basketball, which is a sport I love, and playing it in front of a lot of people [is so much] fun for me," sophomore Cole Morgan said. "It'll be a really fun experience, especially [when there's] a lot of people you know and your classmates watching."

The school's March Madness tournament is similar to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) tournament, where various teams compete against each other in a knock-out style competition to find out who is best at basketball. Games will take place during lunch on the physical education (P.E.) blacktop and the final game between the top two teams will take place in the main gym.

"I think my team can make it far if we work [together] to find an open man," junior Jayden Morita said. "Our

strong suit is definitely not height so we have to use our speed and passing to get open."

Each team consists of five to eight players of various grades who all have different strategies and advantages to help them advance through the tournament.

"I have a lot of really really tall people and our average team height is like 6 '3," Morgan said. "I chose them so we can secure all the rebounds and block a lot of shots."

March Madness is an opportunity for students to compete with their friends, even with different levels of basketball experiences. Many players came up with creative names for their teams such as Bollywood Ballers, Family Guys, Green Goblins, Rim Reapers, Knapp Ranch Elite, Tarzana Ball, the Procrastinators and more.

"[I joined] because my friends were participating in it and they needed someone tall," sophomore Sukhpal Bhullar said. "[I'm looking forward to] beating Family Guys in the first round [and] I think we can make it until we play the basketball players on the school's team."

While many players have

varying levels of basketball experience, with some on the school's basketball team and others who play recreationally, the tournament opens up chances for all students to participate in a sport they enjoy.

"I am looking forward to the excitement of playing a game and running plays with the team," Morita said. "We hope to catapult me toward the basket so me and the ball go through the hoop for extra points."

The players are looking forward to competing, some are there to have fun playing in the tournament while others have serious ambition to win it all.

"[I'm looking forward to] winning of course," freshman Isaiah Johnson said. "I think that we have one of the best teams in the whole tournament and I believe that we could just win it all."

The final will have many students in the crowd watching as the final teams battle it out for the championship. Through student council's hardwork and planning, the final game will be exciting and enjoyable for everyone in the school, including students and faculty.

"I'm excited for the final

game," junior student council planner Ava McDonald said. "We have a prize, we're going to decorate the gym and we are also going to have a small halftime performance."

Many students are excited to see how the tournament will progress and see games during lunch which will have both student and faculty referees. With involvement from both students and staff, March Madness will bring everyone together.

"I'm looking forward to seeing the school spirit coming out to March Madness, cheering on the teams, and seeing the fun that is going to come with it," sophomore Aaron Sanfir said.

School spirit is one of the most important things to come out of the school March Madness as it brings together the students and creates a sense of unity between them. It's an atmosphere where students can compete, cheer and form close friendships with each other.

"My team all [joined] because we're tight together and we play blacktop ball at lunch," Johnson said. "We wanted to test our limits at the tournament."

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The race for California senate

By **Kyleigh Zvara**

The race for one of California’s senate seats began, with five candidates who competed to gain the spot throughout late February and early March, electing Adam Schiff and Steve Garvey to move on to the final debate.

The five candidates included Democrat Schiff along with Democrat Katie Porter, Republican Garvey, Democrat Barbra Lee and Republican Eric Early.

Throughout the race, Schiff held a strong lead,

while Porter and Garvey remained tied right behind him in a close second. Every runner, though, got the opportunity to define what they stood for in the three Senate primary debates.

In his debate, Schiff tried to calm any criticism he had gained through his previous political choices by emphasizing that his more moderate opinions followed closely the previous senator, Dianne Feinstein’s, who had served California for 31 years. He also made sure to mention that he worked as impeachment manager on

Donald Trump’s first trial.

Porter was one of the more liberal contenders and prominently brought up the issue of age, her being the youngest candidate in the race.

The last democratic candidate, Lee, constructed an argument consisting mostly of her liberal choices and statements surrounding the Afghanistan War in 2001, and more recently, the storming of the capital.

Garvey, the former Dodger, was the only Republican candidate to debate. Skepticism about Garvey’s ability

to lead politically was high as he has only had experience with baseball, but in the past that has not stopped Californian’s from electing such representatives. Garvey also made sure to separate himself from the rest of his party, emphasizing Trump and his “Make America Great Again” (MAGA) ideals.

Schiff and Garvey ended up overpowering the debate with their arguments, winning over the people. They will serve their term with the state’s other senator, Alex Padilla, who will be in

office until 2029.

The previous senator, Laphonza Butler has chosen not to run for reelection after being placed in late senator Feinstein’s spot. She felt she would be able to better serve the people without having to worry about campaigning.

Schiff and Garvey are fighting to serve in one of California’s two senate seats with current senator Padilla.

Russian opposition Alex Navalny leader dies

By **Victoria Matz** and **Isabel Rose**

Alexei Navalny (47), a renowned Russian politician, lawyer and anti-corruption activist, died Feb. 16, 2024, leaving his supporters unsure of the future for Russia.

While several countries place the blame of his death on Russian President Vladimir Putin including the United States (U.S.) President Joe Biden, he has made no statements regarding the opposition leader or his demise.

The exact cause of his death is unknown, only that he was sent to a special regime facility in the Arctic where he died.

Navalny was most notably known for his work in

opposing the Kremlin and exposing their corruption, making him a prominent enemy of Putin. Navalny knew of this danger, and in 2020, he lost consciousness aboard a plane flying over Siberia, and was hospitalized in an induced coma. He was flown to Germany where it was discovered that he had been poisoned with a nerve agent from the Soviet era. This was the first seen attempt at assassinating the activist.

