Running red in a blue city: Alia Garcia-Ureste remains firm in race to congress

BY CHRISTIAN VASQUEZ

With six Democrats competing in the primaries to replace U.S. Representative Beto O’Rourke’s vacant Congressional seat, and El Paso being one of the steady blue counties in the state, Republicans are seeminglydrastic leadership shift has occurred in Texas in just a week of voting, with the Democrats having a 28,000 voting edge over Republicans in the state major urban counties, compared to 2014 when the Republicans had a 34,000 voting edge over the Democrats. If you can’t make it to the race to replace Rep. Beto O’Rourke in the 16th Congressional District. The Texas Senate position is up for grabs as well as Senate candidate Greg Abbott running againstний Democratic and two Republican challengers. The lamented governor’s position is also up for grabs as well for current Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick. Attorney General Ken Paxton will also defend his seat in this election cycle.

Propositions:
Check out ElPasoCountyVotes.com to see exac tly which candidates and propositions will be on the ballot. There are 12 propositions to vote for against on the Democratic ballot and 11 on the Republican ballot, encompassing topics such as whether a universal Medicad should be implemented on the Democratic ballot, to school choice on the Republican ballot.

What form of ID to bring:
When heading to the polls make sure to have either your state driver’s license, Texas election identification certificate, Texas personal ID, Texas license to carry a handgun, U.S. military ID card that includes a personal photo, U.S. citizenship certificate that includes a personal photo or a U.S. passport.

Are you registered to vote? To make sure you are registered to vote, visit either the Texas Secretary of State or El Paso County Votes websites and enter your full name, birth date, zip code and the county you live in to check if you are registered.

Running red in a blue city: Alia Garcia-Ureste remains firm in race to congress

BY THE PROSPECTOR STAFF

The Prospector has been just over a week into early voting in the local election and it is currently Democratic voters who have already made a large impression in the election.

There were 4,800 El Pasoans who voted on the first day of early voting, according to the office of the Texas Secretary of State, and there was a significant jump in Democratic voter numbers.

In just the first day, 4,018 Democratic and 791 Republican votes were cast on the first day of early voting. The increase went up 86 percent for Democrats compared to the 2014 election, and a 170 percent increase compared to the 2016 presidential primary ballot.

The Republicans also saw a small increase from the 2016 election, where 777 votes were cast on the first day.

Former El Paso Times editor Bob Moore reported Monday morning that the counties with the most Democratic votes compared to Republican votes were border counties, with Hidalgo, Cameron and El Paso leading the way. The most Republican to Democratic votes were cast by suburban cities around Houston, including Montgomery, Brazoria and Galveston.

However, Moore also reported that a seeminglydrastic leadership shift has occurred in Texas in just a week of voting, with the Democrats having a 28,000 voting edge over Republicans in the state major urban counties, compared to 2014 when the Republicans had a 34,000 voting edge over the Democrats.

“I just felt that it doesn’t matter that I’m a Republican. You know it’s a blue dis­trict, but if people will give me a chance and listen to what my platform is about, maybe they’ll give me a chance and vote for me,” Garcia-Ureste said.

Garcia-Ureste is currently the Madame Commissioner of the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission, which cre­ates awareness of the Holocaust as well and Genocide Commission, which cre­ates awareness of the Holocaust as well and Genocide.

She wants El Pasoans to take advantage of the medical portion of UTEP’s partnerships to help city projects. She said that green companies—companies that are trying to be environmen­tally friendly—could be a path forward to help the El Paso economy. She points to her own successful business that cleans up after oil and gas companies.

“Little did we realize cleaning up Mother Earth was going to replace two incomes,” Garcia-Ureste said.

Garcia-Ureste claims that one of El Paso’s strong points is that the economy does not rely on oil and gas like much of Texas. But also oil and gas companies are coming to El Paso, given the drilling for shale oil in Hudspeth County.

She wants El Pasoans to take advantage of the coming gas and oil industries and open up green companies, believing that there is a market need for new business startups that recycle pollution.

But she also says that solar and wind energy are not likely to replace oil and gas anytime soon.

“That won’t replace our need or our electrical grid, but we can combine all these alternative energies and we can put forward some jobs in good numbers,” said Garcia-Ureste.

She also wants to reduce the deficit.

