

SPORTS // PRO TEAM SPORTS

Ramon Richards keeps clearing obstacles on way to NFL dream

By Jose Arredondo, Correspondent

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Ramon Richards endured a tough childhood on the East Side to star at Brackenridge, Oklahoma St. and catch on with the Rams.
Photo: Courtesy LA Rams /

The obstacles started for Ramon Richards at 10, when doctors discovered his spine was fused — a condition that could hinder his ability to grow and walk.

Richards, a cornerback for the Los Angeles Rams' practice squad, said he often thinks about the challenges he has overcome and about his neighborhood on San Antonio's East Side that was plagued by drugs and gang violence.

The 23-year-old former Brackenridge standout now a part of a Super Bowl team. The Rams face the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta on Feb. 3.

Thirteen years ago, though, doctors and his family debated whether he would be able to walk without braces. The doctors encouraged his parents to perform surgery, but they went another route.

“(The doctors) told me what could go right, but (they) told me what could go wrong, which meant he could be in a wheelchair for a while, or he could have been in braces, and I didn't want to risk that,” said Ruth Murray, his mother. “So what we decided to do was make him exercise more and kind of push him.”

The lifestyle change worked for Richards, and he played basketball, track and field, and eventually football.

Richards spent most of his time playing basketball at Denver Heights. He looked up to Allen Iverson, even wearing a headband to complement his braids.

His father, Ramon Richards Sr., worked graveyard shifts, and his mother, Murray, worked while she attended Our Lady of the Lake University full time, getting degrees in natural science and biology.

Richards said he went from North New Braunfels Avenue and East Houston Street to Alamo Stadium — where he picked apart defenses as Brackenridge's star quarterback — to the NFL because he watched his parents' sacrifices and work ethic.

Even now, he is still having to prove himself. Richards wasn't chosen in the 2018 NFL draft, instead signing with the Rams as an undrafted free agent May 4.

Richards has spent most of the season on the practice squad as he sits behind five cornerbacks on the

roster.

“Like any other time in my life — start from the bottom and just having to put your head down and go to work,” Richards said. “When I got to Oklahoma State, I was at the bottom of the depth chart, and by the fourth game, I was starting.”

Although Richards didn’t have much growing up, he did have the “Fab Five” — a nickname he gave his family.

“The common denominator in every scenario, whether we were in a one bedroom or in my grandma’s living room — was my mama, my daddy, my brother, my sister,” Richards said. “Us five stayed together. We stuck together. My parents never left, and they never gave up.”

Growing up, his family’s living situations always fluctuated. Sometimes, they didn’t have water, or the electricity was out, but Murray believes those struggles brought them closer together.

“When we had nothing, we realized all we had was each other, and we used to tell each other that all of the time,” she said. “Before we would walk (Richards’ brother) Raiquann and Ramon to school, we’d stand in a circle and pray.”

When Richards arrived at Brackenridge in 2010, he earned a spot on the varsity team his sophomore season. As a junior, Richards threw for 1,995 yards and 18 touchdowns, and rushed for 1,183 yards and 19 touchdowns, leading Brackenridge to the second round of the playoffs after a 16-year hiatus.

That’s when the college scholarship offers started.

Richards’ first offer, to play quarterback at Rice, came during track season. When the family made an unofficial visit to Oklahoma State later that year, the opportunities became real to Richards.

At Oklahoma State, Richards transitioned from quarterback to defensive back. As a senior, he started 12 games and made one of the biggest plays of the season for the Cowboys, intercepting a pass in the end zone on the last play of the game to seal Oklahoma State’s overtime win against Texas in Austin.

His 62 tackles were the most among Cowboys cornerbacks, and he had a team-high 11 pass breakups.

Twice he was awarded the Vernon Grant Award for outstanding leadership, spirit and enthusiasm by the Oklahoma State coaching staff.

His best friend, Kenny May, who plays wide receiver at Division III George Fox in Oregon, said Richards’ success has affected San Antonio’s east side.

“College scouts don’t look in the inner city. There’s a lot of dominant kids here that are just hidden, but you have to show out, because you got kids from Judson and here and there,” May said. “There’s a lot of people from San Antonio in the league, but not the inner city. It’s big for Ramon to be in the league, and I don’t think he knows how big this is.”

It wasn’t until October that it registered for Richards he’s in the NFL.

But he isn’t content.

He still has more obstacles to overcome, starting with getting on the field so he can show the folks back home it’s possible.

“It gives me an opportunity to influence and motivate the next young man who’s in my position ... who witnessed the same struggles,” Richards said. “It gives me an opportunity to not only create my own success, but to give inspiration to the next man.”

SPORTS // HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

Steele defeats Austin Westlake in 6A boys playoffs

By Jose Arredondo, Correspondent

Feb. 25, 2019



Knight senior guard DeVaughn Rider runs back to his teammates in celebration after his team wins in overtime 73-66 against Austin Westlake in boys basketball playoff action at San Marcos High School gym on February 26, 2019.