From a young age, Navalny wanted to make Russia a better place, leading to his notable role later in life.

In the early 2000s he earned two degrees, one in economics and one in law and joined the Russian liberal party by the name of

Yabloko. Navalny formed a movement in hopes of protecting the rights of Moscow residents; however, in 2007, he was expelled from his political party because his beliefs and motives were viewed as overly nationalistic.

Refusing to give up, he started the Anti-Corruption Foundation in 2011, which revealed all of the government corruption in Russia. After serving a 15-day sentence in jail for leading a protest consisting of about 25,000 people, he was arrested in 2012 for embezzlement and fraud. Both charges did not have valid evidence or reasoning, resulting in Navalny believing that his arrest was made out of false allegations and

politically motivated reasons. However, both cases were suspended and he continued to run for positions in the Russian government, aiming for the presidency.

In 2023, he was sentenced to 19 years in prison for extremism, which was added on top of the 12-year sentence he was already serving. That year, he was transferred to the facility in the Arctic where he passed away.

Following his death, Yulia Navalnaya, his widow, placed the blame on President Putin, and vowed to take her late husband’s place in fighting for a “free Russia.”

Since Navalny’s exclusion from the 2018 presidential election, notions of

Navalnaya running instead were present in Russia, but she decided to stay out of politics, something that she has now changed.

Today, Navalnaya continues the struggle to connect with Navalny’s supporters in Russia, since her messages are claimed to be false by pro-Kremlin social media accounts. The war in Ukraine has also made it harder for her due to the shutting-down of all independent media outlets by the Russian government.

Despite the difficult challenges she faces, Navalnaya is determined not to let the dream of a free and beautiful country die with her husband.

Famous and influential women

By **Sylah Hill** and **Victoria Matz**

In a world full of incredible people, many stand out as influential and powerful figures in our lives. In March, the legacy and power of influential women are celebrated and remembered as time goes on.

One of the most influential women in this day and age is Taylor Swift. She is an American singer-songwriter, and a role model for young girls nowadays. Her supportive community unites people of all kinds to enjoy her music. Song lyrics, merchandise and meaningful messages are what means a lot to all people who think of her so highly. She is well-known by

all, and continues to thrive in the music industry due to the unwavering support from her fans over 16 years of songwriting.

Another young and upcoming model to all women around the world is American poet and activist, Amanda Gorman. This bright young woman was first publicly presented to the world in 2021 when she spoke at President Joe Biden’s inauguration. While some may have known her prior to this large event, after her speech, her popularity grew immensely. People all over found her public speaking and writing style to be so flawless and airy to listen to. In addition to her incredible accomplishments, she was the first person to be

named National Youth Poet Laureate. Not long after, she published a poetry book named The One for Whom Food is Not Enough, which contained some of her more well-known poems. As time goes on, her popularity and influence on women of all ages will only grow and continue to spread awareness towards issues like oppression, feminism, race and more.

One prominent and noteworthy woman worth acknowledging this March is Ketanji Brown Jackson, the first Black woman on America’s Supreme Court. In a world where women and women of color are consistently spurned, Jackson secured her spot in America’s highest court. United States

Vice President Kamala Harris presided over the vote which ruled in Jackson’s favor. In doing so, Jackson sparked inspiration in the minds and hearts of aspiring young women of all backgrounds to disregard the systems previously set up in their disfavor and to strive for greatness.

Another significant figure worth acknowledging this Women’s History Month is singer-songwriter Alicia Keys. Alicia Keys is a talented singer best known for her hits “If I Ain’t Got You” and “Fallin’”, which aided in her initial rise in popularity in the early 2000s. Signed by Columbia Records at only 15-years-old, Keys used her powerful vocals, musical skill and incredible talent to

traverse the music industry. Keys quickly established a consequential role in the rhythm and blues (R&B) genre and also the Black community, and to this day she remains a greatly appreciated figure in the history of women and of Black women. Her success continues to rouse creativity and artistry in women in the performing arts industry even 23 years after her debut. The ability to impact the music industry is a difficult feat but one that Keys accomplished.

As the month of March continues on, women like these will continue to be recognized for their hard work and great influence on the world and the industries they specialize in.

The theater program has all that jazz in “Chicago”



Photo by Jenna Espinoza and Kasey Lee

By **Jenna Espinoza** and **Kasey Lee**

The school’s theater program performed the hit musical, “Chicago,” featuring two casts March 14-17 after putting in endless hours of rehearsing and hardwork. “I’m looking forward to performing since it’s my first ever musical,” senior Cassius Franciosa said. “I’ve never sang on stage before so I’m super excited about that.”

Different from a lot of their previous performances, “Chicago” is a musical that takes place in the 1920s about two cynically sexy women, Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly, who are be-

ing tried for murder against their spouses. “[“Chicago” is] a take on the corruption in the media because there’s a lot of unjust things in the justice system,” junior Arabella Woelfer said. “It has a lot to do with how the media is portrayed and how guilty people are let out of jail.” In preparation for the show, the cast members rehearsed almost everyday, for two hours a day, during the week and seven to nine hours on the weekends. “There’s a lot of music review since there’s a lot of harmonies and singing,” sophomore Riley Star said. “We also do dance reviews and rehearsal’s on putting

the plot together as well.” Even though the musical incorporated lots of singing and dancing, requiring the cast to put in extra hours of rehearsals, many of them are enjoying the fun aspects to the musical. “My favorite part is probably the dances since I have a main role in one of the casts and in the other cast I play an ensemble and I just love dancing in it,” junior Sophia Lewis said. Accompanying the cast’s vocals, the performance also includes music from a live band, with both professionals and students from the school. After working together for many hours, both the black and gold

casts became immensely close with one another allowing them to put on an epic show. “My favorite part of the show is hanging out with my friends,” senior Harper Nooney said. “I think [the relationship between the cast] is really uplifting and really positive.” With this performance being the last big show before the end of the semester, many members are excited but sad to perform.