“We’re in a lot of debt, both foreign and domestic, numbers are moving up and down, and as always it’s up to the taxpayers. It’s like people like us—the working class—we are going to have to answer the question of how are we going to balance the budget?” Garcia-Ureste said.

On immigration, Garcia-Ureste said that she supports President Donald Trump’s idea for a wall, but calls for a “smart wall,” which she compared to the wall that is used in the Israeli West Bank Barrier.

“We are a sovereign nation, we need to know who is coming and going, especial­ly if they are not asking our permission to come in,” Garcia-Ureste said. “We know that the majority of people who are cross­ing the border are not criminals, but the ones who are, they’re a real danger.”

She said that she does feel for Dreamers, but that she wished they had come to the United States in a legal way. She also said that there are many Texans who descend from land grants given by Texas when it was a state and a Republic that many Dreamers may have descended from.

“In Texas alone, land grant community estimates there is between three and nine million Texano that descend from the original recipients of these land grants,” Garcia-Ureste said. “The number is over 11 million that are undocumented, and here many of the 1.8 million might have this genealogy too?”

She said that descendants from those land grants could be a legal pathway to citizenship for the 124,000 DACA recipi­ents in Texas.

Like her fellow Republican candidate, Garcia-Ureste is not at the top of the list when it comes to total funds raised. The majority of her campaign funds have come from her recycling company. Her total contributions are $165, with $59 from her own funds.

The other Republican candidate, Rick Seiberg, has raised $7,304, with $6,000 from his own funds.

The top two contenders for the Demo­crats have raised significantly more, with Dori Fenbermoch raising nearly $1 million and Veronica Escobar just over $800,000.

For more candidate profiles visit theprospectordaily.com.

Follow Christian Vasquez on Twitter @chrismvasq

DESIGN BY ALEJANDRA GONZÁLEZ/ THE PROSPECTOR
Black History Month matters

By JASON GREEN

The Prospector

Black History Month is for everyone to learn, witness and be reminded how important black history is to our nation.

According to the El Paso Times, early voting numbers for the Democratic Primary in El Paso are up 86 percent from 2014 and 170 percent from 2016. It is probably safe to assume that the turnout, as has been the case in almost every election this year, in reaction to Trump being elected president. In turn, Republicans have faced high-profile losses in typically red states, such as Virginia and Alabama. The Democratic Party is seeing a rejuvenation following their defeat at the hands of the Bush-I-McCain-Obama/Romney—Republicans 18 points ahead in November, and with a few days before the blue city and county, the primaries on March 6 are basically the bell and end for all seats.

A few days before a few major elections, we know that Black History Month is a month that resonated with me and many others, explaining that Black History Month is something that needs to be observed by all.

As I looked at the crowd that had accumulated to hear Davis speak, I saw diversity. People of all ethnicities sat there, completely in tune and attentive to all Professor Davis said. That she spoke that day I witnessed such a prominent figure of the Civil Rights Movement being respected and revered by people from all over, and I was once again reminded how important black history was to not just black Americans and black people in general (which Davis also spoke about, in regards to Black History Month not just celebrating African Americans, but African diaspora worldwide), but to everyone sitting in that auditorium, regarding respect for this nation.

Black History Month is for every- one because this month observes the birth of our nation. The rights for black Americans paved way for other movements, such as the feminist movement, anti-war movements and many more that followed. The Civil Rights Movement truly shaped the nation, and continues to do so today. When people ask why we observe Black History Month, and what its importance is, they must realize black history is the history of this country and every citizen of the United States has a right and obligation to understand that.

ACCURACY WATCH

The Prospector is committed to the accuracy, if you think we have made an error of fact, email the editor at michaelaromana@gmail.com

Change starts now with the democratic primaries

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"El Paso" Ai-Hwa Chinese School celebrated Year of the Dog

BY JAKE DEVEN

Students, faculty and parents came together at a packed Union Cinema to celebrate the incoming Year of the Dog with traditional Chinese performances at UTEP on Saturday afternoon, Feb. 24.

“This is what universities are for—these incredible celebrations of culture, friendship and learning. To come together to understand each other and develop the skills, abilities and confidence to be competitive in the world,” said Alberto Lopez, assistant vice president for the Office of University Relations.

Among those welcoming the Chinese New Year on Saturday were Boy Scouts of America, third graders from Mesita Elementary, fifth graders from Eastwood Knolls Elementary, students from EPCC, Rotary Youth Exchange students and the Taiwanese Chamber of Commerce (TCC) in El Paso and Juarez.

