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NEWS RELEASE

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Covina-Valley Unified Deaf Senior Excels as Student-Athlete, Breaking Barriers On and Off the Field

COVINA, CA – Being Deaf has shaped the life of South Hills High School senior Francisco Morales, presenting challenges many students never face, yet he has never allowed those challenges to define him. With resilience, determination, and the support of his teammates and coaches, Morales has immersed himself in academics, athletics, and leadership opportunities, proving that no obstacle can limit his ambition.

Morales, who has been Deaf since birth, communicates through a combination of speech, American Sign Language (ASL), and the use of a cochlear implant. He also has the support of an interpreter in his classes, practices, and games, and credits his mother for encouraging him to learn ASL at age three.

“Sometimes being Deaf is difficult for me because there are no sounds, or I can’t always hear what people are saying,” Morales said. “But my life has taught me to stay positive and be influential with my friends. My teammates are my brothers, and my coaches always push me to do more.”

A four-year football player, Morales has earned a spot on South Hills’ varsity team for the past two seasons, playing center, guard, and defensive nose tackle. Through creative adaptations, his teammates and coaches ensure he is fully engaged on the field. Players have learned sign language to communicate, one teammate signals plays by tapping his wrist at the snap, and coaches use a numbered wristband so he never misses a call.

As a freshman, Morales earned the team’s IRONMAN Award, an honor voted on by teammates to recognize one player for character and perseverance.

“They treat me like just another player, which is exactly what I want,” Morales said. “They don’t discriminate because of my Deafness – they believe in me.”

In addition to football, Morales competes on South Hills’ wrestling and track and field teams, serves as president of the Husky Signers Club, participates in the Culinary Arts Career Technical Education pathway, and is a member of the Active Faith Club.

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“I want to show my Deaf community that we can do the same things as anybody else – sports, activities, whatever we set our minds to,” Morales said. “It can be challenging, but it feels good to overcome obstacles. Don’t limit yourself.”

Looking to the future, Morales plans to attend Gallaudet University to pursue a degree in culinary arts, while continuing to play football at the collegiate level, with dreams of one day joining the National Football League.

“Francisco is a shining example of the spirit and excellence at Covina-Valley Unified,” Interim Superintendent Dr. Jonathan Blackmore said. “His inspiring story and the respect and support of his teammates and coaches are an incredible reminder that anything is possible for our students. Thank you to Francisco’s interpreter, Michelle Benavides, and to all of our remarkable interpreters whose dedication ensures every student has the opportunity to thrive.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:



CVUSD_MORALES1: South Hills High School senior Francisco Morales, who has been Deaf since birth, has been on his high school’s football team all four years. With creative adaptations, his teammates and coaches ensure he is fully engaged on the field.



CVUSD_MORALES2: With resilience, determination, and the support of his teammates and coaches, South Hills High senior Francisco Morales, who has been Deaf since birth, has immersed himself in academics, athletics, and leadership opportunities.

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