

Three former PHS athletes in college

By Jonathan Comeaux

With Piedmont High soccer getting underway and the fall season officially over, we take a look at Louisa Symkowick of Carleton College's soccer team, Enzo Bernales of Occidental College's soccer team, and Sadie Town of Santa Monica City College's volleyball team.



Photo courtesy of Carleton College Athletics
Louisa Symkowick, PHS Class of 2025, is a freshman on Carleton College's soccer team.

LOUISA SYMKOWICK Carleton College

Louisa Symkowick, PHS Class of 2025, just finished her freshman season on Carleton College's soccer team. She was a member of Piedmont's 2023 Div. 4 North Coast Section championship team. Carleton College went 18-3-3 this season to win the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference title with a 1-nil win over St. Catherine University on November 8. The Knights proved to be one of the best Division 3 schools in the country, reaching the Elite 8 before falling 2-1 to No. 7 University of Chicago on November 23. To get there, No. 16 seeded Carleton beat John Carroll University 1-0 I the first round on November 15, beat Lake Forest College 2-nil the next day, and beat No. 13 Swarthmore College in penalty kicks 4-2 on November 22.

Symkowick appeared in 19 matches this season for 475 total minutes. She scored once, recording six shots with three on target in the process.



Photo courtesy of Occidental College Athletics
Enzo Bernales, PHS Class of 2025, just finished his freshman season on Occidental College's soccer team.

ENZO BERNALES Occidental College

Bernales, PHS Class of 2025, is a freshman on Occidental College's soccer team. He was a leader of Piedmont High's Division 4 NCS title in 2023, when we named him The Posts' Sophomore of the Year.

This year, Occidental went 10-4-6 (W-T-L) and won the Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference championship with a 1-nil win over Redlands on November 8. They reached the Division 3 NCAA Tournament, losing 3-1 in the first round to No. 2 Augsburg on November 15.

Bernales appeared in 11 games this season for 205 total minutes, recording one assist to go along with three shots with one on target.



Photo courtesy of Santa Monica City College Athletics
Sadie Town, PHS Class of 2024, helped Santa Monica City College achieve its first State Championship Tournament berth in 31 years.

SADIE TOWN Santa Monica City College

Sadie Town, PHS Class of 2024, just finished her sophomore season on Santa Monica College's volleyball team. She was a four-year starter at Piedmont.

Santa Monica CC recently finished its season with a five-set 3-2 loss to San Diego Mesa in the 3C2A State Championship Semifinals on December 6, concluding with a 27-5 overall record, winning the SoCal Regional title in the process. Their State Championship berth marked the school's first in 31 years.

Town appeared in 24 matches throughout the fall season, recording highs of 12 kills against Ventura on September 5 and Irvine Valley on August 29.

Interview with Flag Football coach Beth Black

By Jason Shum

Within the Piedmont High School community, English teacher Beth Black is known for her ability to lift students up. She can turn a hesitant ninth grader into a confident writer, she brings a steady, calm authority to seniors preparing for their next steps, and as the inaugural head coach of the Girls Flag Football team, she has become a defining presence in one of the fastest growing sports in the country.

Coach Black has spent more than 24 years teaching English and journalism at Piedmont High School. She guides students through literature, analysis, revision, and the work of finding their own voice. Many return years later to share that something they learned from her stayed with them, moments that reflect the care and intention she brings to her teaching.

Sports have always played an important role in her life. She grew up in Ohio in a family where football was part of everyday conversation. At the University of Toledo, she became a competitive dancer, honing the discipline and focus that now guide her coaching style. She also played recreational flag football in college and discovered just how strategic and engaging the sport can be.

When girls flag football became an official high school sport in California in 2023, Coach Black stepped forward to establish the program at Piedmont. She partnered with teacher and assistant coach Haley Adams to build the program from the ground up, creating a welcoming space for experienced athletes and newcomers alike. Their work resonated immediately. Interest surged, tryouts filled quickly, and the program became one of the most popular and inclusive teams on campus.

Piedmont now fields three full levels. The varsity team brings experience and competitive skill. The JV team supports developing athletes. The frosh team gives newcomers a place to learn the game and grow with confidence. This structure has produced all-league players and created opportunities that did not exist even a few years ago.

For Coach Black, the most rewarding moments are the ones when a player suddenly sees the game differently. A route comes together, a read makes sense, or a young athlete trusts her ability for the first time. These breakthroughs reflect the confidence and growth she works to build.