Also performing in the celebration were students from various schools in El Paso, who are studying Chinese through UTEP’s Professional and Public Programs’ Ai-Hwa Chinese School, which will be celebrating 20 years of providing Chinese language and culture classes in El Paso next year. Current principal of the school, Shaping “Champagne” Chyi, was the main organizer of the Chinese New Year celebration.

Performances by third graders from Mesita and fifth graders from Eastwood Knolls included a rendition of the “Beautiful Jasmine Flower Dance” and a “Mongolian Chopstick Dance.” Students from the Rotary Youth Exchange presented the audience with a “Sunshine Flower Dance,” while students from EPCC performed a rendition of the “Green Dragon Crescent Moon Sword” with their professor, KangHoon Choi.

In addition to performances by students from the elementary schools and EPCC, the audience was treated to a few performances by younger children who performed a “Happy Bunny” dance, which is a Chinese version of “Old MacDonald had a Farm.”

The Taiwanese Chamber of Commerce showcased the progress the organization has brought to the community.

Finishing off the event was a performance by all performers called “Red Envelopes with the Wealth God.” The red envelope is a gift traditionally presented during the New Year. The red color of the envelope symbolizes good luck and is a symbol to ward off evil spirits.

Follow Jake Deven on Twitter @jakedeven
By Jake Devils

At the upcoming 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations in New York from March 10-17, women from every corner of the world will gather to discuss challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

This year, Julissa Corona, a UTEP master of social work student, is one of 10 students who were selected from across the nation to participate in the CSW as a delegate for the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

“I’m excited to learn about policies and how to change them and I’m excited to participate in advocacy for women’s rights,” Corona said.

The WIPLF is an organization that works to achieve racial and economic justice, world disarmament and other rights for women. Corona cited to participate in advocacy for women’s rights, “Corona said. She was excited to learn that she was chosen as a delegate for the CSW, which is a governmental body that focuses on gender equality and the advancement of women and draws representatives of governments to address the problems facing women around the world.

The application process for this unequalled opportunity is highly competitive and focused on the applicant’s documentation of both official and NGO meetings. Corona earned her bachelor’s of science in psychology degree from Methodist University in Fayetteville, North Carolina, in 2014. Soon after, she started working in clinical psychology, where she worked with an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team.

“The goal of ACT is to help people stay out of the hospital and to develop skills for living in the community, so that their mental illness is not the driving force in their lives. During this time, she practiced psychological rehabilitation, working with clients who were experiencing schizophrenia and psychotic symptoms. Corona became especially interested in the social aspect of the job, understanding the issues that impact individuals, their response to the issue and how to fix the issue. She will also attend official and non-government organization sessions and contribute to the official participation of multilateral engagement and coordinated action.

Health Sciences student, Julissa Corona, is one of 10 students selected to participate in the CSW as a delegate for the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom this March.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UTEP COMMUNICATIONS

“What (the social worker’s) work was more broad and focused on human behavior. I liked that,” Corona said. She was excited to learn that she was chosen as a delegate for the CSW, which is a governmental body that focuses on gender equality and the advancement of women and draws representatives of governments to address the problems facing women around the world.

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El Cuartito: A Japanese favorite with a Mexican twist

BY CLAUDIA FLORES

El Cuartito offers four different variations of ramen based on traditional Mexican plates.

Nick Salgado, who runs El Cuartito, the charbroiled ramen shop, said that they try to bring new things to El Paso or whatever is trending in other states like New York or other parts of the world. “I grew up in Juárez, Nick grew up in the state of New York, San Francisco and other places of Southeast Asia such as Thailand and Korea. "Other than coffee, I wanted to introduce people to some new drinks and one of them is the charcoal latte, and what we use is activated charcoal, and it’s not just for the color or aesthetic effect, it’s also good for digestion and health benefits," he said. Kim explained that in order to create the drink, they use coconut ash charcoal, which is an edible charcoal, and they add coconut cream and coconut extract.

Kim said that all of the product’s ingredients are from Japan to maintain the products as authentic as possible. “The charcoal is imported, and if it’s a matcha, we try to get high-class products so we import it straight from Japan,” Kim said. "Same thing for ube (purple yam), it’s imported from Southeast Asia, where it is grown."