“I’m super excited because this is a really huge show for me that I get to end off my high school experience with,” senior Kylie Heimlich said. “I’m also really looking forward to playing role of Roxie because she’s a super important role and she is super interesting to play” With many senior cast members, “Chicago” is their last show together and through the school’s program. After years of building close relationships with one another through performances like this, they are looking forward to performing this show and continuing their journey after high school.

“I know that I will cry my eyes out because being in a class full of people that are all my friends has been the best part of my year,” Heimlich said. “Moving off to college and starting with people that I don’t know is crazy and the fact that this will be my last show with my friends will be really heart-wrenching but i’m also really excited this is the show I get to end it off with.”

The one hour and 30 minute show is \$20 for adult admission and \$13 for students and also includes a 15 minute intermission. With some teachers offering extra credit to students that attend the show, both cast members and attendees are excited to see the culmination of their dedication and hard work. “I’m really sad that this is my last musical because I’ve been in this program for four years and I’ve never really had anything like this before,” senior Zelda Tabanou said. “I’ve put so much effort into these shows so it’s gonna be hard to leave that behind.”

A new age masterpiece with Dune Part 2

By **Kaley Samiian** and **Kyleigh Zvara**

“Dune: Part Two,” the sequel to the science fiction hit, “Dune,” debuted in theaters Mar. 1, bringing Timothée Chalamet and Zendaya’s characters, Paul and Chani, back onto the big screen. The film continues where the original left off, taking place in the fictional world of Arrakis where Paul Atreides unites with Chani and the Freeman with hopes of seeking

revenge against those who ruined his family. However, he is presented with a dire situation and is forced to make crucial decisions for the universe. The first Dune movie was one of the highest grossing films of 2021 with \$435 million total earned and \$41 million on its opening weekend. “Dune: Part Two” garnered \$82.5 million in the first weekend, which doubled its prequel, as well as a very respectable \$182.5 million worldwide. Many fans were excited to

see Zendaya as a more prominent character in the new movie. Though she was a main character in the previous film, she was only in the movie for a short amount of time. The director Denis Villeneuve explained that her character was meant to have a larger role in the second film if they were allowed the opportunity. Similarly, Florence Pugh’s character Princess Irulan is to be a much more involved figure in the possible next Dune. The movie series is based on

the famed 1960’s novel with a shared name by author Frank Herbert. The first film covered the beginning of the book, while the second details the latter half of the novel. The movie has received a multitude of positive reviews which is uncommon for the entertainment industry today. Those who loved the film point out its captivating cinematography coupled with its action-filled scenes that never lose the attention of viewers. Additionally, people enjoy

that they are given a deeper understanding of the characters and are intrigued by the many character developments in opposition to the few downfalls, especially Atreides transition into being an antihero. Plans for a part three of “Dune” have been discussed, though nothing has been officially announced. Fans excitedly await a continuation of the story, whether it’d be three months or three years.

Fashion, Fame, Film: The Oscars

By **Kyleigh Zvara**

The 96th annual Academy Awards, also known as the Oscars, was hosted by Jimmy Kimmel Sunday, Mar. 10, at the Dolby Theatre. For the past 96 years, the top films of the year have gained recognition for their success in the Academy Awards ceremony. The usual most popular categories include “Best Actor in a Leading Role,” “Best Actress in a Leading Role” and “Best Picture.” In “Best Picture” there were 10 nominees, including the highest grossing movie of the year, Barbie and the movie

with the most Oscar nominations this year, “Oppenheimer.” Other films in the category like “Killers of the Flower Moon” and “Anatomy of the Fall” had been nominated in most of the other award ceremonies in similar categories. “Oppenheimer” won, adding a win to their six others that night. Both “Leading Role” categories had faced significant controversy prior to the actual night. The problems included who was nominated, or more so, who wasn’t. Many were surprised to not see Leonardo DiCaprio in the “Best Actor” group for his role in “Killers of

the Flower Moon.” Even more fans, however, were surprised to find Margot Robbie wasn’t nominated for “Best Actress” after her performance in “Barbie.” Instead, actor Cillian Murphy won for his brilliant portrayal of Robert Oppenheimer in “Oppenheimer” and Emma Stone won for her performance in “Poor Things”. “Oppenheimer” swept the awards with seven wins out of their 13 nominations. The movie was the third highest grossing film in the box office this year with huge commercial success, as well as much recognition throughout the past award season.

The film “Poor Things” also did very well with four total wins out of their 11 nominations, three of them back to back. Other than the actual awards, one of the most anticipated moments of the night were the musical performances, most notably Ryan Gosling singing “I’m Just Ken” from the Barbie movie. This song and another by Billie Eilish and Finneas from the movie were both nominated for “Best Original Song” with Eilish’s “What Was I Made For” winning. Some people this year, like every year, felt certain movies were snubbed, much like they

felt with DiCaprio and Robbie in their categories. Most of such controversy was derived from Barbie, which only received eight nominations, to many’s surprise not including “Best Actress” or “Best Director.” The movie being the biggest box office hit worldwide this year led fans to question why they were not more recognized at the Oscars. The 96th Academy Awards had its ups, downs, sweeps and snubs, with “Oppenheimer” dominating the show and another triumphant year of film past.