Photo: Tom Reel, Staff / Staff photographer

SAN MARCOS — It took an extra period and a 31-point performance from Steele sophomore guard Langston Love for the Knights to knock off Austin Westlake 73-66 on Tuesday night at San Marcos High school.

Steele’s regional semifinal opponent has yet to be determined.

Confusion kicked off overtime when Steele junior guard Quincey Shepherd thought he was fouled, which caused both teams to stop playing. Sheppard was then called for a travel when he walked toward the official, but Steele (28-8) responded on the following possession when senior guard DeVaughn Rider drew a charge.

Love scored a layup and later snagged a game-clinching steal with 24.2 seconds left in the game.

“Coach (Lonny Hubbard) told us to focus even when the calls aren’t going our way,” Love said. “It was huge to get us rolling, I needed to get us back on track especially after I missed that shot at the end

of the fourth quarter.”

Westlake (34-4) was missing a big piece: five-star center Will Baker, who is committed to the University of Texas. The 6-11 senior broke his finger before the playoffs and missed the area game against East Central, but played against O’Connor in the second round.

Westlake coach Robert Lucero said the team ruled out Baker before tip off because of doctor’s orders, and that’s when Hubbard learned of the news.

“I honestly still don’t believe it; he might be like Superman and get on the court and let us have it,” Hubbard jokingly said before the game.

“But this team is still extremely tough, they won against East Central without him so we have to prepare with whatever they throw at us.”

Westlake senior guard Darius McBride stepped up and gave the Chaparrals an early 12-4 first-quarter lead with his penetration and passing.

McBride finished the game with 21 points but went scoreless in the fourth quarter.

Steele made a run when Love snatched three offensive rebounds in the final three minutes of the first half that resulted in two put-back layups and Steele’s first lead since the first minute of play.

But Westlake’s five 3-pointers in the first half gave the Chaparrals breathing room and a 34-33 halftime lead.

Hubbard said his team responded in the second half the way it has all season — with heart. The Knights started off its season with an 0-4 record and are now two victories away from the state tournament.

“There’s going to be highs and lows all of the time, but it’s how you handle them,” Hubbard said. “We can’t hang our head, if we did, our team would be going home right now.”

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SPORTS // HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

Brennan stomps Marshall for its fourth straight win

By Jose Arredondo, Correspondent

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Bear receiver Jordan Smith high steps away from a tackler for a touchdown in the second quarter as Brennan plays Marshall at Farris Stadium on October 11, 2018.
Photo: Tom Reel, Staff / Staff photographer

It can sound cliché when coaches say they’re taking the season “one game at a time,” but that has been the case for Brennan, which has won four straight games since starting the season 0-2.

Brennan coach Stephen Basore believes the number one factor of winning and losing games is turnovers. Brennan’s defense forced three fumbles and two interceptions in its 51-0 victory over Marshall on Thursday night at Farris Stadium.

Brennan (4-2, 4-1 District 28-6A) rushed for 241 yards and passed for 206 yards. Marshall (2-4, 1-4) had 114 yards of total offense.

RELATED: Bailey-Davis' three scores lift Judson over New Braunfels

Brennan wide receiver Darryon Tolefree opened the scoring with a 67-yard punt return for a touchdown. Tolefree scored the game-winning touchdown two weeks ago against Brandeis. Thursday, he finished the game with 59 yards receiving, 18 yards rushing, 67 yards returning and one touchdown.

“He’s an electric player, and we feel like a lot of explosive players, a lot of them can run after the catch,

and even our running backs can break for big runs,” Basore said afterward. “We try use all of our guys to the best of their abilities, and Tolefree runs it a little, catches it a little and we are just trying to keep building on what we have to stay explosive.”

Brennan junior cornerback Keion Thomas responded minutes later when he intercepted a pass at the 50-yard line. This interception set up Brennan’s running onslaught, and senior running back Joshua Lopez capped off the series with a 24-yard touchdown run.

Marshall’s most successful play on offense was brought back by an illegal formation penalty. The play would’ve been a 73-yard touchdown reception by Marshall sophomore wide receiver Dylan Cooper.

Brennan continued its scoring bursts.

Senior running back Javon Grimes received the handoff, stopped, changed directions and scored a 17-yard touchdown to give the Bears a 23-0 lead with 7:09 left in the first half.

Brennan sophomore safety Justino Escobar intercepted a pass with 4:45 left in the half, and the Bears scored three more touchdowns - this time in the air — as Brennan led 44-0 at halftime.

Sophomore quarterback Jordan Flores connected on a 34-yard touchdown with sophomore receiver Jalin Spells. Flores completed a 40-yard touchdown pass to senior wide receiver Jordan Smith. In the final seconds of the half, Flores found junior Brandon Wyatt for a 4-yard touchdown.