Besides the charcoal latte, Fahrenheit 180 offers a new insight to some of the most popular drinks and desserts in Asia, such as the bicolored croissant, the angel snow desserts, matcha crepe cake and ube drinks. "The bicolour croissants are filled with different types of fillings, but it’s not like a regular croissant where you just roll chocolate inside," Kim said. "We actually give it a little twist by adding color to it. So if it’s a chocolate croissant, we add dark chocolate and with a marshmallow fluff. Everywhere else is moving forward turning them into a new product. "Ramen to me has the same place in my heart, maybe slightly below where menudo, pozole, fideo and these other soups sit. It’s about taking humble ingredients, basically things people didn’t original want to eat," Valdes stated. "With ramen we’re taking bones and noodles and turning super humble ingredients into something better, and we marry them with the flavors that we grew up with, such as menudo, pozole and tacos al pastor-putting together familiar with less familiar and creating an awesome new product."

With the final product, the food has been in the making for over 24 hours. Valdes explained that he starts with the traditional ingredients with ramen, and it is near the end of the process that he takes a Mexican turn. "We start with kumbe (beep), katsudon (smoked Skipjack tuna flakes) and dashi, which is the stock of Japanese cuisine and is the Knorr Suiza of Mexican cuisine," Valdes said. "Our broth is considered a pork broth, but there are also chicken bones in there and those bones get blanched and clean and they go into the dashi. It takes 24 hours to make and it takes two days to make the whole thing."

Valdes said that making ramen takes a lot of practice, knowledge and patience. In fact, the main ingredients to make the savoy broth consist of elements in which some people would consider leftovers. "A lot of time you won’t know if you mess up until the end. So if you’re in a restaurant and you order something and I mess it up it will take me 30 seconds to fix," Valdes said. "But if I mess something up that takes 48 hours to make, and I won’t notice until the very end–some thing just happened–that’s why the time and precision are so important because I have to ensure that those 48 hours weren’t in vain."

Other ramen restaurants in El Paso, such as Kaedama and Noshi Ramen, offer a more traditional style of ramen. Aside from serving as a restaurant, El Cuartito will also have a bar offering a variety of drinks such as Mezcal and Estrella Jalisco beer.

Fahrenheit 180 offers café destination near campus

BY CLAUDIA FLORES

Fahrenheit 180 is one of the newest places in town that offers more than just your typical cup of coffee and is located right across from the DoN Haskins Center.

"My friend runs Fahrenheit 32 (ice cream shop), and what he does is that he tries to bring new things to El Paso or whatever is trending in other states like New York or other parts of the world," said owner James Kim, 24. Even though El Paso has a large variety of places to relax with a good cup of coffee, to Kim, creating a space with different products was one of the important factors that led to the creation of Fahrenheit 180. "When I first came here, there was nowhere to go. When my girlfriend came to visit we wanted to go somewhere to just hang out and chill, but the closest thing was Starbucks, which only fits in a couple of places a day to Sunday. from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.," Kim said. “People are familiar with the New York style coffee, which is very thick, and the Japanese cheesecake is more bready, is more fluffy and cisco and other places of Southeast Asia, such as Thailand and Korea. "Other than coffee, I wanted to introduce people to some new drinks and one of them is the charcoal latte, and what we use is activated charcoal, and it’s not just for the color or aesthetic effect, it’s also good for digestion and health benefits," he said. Kim explained that in order to create the drink, they use coconut ash charcoal, which is an edible charcoal, and they add coconut cream and coconut extract.

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Part of the concept of Fahrenheit 180 is not only to offer new trends, but also to bring parts of different cultures to blend in with the El Paso community. "I feel it’s very important that everybody else is moving forward and El Paso is not there yet," Kim said. "So, I feel that bringing this here is a cultural effect and it’s not about bringing just one culture, it is about bringing cultures from other parts of the world."

Fahrenheit 180 is open from Monday to Sunday from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Friday to Saturday from 6 a.m. to midnight and Sunday from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Fahrenheit 180 may be reached at 747-7446.
21st Century Scholars
Class of 2018

[Image with a large group photo of students and their names listed below]
Musician’s Forums bring awareness to local music scene

BY ELNIE GONZALEZ

There is a strong music scene in El Paso that has been unknown for quite some time. The scene has emerged in the last few years thanks to venues such as The Lowbrow Palace and Tricky Falls.

