



She's Got Mail

By Andrew Barlam Signal Staff Writer

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Angelica Sahagun can't stop giggling. Her smile is stretched so wide it has to hurt. She grabs her shoes. She tucks her knees to her chest. She rocks in her seat and nods her head.

The 5-foot-7 Canyon High freshman does all this as she says four magic letters.

Better than the 10 points and five rebounds she is already averaging as a starter on the Cowboys varsity team as a ninth grader, better than the sheepish, red-faced half-smiles of opposing players when she burns them with one of her crossovers, better than any word

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of praise her coach or teammates can ever give her - they sum up her basketball potential. U. C. L. A.

As in the Bruins. As in the team that sent Sahagun her first college recruitment letter. Two years ago. As a seventh grader. Seriously. She was just 12.

UCLA, Air Force and Gonzaga all sent letters after watching her play in an Adidas camp.

"That's when it started," Sahagun says. "I was excited. Everybody knew. We celebrated. Then I started getting even more. Ever since eighth grade, I've been blowing up," Sixteen college letters in all before she ever played a game of high school basketball. Oregon, Washington, Maryland, Azusa Pacific, Colorado and on and on it goes.

Most saw her play before the Canyon High season started, playing with Finest Basketball Club. Canyon coach Stan Delus, knowing she was coming to Canyon, signed her up.

Forget being nervous for games against Hart, Valencia, or Saugus. She was playing with the pressure of performing in front of college coaches who were there to judge her.

Delus says three more colleges have made trips to watch her play for Canyon this year.

They ooh. They ahh. They take notes. Then they send her a letter.

Later on when they want her to sign, they'll remind her how early they came around.

"Gonzaga wants her right now. They told me that if they were allowed to sign her today, they would," Delus says. "They see her skill. These teams all want to get in on her.

"She sees the whole floor, she's athletic around the basket, she knows how to change directions and mix up speeds. She already does everything a Division I player does. She's raw. She's still a baby, but she doesn't look like a 14-year-old or play like a 14-year-old."

Sahagun has been doing it since she joined her first club basketball team at 11 years old. She played against players as old as 16 and 17 and says she held her own against them.



The challenge for the Cowboys was figuring out what age they should treat her. She's been a starter since the first practice of the summer.

She's a freshman who looks and plays like a senior. Initially she just kept to herself. She didn't speak to anyone else. She sensed jealousy and skepticism. She tried to just let her moves on the court do the talking. "She didn't talk. She never said a word. It got to the point where we're like, 'Hey, you better talk once the season starts or we're going to have to start beating you up,'" jokes Canyon senior Nikki Leon. "I try to help her and get her to calm down. "Now we can't get her to stop talking. She's a freshman with the confidence of a senior."

The Cowboys do their best to keep her grounded. They won't let her head explode with all the compliments she receives. They rib Sahagun about her status as a super prospect. They've continued a nickname she received playing with FBC.

"I'm not Angelica. I'm 'Rookie,'" she says. "They act like it's my first name and Angelica's my middle name. Like they don't even really know it. Nobody uses it." She says she receives college letters addressed to Angelica "Rookie" Sahagun. Delus calls her "Rook" even to people unfamiliar with the nickname. She'll have to earn her first name back. Sahagun loves it.

It's done nothing to diminish her confidence. Her favorite player is Michael Jordan. She shares both his jersey number and swagger.

"Some people say, 'Oh that's just a freshman. She can't do anything. She's all hype,'" Sahagun says. "I think they should be intimidated by me. I'll cross them over, spin on them; I'm not going to back down against anybody. I'm always taking it to the rack." Already, she's Canyon's second best player. She's second in scoring and third in rebounding.

Only Leon, who leads the Cowboys in points, steals, rebounds, blocks and steals, has played a bigger role in Canyon's 14-4 start and current nine-game winning streak.

This year it is the Cal-State Bakersfield-bound Leon's team. She has more than just a box full of letters - she has a signed scholarship.

Next year it will be Sahagun's to lead. Leon says so. So does her coach. And he'll even take it a step further. "Nikki, by the time she's done this season, is going to be this school's all-time leading scorer," Delus says. "Angelica, if she stays with the same skill level she's on, she's going to break every record. Seventy-five percent of her potential she hasn't even reached yet."