Olivia Rodrigo’s “Guts” Tour Begins

By Sylah Hill and Victoria Matz

Olivia Rodrigo kicked off her world tour Feb. 24 with a total of 77 shows, and is set to end Aug. 17. Rodrigo will be performing songs from “Guts,” which was released Sept. 8, 2023

In the few shows she has performed so far, Rodrigo has showcased her stage presence and fashion taste. In addition, Rodrigo’s set lists include hits from her sophomore album such as “Vampire” and “Bad Idea Right?”, as well as other hits from her primary album such as “Driver’s License” and “Jealousy, Jealousy.”

When tickets had just started being sold for her tour, fans were hit with the dilemma of dealing with the issues involved with Tick-

etmaster, like many other popular concerts. Website malfunctions, incorrect ticket prices and issues with the Ticketmaster website have been seen ever since the battle for tickets to Taylor Swift’s “The Eras Tour.” Fans were frustrated attempting to get tickets to Rodrigo’s tour.

Nonetheless, fans are ecstatic to see one of their favorite artists take the stage. Some even going the extra mile to try avoiding the set list for her show to arrive surprised.

Fashion surrounding her show is another major subject talked about. Fans on TikTok have been sharing inspiration for outfits in addition to what to bring to the concert for the best concert experience. While her outfits continually look more

beautiful and extravagant, fans can only wait to see what she will wear to the concert they are attending.

In addition to all of the songs that are already set in stone for Rodrigo to perform, fans are hopeful that she will surprise them with hit songs from her show, “High School Musical The Musical The Series” or songs that are separate from her albums.

During her performances, Rodrigo has showcased and will continue to showcase her impressive abilities and talents outside of just singing and songwriting. Because of the immense support of her fans, this young pop star will only rise in fame and continue to release top hits for the world to enjoy.

Heartbreak and Healing in new novel: “If Only I Had Told Her”

By Jenna Espinoza

The heart-wrenching novel, “If Only I Had Told Her,” written by New York Times bestselling author Laura Nowlin, was released Feb. 6 and tells a beautiful story of tragedy and truth.

“If Only I Had Told Her” is the second book after the popular novel “If He Had Been With Me,” which was released 11 years prior to the sequel, in 2013. Fans of the novel were desperate for more closure after the first book had ended with an ambiguous and unresolved ending for readers to imagine for themselves what happens after the book closes.

The novel is told through three different points of views (POV) in three sections. Nowlin starts off with Finn Smith’s POV, three days before the unexpected accident that occurs at the end of the first book. Since they were kids, Smith has been in love with the girl next door and his childhood best friend Autumn Davis. However, thinking she could never reciprocate the

feelings, he started dating the popular girl, Sylvie.

As they begin hanging out everyday during the summer after graduation, Davis and Smith become inseparable, like when they were kids again, and eventually begin to realize the love and passion they have for one another. Smith decides he needs to break up with Sylvie so he and Davis can start their life together. That is until he and Sylvie end up in an accident, leaving his closest friends devastated, not knowing how to move on.

The second part of the book is told through the POV of Jack, Smith’s best friend. His story offers a look on what it’s like to live with heartbreak and grief. After seeing both Davis and Smith together, Jack doesn’t know if he can trust her with his best friend’s heart. However, after seeing her grieving, it changes their understanding of one another.

Throughout the section, Jack works on the anger that is within him as he sets off to go to college, hoping

to never forget the way his best friend’s presence filled the world.

The novel ends with Davis’ POV as she learns to live her life without the one thing that could truly lighten her world. The entirety of the section shows Davis struggling to deal with her mental health and balance both love and loss in her life.

Nowlin portrays her characters in a way that makes readers connect and feel for each of them. Readers will be in tears while reading this heartbreaking young adult fiction novel as each page highlights the pain and struggles of young adulthood.

All of the pain and hurt is displayed and written wonderfully, letting readers know how each character feels about the loss of their loved one.

This 416 page novel is a perfect example about the harsh realities of tragic events and how it affects those who have been left behind.

The Royal Courier’s best reads



The Hearts We Sold by Emily Lloyd-Jones

Dee Moreno makes a deal with a demon who takes people’s hearts, but her life is turned upside down when she finds herself falling for another heartless teen while they do the demons bidding.

Editor-in-chief and opinion editor Sydney Keane loves this book for its coming of age theme and the unexpected and heartbreaking plot twists.

If You Could See The Sun by Ann Liang



Alice Sun goes to a prestigious school on a half-scholarship; her parents can’t afford the tuition anymore, but when she finds out she can turn invisible, she finds a way to monetize it. What lengths will she go to earn money? Staff Writer Sophie Apolaya loves this book for its original and relatable story, and the entertaining dynamic between the two main characters.

The Housemaid by Freida McFadden

When a girl is hired by a wealthy family to be a maid for their home, she quickly discovers all the secrets that create bad energy between the wife and the husband.

Opinion Editor and Copy Editor Victoria Matz loves this book because even though it’s an easy read, the hints and clues throw off the reader, making it very enjoyable.

How It Feels to Float by Helena Fox



17-year-old Elizabeth still copes with the death of her father 10 years later; Haunted by his ghostly presence, she indulges in his stories along with her own life.

Staff Writer Sylah Hill loves this book for it’s outstanding mental health and queer representation, along with its reality and emotion.

Kissing in Manhattan by David Schickler



Kissing in Manhattan follows various characters who each have their own chapter and their intersecting lives in Manhattan.