Whether she is guiding a student through a college essay, helping a reporter refine a story for *The Piedmont Highlander*, or supporting her players during practice, Coach Black brings steady commitment and genuine care. Her influence reaches from the classroom to the newsroom to the field, and many students discover new confidence because she helps them see what they can achieve.

Coach Black reflected further on her coaching journey and the rise of girls' flag football.

Q: What inspired you to become the inaugural head coach of Piedmont's first Girls Flag Football team?

A: The athletic department was looking for a female head



Flag football coach Beth Black sits down for an interview to discuss her time as a coach for Piedmont High.

coach, and they reached out to me because they knew I loved football and understood the game. I was truly excited about the opportunity and ready for the challenge.

Q: Can you share a little about your background in athletics or coaching and how it prepared you for this role?

A: I had coached cross country and track as an assistant at a former school, and I have been involved in several other sports and sports organizations over the years. In terms of my own athletic background, I grew up playing soccer and later played intramural flag football in college, which gave me basic knowledge of the game. The sport has changed since then, but it gave me a foundation. I also have strong knowledge of many sports through sports journalism and years of watching and studying different games. My coaching experience also includes cheerleading and informal coaching in volleyball and freshman-level football.

Q: How did you feel when you learned you would be leading the program, and what does it mean to you personally to be the first?

A: Being the first meant approaching the program with a clear purpose. My goal from the beginning was that by the time I finished coaching, girls would never again see football as something closed to them. I wanted them to see it as accessible from a young age. My mindset was to teach as many girls as possible the skills of the sport and show them they belong in football.

Q: What was the biggest challenge in launching a brand-new team, and how did you address it?

A: The biggest challenge was that most of the girls had never thrown a football before. They did not know how to properly throw or catch, they did not know the line of scrimmage, and they did not know the rules. We had to start at the very beginning. We taught what a football team is, what offense looks like, what defense looks like, and how different the sport is from anything they had played before.

Q: Flag football is expanding nationwide, especially in California, and many colleges are adopting it. Why do you think it has grown so quickly, and what explains its appeal?

A: I think we have finally reached a place where girls feel free to love the sport. What is not to love about football? For

girls like me who grew up playing football with boys but had no real opportunity to join a team, this is a long-awaited change. For many years, girls had to become the sideline supporters instead of the players. Now the door is open, and the message is clear: of course you can do this.

Q: What core values do you instill in your players?

A: One value is to try something new, even in high school. Many of our players come from soccer, volleyball, water polo, and other sports, and they are discovering they can be good at something completely new. Another key value is teamwork. Football requires teamwork in a way that few other sports do. And finally, football teaches you to own your space. You have a right to that space on the field, and if you get there first, it is yours. That awareness and confidence are important lessons.

Q: What has been the most rewarding or exciting moment so far, on or off the field?

A: Watching the growth of players over three years has been incredibly rewarding. Some of our seniors began with no understanding of football at all. Early on I would give very simple instructions like rush the quarterback, and they would do it without much awareness. Now they understand angles, leverage, how the quarterback might roll out, and how to adjust. They think and react like football players, and I no longer need to teach those basics. Seeing that transformation has been amazing.

Q: With colleges adding women's flag football, how do you see Piedmont fitting into that pipeline of opportunity?

A: So this is where we now have to start shifting from the very beginning of the program which was introducing football to as many girls as possible, to now becoming two approaches. If you still want to learn football, I will coach you, but if you expect to be on the varsity squad, you have to know football. You already have football awareness. We need to become competitive. Now, girls can start earlier if they want. They can find outside organizations to get involved in to continue their football knowledge. That's how I can help them have football opportunities in the future.

Q: When future players look back at that first season three years ago, what do you hope they remember about being part of Piedmont's first flag football team?

A: Even if they did not consider themselves a football player at the beginning of that first year, I hope they know that they became a football player. So, in the future if anyone ever asks them what sports they played, they will never think twice about saying "I played football in high school."

This interview is part of Jason Shum's Eagle Scout Project with Troop 15, documenting the history of Piedmont High School football for the Piedmont Football Archive at PiedmontGridiron.club. Featured coaches include Jordan Seiden, Beth Black, Pouyan Assadi, Dick Carter, and Mark Kliszewski.



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