The second half consisted of just one touchdown but Flores did it in wild fashion. In the final minutes, Flores dropped a snap, scrambled in the pocket and heaved it for a 43-yard touchdown pass to Spells.

“He’s a really good thrower. He’s tough kid, he’s intelligent, he understands and he make some great plays,” Basore said of Flores, who finished the game with 163 yards passing and three touchdowns.

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NEWS // SOUTHSIDE REPORTER

East Side matriarch, role model celebrates MLK

By Jose Arredondo, Correspondent

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Dorothy Mondine (left) sits on her front porch at her home on Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, waving at passersby with her daughter, Barbara Jean Anthony, on Saturday, Jan. 12, 2019.
Photo: Marvin Pfeiffer /Staff photographer

Dorothy “Mother” Mondine was cooking at Luby’s on 719 N. Main Ave. when she heard the news of Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination.

She can still remember the pain she felt; all she could do was pray for his family.

Fifty years later, her faith continues to sustain her and fuels an eternal optimism.

“We can’t help what God does, there’s a time and season — Ecclesiastes Chapter 3,” Mondine said, sitting on a lawn chair outside her home on Martin Luther King Drive one recent Saturday afternoon. “There’s a time and season for every purpose of the heaven.

“We all have a season, but we don’t know when our season is coming. A season of hurt, a season of trouble ... we don’t know when our season is coming.”

Nearing 90, Mondine’s blue eyes are still sharp, peering over the glasses that sit at the end of her nose. Her enthusiasm and active lifestyle belie her age.

“How you doing? Hi, baby, sweetie pie,” Mondine said, waving to her neighbor’s daughter. “That is my baby, she remembers Miz Mondine — love ya.”

Mondine has lived at this house since 1974. Greeting neighbors and passers-by from her front porch is her favorite part of the day, she said. And while she didn’t get to watch the MLK Day parade until she retired in 1998 — it started in 1989 — she has made up for it ever since. She decorates her home for the event every year and prepares a meal for family and friends that day. Then she stays outside the entire length of the parade, waving and calling out support to the marchers as they pass by her home.

This year will be no different. Tens of thousands of marchers will set out from Martin Luther King Jr. Academy, 3501 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, at 10 a.m. Monday, Jan. 21, and head west on MLK Drive for the 2.75-mile walk, ending at Pittman-Sullivan Park, 1101 Iowa St.

And Mother Mondine will be there, standing by the white fence that surrounds her home, greeting everyone that passes by with a hearty, “God bless ya.”

The 86-year-old Texas native credits God for her long life, and it’s clear her faith and the wisdom acquired over the ages have helped her cope with difficult times.

She has outlived five of her nine children; her oldest son, Carl Craig, died last week at 68. She’s sad, but

she knows there's nothing she can do about it and points out that life must go on. She said she learned to deal with death at an early age and remembers her mother telling her to cry when a child enters the world but celebrate the person's life when he or she passes on.

Mondine was raised on a farm in Lockhart. She walked 5 miles to school and had to ride in the back of the bus on the return trip. After school, she picked cotton, as much as 500 pounds a day, to help support her family. She endured much racism and followed rules that separated blacks from whites.

“We used to have to sit on the toilet outside,” Mondine recalled.

She didn't understand why people shouted racial slurs, but she did know black people had to endure it.

After Mondine's father died in 1947, she moved to San Antonio, which had more diversity than her hometown, but still there was racism. She didn't want to attend school because she was ridiculed for a speech impediment, so her aunt got her a job taking care of children in Alamo Heights and other parts of town.

“I worked for some people that did me bad ... I worked for this woman, and she told me to stay there and take care of her kids,” Mondine said. “When she got back, it was 2 o'clock in the morning.

“She told me she didn't have pocket change and threw me out — I had to call my uncle to pick me up.”

Mondine has spent much of her life working to provide for her children, but she managed to find time to enjoy herself every now and then. She loves music and dancing, and sometimes wears ballerina slippers. Mondine demonstrated her go-to dance move, placing her hands on her hips and moving left and right.

“Oh, Lord, I can't do that anymore,” Mondine said, laughing.

As the years passed, Mondine witnessed highways being built, neighborhoods changing and her adopted city reaching milestones — a list of events that she said is too long to recite.

“I remember back in 1968, they built the tower down there and then they did all these things, the AT&T Center,” Mondine said. “I (saw) the San Antonio Spurs way back when they used to wear them little shorts up to here.”

She watches the news often and praises the younger generation for speaking out on social issues.

“The young generation, they're smart now, they're marching to the White House — thank God for the young generation,” Mondine said, clapping. “And God lets me see all of that, thank you, Lord.

“Every time I see young people I say, ‘Thank God for you.’”

Mondine knows she has more years behind her than ahead, but hopes to leave a blueprint for living right.

“It's the way you live, your reputation, the way you live before young people, the way you live before God,” Mondine said, sharing advice she was given as a young woman. “Young people are watching, even your children are watching, you can't live just any kind of way.”