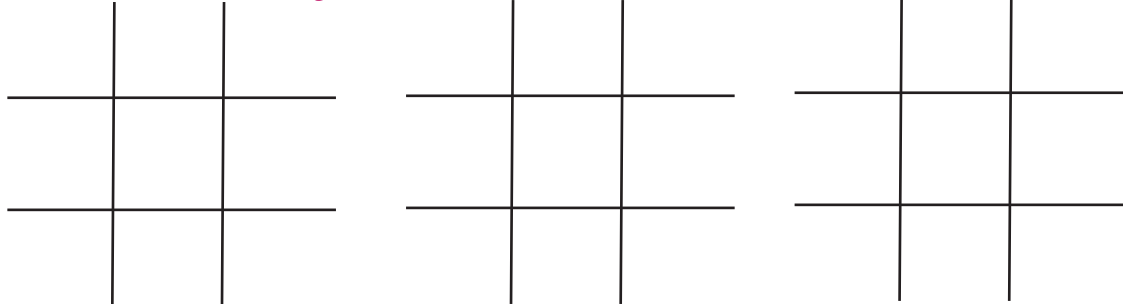
A&E Editor and Copy Editor Kyleigh Zvara loves this book because of how readers get to see the characters stories reflected in the same world. She thinks the author crafts the book in a way to bring the book to life, as if its real.

What’s your favorite book?
Tell us on Instagram @ecr.newspaper

Color in your favorite books!



The Royal Games



The 2nd annual winter formal: A masquerade ball



Photo by Lauren Gilder

By Sydney Keane

The school had their second annual winter formal Feb. 24 that featured a masquerade ball theme as well as several other activities for students to participate in.

“I’m a part of stuco (Student Council), so I know that a lot of things that were supposed to be [at formal] weren’t there,” sophomore Zahara Haque said. “They should promote things better and have it more organized so it’s [better known].”

Formal was set on the quad and inside Anderson hall, both decorated to fit the theme of a masquerade ball. There was a personal Disc jockey (D.J.), henna artist, game station, ban-

quet table with food and a dessert table all spread out amongst the two locations. Students were enjoying the inside option, due to it being rather cold, but plenty were seen outside on the dance floor or at the banquet table.

“I liked the music and thought it was good,” sophomore Anders Sundberg said. “They also had good food compared to what homecoming had before.”

Unlike other school dances, formal didn’t have the same vibrant energy as homecoming or even prom. There were far fewer students with most of them being underclassmen, and also less amenities. There was air hockey and foosball, as well as a smaller food table

that created a long line for students to wait in. There also wasn’t a lot of light, with mainly strobe or colorful lights in bigger areas.

“I think the masquerade theme was nice [and] unique,” Haque said. “I think it’s really easy to do, but I don’t think it was done correctly. I didn’t see any decorations that were masquerade themed and I didn’t see a lot of promotion for it.”

Masquerade balls are known for their extravagant outfits and decorative masks. However, most students stuck to the usual homecoming attire or longer version of it. The decorations also resembled more of a winter wonderland than

a masquerade ball. There were snow-like puffs surrounding trees and a white tree arch behind a white backdrop for students to take photos behind.

“I think because [winter formal is] so new a lot of people didn’t know what to expect, so not a lot of people were sure if they wanted to come,” senior Arielle Wazana said. “Whereas there’s homecoming, where everyone knows what that is and everyone wants to go. Because it’s so new I think there’s still some more [time needed] to convince [students to come to] formal.”

THE ROYAL COURIER SPRING 2024

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STAFF

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Jenna Espinoza
Sydney Keane

PAGE EDITORS

Isabel Rose (News)
Kaley Samiian (News)
Kasey Lee (Features)
Isabel Rose (Features)
Jenna Espinoza (A&E)
Kyleigh Zvara (A&E)
Sydney Keane (Opinion)
Victoria Matz (Opinion)
Kasey Lee (Sports)
Kaley Samiian (Sports)

HEAD COPY EDITORS

Victoria Matz
Kyleigh Zvara

STAFF WRITERS

Sophie Apolaya
Sylah Hill
Jessica Khandouzi
Oliver Yuval

ADVISER

Amy Carter

STAFF POLICY

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Our main purpose is to (1) inform the students, faculty and community of school-related news; (2) broaden the range of thinking of staff members and readers; (3) provide a forum for readers; (4) train the students in the functions of the press in a democratic society; and (5) provide entertaining features of interest to the students. All editorials without a byline reflect at least two-thirds opinion of The Royal Courier staff but are not necessarily the opinion of the administration.

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CONTACT

The Royal Courier
El Camino Real Charter High School
5440 Valley Circle Blvd.
Woodland Hills, California, 91367
phone: (818)-595-7500
fax: (818)-710-9023

Kohan-Sedgh Law Firm, P.C.

ACCIDENT LAWYER

Tel. (310) 954- 8888



Sasan Kohan

Attorney at Law



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not what you are
Breathing heaving
cleaving through the
dark to reach a world so
far
- Adra Ellis

NJROTC: Superbowl champions 2024



Photo by Ricardo Covarrubias

By **Kyleigh Zvara** and **Kaley Samiian**

The school’s Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (NJROTC) won first place at the Area 11 Drill Meet Championship, Feb. 10, to qualify for nationals in Pensacola, FL.

“This is the first time [the school’s] NJROTC has made it to nationals,” sophomore Viyana Mirzaei said. “So it’s very important to us.”

There are 10 events at the championship, also known as the Superbowl, including; unarmed and armed exhibition drill, unarmed and armed basic drill, physical training and academics.

“I was on four of five drill teams,” senior Damian Zendajas said. “Additionally, I was on the Academic team.”

The variety of competitions allowed platoons and

individuals to shine in what they were good at, but even in their best events there was still a lot of pressure on them to win.

“During the competition, tensions were high,” senior Eden Hillel said. “We were managing cadets, events, and unexpected hurdles so it was definitely a stressful day.”

The students left school at 6:30 in the morning to drive out to Santa Ana for this competition. The long drive and difficult day paid off, with them leaving victorious, earning first place.

“As the awards went on, we could all mostly tell the direction that it was going,” Zendajas said. “It remained close till the end.”

Because of their success, NJROTC will be heading to Pensacola, Florida in early April to compete against the best units from all over the

country.

“I’m really excited, but it’s kind of scary to see the other schools from all over the country because we don’t know how good they are,” sophomore Sophia Dinh said. “Since this is our first time going to a national competition, we don’t know what it’s going to be like.”

NJROTC’s commitment and consistency in training has contributed to their victory and the new standards they set for the school’s program.

“In the end, when they announced that we got first place it was both mind-blowing and honestly relieving,” Zendajas said. “Our hours and hours of practice and dedication since the summer of 2023 really paid off.”



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CLUB COLUMN

By Sophie Apolaya & Kasey Lee

Vietnamese Club - Thursdays at Lunch in C-121



The Vietnamese club teaches students about Vietnamese culture, tradition, food and language through fun and interactive activities.

“I wanted to run this club because I didn’t feel a strong connection with the Vietnamese community here,” junior president Taylor Nguyen said. “It’s a fun way to meet new people and learn about what our heritage is.”

The club’s welcoming environment encourages people of all nationalities to attend, where they can meet others and enjoy learning and bonding over Vietnamese culture.

La Familia - Thursdays at Lunch in Z-11



La Familia encourages all students to learn about the different hispanic countries and their cultures, while offering community service hour opportunities.

“I chose to run the club because I was new to the school last year and it was one of my favorite clubs,” senior club president Jazmine Valdivia said. “It served as a welcoming community for me so I wanted to share that [same experience] with other people.”

The club not only is a friendly learning space, but it also gives students the opportunity to better their community, make new friends and earn graduation cords.

Modern Literature Club - Thursdays at Lunch in B-224



The Modern Literature Club welcomes students who seek out a space to talk about their favorite books with other like-minded members.

“People who like to read for fun can get together and read what they want and discuss it together,” senior president Melissa Majd said. “Usually when you read it’s kind of sad that you don’t have anyone to talk about it with.”

The club is a great way to connect and bond with others who share similar opinions about numerous different genres of books.

Wise UP! CHIRLA Club - Mondays at Lunch in Z-8



Wise UP! CHIRLA delivers information to the school about the CHIRLA (Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights) organization’s works and opportunities for aid such as DACA (Deferred Actions for Childhood Arrivals), FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and scholarships.

“We want to inform undocumented students that are here that they do have a chance to go to college, and pursue education after high school,” senior club president Rebecca Sanchez said. “We educate on immigration as well.”

This club is helpful for immigrant students who are interested in receiving aid and information for their post-high school education, and helps better the community in terms of awareness.

Top 5 spring break spots for high schoolers

By **Sydney Keane**

Spring break is all about relaxation and fun, so come take a look at some affordable, exciting and enjoyable activities that everyone should consider.

Starting off at number five is going to or staying at a beach house. Although this is a more expensive opinion, it is the best option for families or even senior friend groups to get away for a longer period of time. People can opt to stay at a family or friends house in a beach area, permitting they have that option, or look on Airbnb for rentals. The best part about staying so close

to the ocean is the quick access to the beach and the fun beach towns that surround it.

The park takes fourth place and is quite contrasting to number five; however, what it lacks in extravagance it makes up for in convenience and affordability. The park is such a great place to hang out at, especially during the spring. Going with a group of friends to play games or listen to music and have a picnic are great options and cost little to no money. It's also something that people can do by themselves if they are looking to relax and not worry about others.

Coming in at number three on the list are pool days. Not everybody has a private pool in their backyard, but there are plenty of public pool options that people can seek out. The pool is always a nice way to cool off and have fun with friends. It's also nice to just relax and soak up the sun that everyone has been missing incredibly.

Second place goes to all the fun and exciting amusement parks that Southern California has to offer. There are some price differences between the big three parks; both Knotts Berry Farm and Six Flags: Magic Mountain cost around \$80 to \$90,

while Disneyland can range from \$170 to \$300 per ticket. All parks offer a fun and memorable experience, so it is really up to what each person prefers and the type of amusement park day they are looking to have.

Last but not least comes first place, which is a classic beach day in Southern California. The valley is only a 30 to 40 minute drive from Malibu beaches and the end of March should bring some warmer weather. Most beaches are free, excluding parking, and there are even some beach bus options that are available for teens. Although there are some good food options in the area,

people can make their own food at home and bring it to the beach for a lovely picnic. This all makes a beach day the perfect spring break plan for any high schooler looking for an affordable and exciting spring break.

commodity, it's helpful. It's nice for everyday tasks, and things like that."

As AI continues to grow, society will have to face the consequences that come with it.

"I think that with time AI will become even more powerful," Lahmanchuk said. "More and more people will continue to use it. Ultimately it's both good and bad."

The controversy surrounding Madame Web

By **Victoria Matz**

After the initial release of the brand new movie Madame Web, Feb. 14, 2024, fans left theaters disappointed and displeased with the outcome.

The film was about Cassandra Web, a paramedic in New York City, who starts showing signs of clairvoyance—which is the ability to obtain information from the future. She is forced to face her past and protect three young women from a mysterious villain who wants

them all dead.

The new movie starred Dakota Johnson as Web alongside stars like Sydney Sweeney and Emma Roberts. Nevertheless, their wonderful acting seen in previous movies fell short in this one, leaving fans wanting more and not in a good way. Fans said that Johnson's acting felt incomplete and short of what the character should've really been like. In addition to that, fans noticed that in interviews she was unenthusiastic talking about the

movie and overall not excited about the release.

More swirling controversy was added to this movie after fans found out that it is not a part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). This movie was actually produced by Sony Pictures Releasing, which is why some fans who are curious to watch it from home, will not see it on Disney Plus. It is actually set to be released on Netflix sometime in the near future.

The new movie is initially based on a Marvel Comic;

however, some significant changes were made from the book. For instance, Jessica Drew was known to be the first Spider-Woman in the MCU, but in the movie, no mention was made of her at all, causing fans to get angry about an incorrect timeline.

Another topic discussed amongst fans were the costumes in the film. While the design was well done and sleek, some actors just looked out of place in them. The costumes did not suit the characters and looked

strange on some. However, on characters played by Sweeney and Johnson, costumes were exquisite, giving their characters an upgrade and a better achieved look than others.

Overall, with the movie receiving a 13% rating on Rotten Tomatoes, it is safe to say that the public did not favor this movie. Yet another movie with such a high budget, reaching up to 80 million dollars, falling short of its potential, leaving viewers deeply disappointed awaiting something else.

Ariana Grande's new, shocking relationship

By **Jenna Espinoza**

The controversy revolving around popular singer-songwriter Ariana Grande has sparked since her new album "Eternal Sunshine" was released Mar. 8.

Grande has received a tremendous amount of hate and backlash these past few months after her new relationship with actor Ethan Slater was confirmed just three days after her divorce from her husband Dalton Gomez.

The two met on the set of their new movie musical adaptation of the Broadway show, "Wicked," which comes out Nov. 27, 2024, with Grande starring as Glinda, Cynthia Erivo as Elphaba and Slater as Boq. The movie began production in 2022, when the two were both still in committed relationships, though they had become immensely close leaving people to

wonder if they were more than just costars.

Many people have accused Grande and Slater of having an affair on the set of the movie. However, inside sources have confirmed they had only begun dating after they both ended things with their respective partners.

Grande and Gomez had filed simultaneous documents to officially end their marriage in October of 2023 due to "irreconcilable differences." Though, before their split was official, many sources had been saying they were having issues within their relationship and were "heading for divorce."

Slater, who is most known for his role as SpongeBob SquarePants in the musical, had been married to his childhood sweetheart, Lilly Jay, since 2018. Sadly, the two had later divorced in 2023 after recently welcoming a baby into their family

in August of 2022.

Although it is yet to be confirmed that they didn't cheat on their ex-partners, many people continue to not believe it, considering Slater had gotten with Grande only six days after filing for divorce against his wife. A month before the couple was confirmed to be dating, Grande and Slater were also photographed with their arms around each other during a trip to a SoHo farmhouse after Grande's 30th birthday in June 2023.

Jay spoke up about the drama in an interview with the Daily Mail stating that Grande was "not a girl's girl" and mentioned how she is only "focused on rebuilding a life for our son."

In an interview on the Zach Sang Show to promote her new album, "Eternal Sunshine," Grande briefly discussed the "frustration" she's felt about all the negative things being said about

her and her loved ones.

During the show, Grande said "I feel like we don't need to go into any specifics, but, of course, there's like an insatiable frustration, inexplicable, hellish feeling with watching people, misunderstanding the people you love and anything." People responded to her interview by accusing her of "gaslighting" them into taking pity on her and stopping the hate.

In Grande's single "Yes... and?" released Jan. 23, she sings about how people should just unapologetically live their life and not care what others think about it. Many people have speculated it to be about the negative comments she has been receiving from her newfound relationship because of the song lyrics, "Your business is yours and mine is mine."

Following the song's release, Grande had lost over 350,000 followers on Ins-

tagram, showing people's disapproval and disappointment of the song and its controversial lyrics.

The 13 song tracklist for her new album has many people wondering if it could possibly be about her new love life, with songs like "Don't wanna break up again" and "The boy is mine."

Many have also wondered if the new unexpected relationship between Grande and Slater could be a public relations (PR) stunt, to help increase their fame and their new projects coming up. Though, many disagree with this fact considering the amount of backlash that is being received.

As speculations regarding both Grande and Slater continue, neither of them have publicly commented directly on their new relationship.

Boys varsity soccer plays hard in CIF final game



Photo by Rebecca Margolin

By Jessica Khandouzi

The boy’s soccer team made it to the city finals where they went head-to-head against Birmingham High School on Feb. 25, where Birmingham won by 2-0.

“It was a good run and we went through many obstacles on the way there,” senior Daniel Zepeda said. “It was a journey to get there.”

During the difficult journey filled with difficulties and setbacks the team’s work ethic and collective approach stood as crucial components in their achievement.

”[A big key factor to getting to city finals was the team’s] work ethic and mentality as a whole.” senior Bryce Grubic said.

The team had a great sense of unity and excitement during the first half of the game. Both teams exuded a

strong sense of cooperation. It was a close game, and the scoreboard read 0-0 at the end of an extremely intense first half in which neither team was able to take the upper hand.

“Although this caused a little slowdown in our progress, it was a crucial test of our courage and resilience.” Grubic said.

Birmingham High School scored very early in the second half of the match, and although this unexpected turn of events was discouraging at first, it gave the squad the drive to come together and reignite their fighting spirit. A hard blow was delivered to the team throughout the match, and they were given a penalty early in the second half.

“Our team demonstrated unwavering unity and constant faith in our skills despite this setback,” Grubic

said.

The team never gave up on the idea that they could win, demonstrating the genuine meaning of sportsmanship. Leading up to finals the boy’s varsity’s strong mentality is what got them through and through

“We played like it was our last game and worked together,” Zepeda said.

The team demonstrated the group’s approach and the immense value they placed on their journey, which showed their drive that got them to success.

“Not many people get to play for their school so it’s a privilege, and it’s a brotherhood,” Grubic said. “It was a big moment representing the school and representing something bigger than just yourself but the school as well.”

Baseball and softball teams hit off their new seasons

By Isabel Rose and Kaley Samiian

The school’s baseball and softball teams hit off their season in February with home-field advantage on their first games, opening the gates of their success this semester.

“During games I’m anxious, but overall I’m excited to get out there,” junior baseball player Julius Haimz said. “I feel prepared and ready.”

The competitive games create a large range of emotions in the teams, whether it’d be positive or negative, but they focus on staying in control which is essential.

“Emotions [during games] go off winning or losing,” senior baseball player Ethan Granillo said. “Once we’re winning, there’s always a good mood among the team. But, once we’re down, it changes everything, and that hunger comes out, so we do whatever we can to get on top.”

In order to be successful, the members need to engage in constant training and teamwork, which pays off in the long run.

“I like the competitiveness,” senior softball catcher and utility Rachel Loth said. “I get really competitive when I play, and enjoy seeing our hard work during practice being shown in games.”

The players dedicate their time to practice daily. Their preparation generally consists of warming up and practicing in-game defensive and offensive skills. These practices have allowed

the teams to connect with each other, despite starting off as mere acquaintances.

“Last year it was really rough because we started out as a new team and were very young so it was a lot of pressure and stress,” junior softball player Sarah Delgado said. “But, I’ve learned to overcome that and now in my junior year I’ve learned how to handle it. I’ll be stressed here and there but mainly focus on the game and the fun that comes with it.

With time, the challenges that come with team sports settled. They have become close-knit friend groups on and off the field which has led to their success, but has also provided a support system for game losses.

“It gives me an opportunity to have a second family and be comfortable around the guys I spend hours a day with,” senior baseball player Branden Sellz said. “It also allows us all to unite and play better on the field.”

For many members of the teams, this season will be their last as a part of the school, and they want to thoroughly enjoy the experience.

“During games I feel more energy than I’ve ever felt, being a senior I try to play every game like it’s my last,” Sellz said. “I leave everything on the field, and my goal is to provide enough energy to motivate the rest of the team.

WHICH Team WILL WIN MARCH Madness?

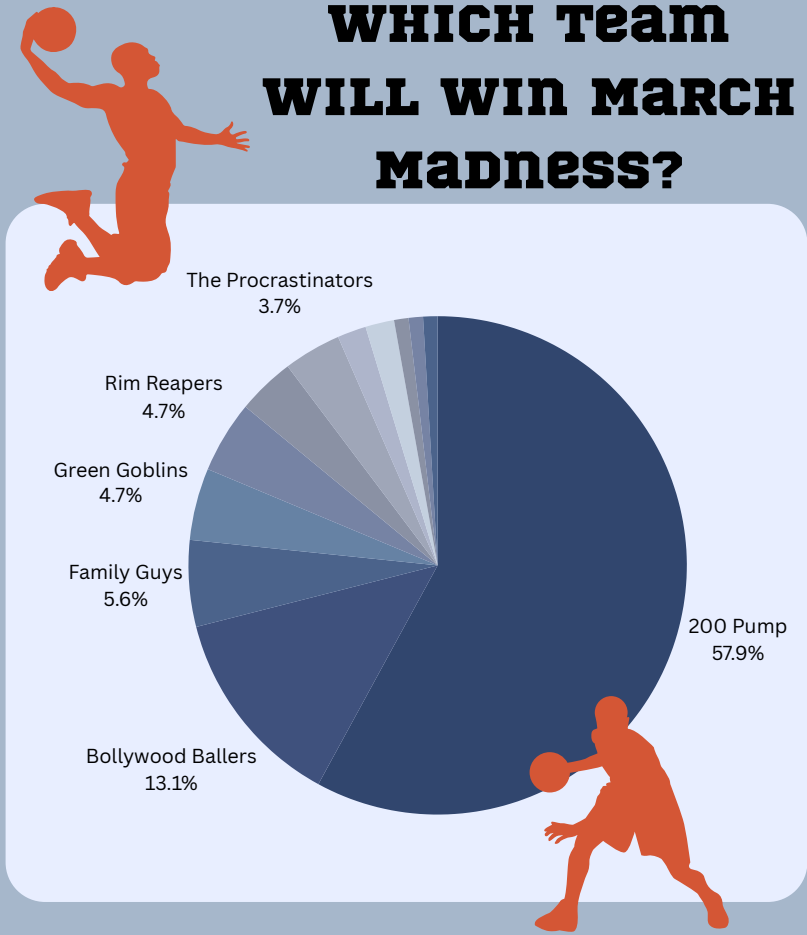


Photo by Nerissa Winokur