As the local music scene continues to rise, local artists are collaborating in an effort to bring more awareness about other musicians within the community.

Christian Yanez is one of those artists. He spearheads an initiative called the Musicians Forum, which is a monthly meeting inviting local artists to come together and learn about different topics regarding the efforts of working as a musician.

The forums take place at the Outpost, located on 2317 E. Missouri Ave, which is a facility in El Paso that provides amenities to traveling musicians for free.

Yanez though it would be the perfect space to hold the forum.

“When I put this together this time around, I wanted it to be for musicians only,” Yanez said. “The thing about the scene here is that all the musicians know each other because they all play shows together. I felt that if I put that spin on it, and by having it at the Outpost, especially because not many musicians know what it is or that it’s a resource for them, it would help increase attendance.”

However, this wasn’t the first time Yanez has tried hosting a forum.

Yanez’ first two attempts at hosting the forum in 2015 and 2016 weren’t as successful as he had hoped for. Along with the musicians, he invited people who worked within the music scene such as in recording studios, marketing and any other resources musicians might need to move forward in their careers. Although there were about 30 business people in attendance, only about three musicians showed up.

This year over 100 musicians attended the forum in January.

Yanez, who works for several of El Paso’s music-centered companies such as Splendid Sun Productions, Neon Desert Music Festival and The Lowbrow Palace, said it’s easy for him to reach out to members of the music community since he’s already in touch with them through Facebook.

Since the Outpost does not have any social media pages or accounts, Yanez uses his own Facebook account to inform musicians about the upcoming forums. He said that after the first forum, he created a Facebook group to be able to send updates to the musicians.

“What we want is for local bands to be able to have successful shows so that they can make a living out of being musicians,” Yanez said.

Each month, the forum will have a different focus. The forum in February focused on marketing and how to increase attendance at a show.

He’s planning a forum in the next few months that will focus on how to book a tour or show. Sorrytown, a local band, will lead the forum after returning from their own tour, which they booked entirely on their own.

“For the most part, I pick the categories that we talk about, but the goal is to have enough people collaborating to those who attend can see from a real-life standpoint what’s like to specialize and exceed in that specific topic,” Yanez said.

Rolph Zehntner, vocalist for Acid Pick, has attended the forums.

Zehntner said, “Now that a connection has been made, we’re hopeful that it’ll be the foundation for a real community, not just a group of people occupying the same space, but a scene that works together for everyone’s benefit.”

This is only the beginning of the musicians forums and Yanez is hoping to see success stories emerge from his push for awareness in the local music scene.

“At the end of the day, this is about improving the scene as a whole,” Yanez said. “If we, as a team, can improve attendance at shows, that results in venues and promoters getting higher profits, which then results in bands getting paid, which is a goal for the bands.”

For more information send an email to caroline@thisisthepa.com

 Florian Gonzalez on Twitter @floriangonzo

METALLICA TO BRING TOUR TO THE DON

This past weekend, fans of the heavy metal band Metallica found themselves teased by a video shared on the UTEP Don Haskins Center Facebook page indicating that the heavy metal legends will make a stop in El Paso for their 2018 North American Tour.

This morning the band released the official dates for their “WorldWired” tour, and as predicted the California band will make a stop at UTEP’s Don Haskins Center on Feb. 28, 2019.

The tour includes 33 other dates in the U.S. where Metallica will continue to promote their tenth-studio album “Hardwired to Self-Destruct” released in November of 2016.

The fan club pre-sale begins Tuesday morning, Feb. 27, 2018. The tickets are on sale to the general public on March 2 at 10 a.m.
Five players to watch for in spring football

1. **Kai Locksley**
   - **Position**: Quarterback
   - **Reason**: As the Miners open their Spring Training with spring ball Friday, Locksley is the man as he begins his second season as the starting quarterback.

2. **Quardraiz Wadley**
   - **Position**: Running back
   - **Reason**: Wadley joins the Miners as a graduate transfer from Kansas State and should be a focal point of the rushing attack.

3. **Nik Needham**
   - **Position**: Defensive Back
   - **Reason**: Needham joined the Miners as a transfer from Texas Tech. He is expected to be one of the best defensive backs in Conference USA.

4. **CJ Reese**
   - **Position**: Defensive End
   - **Reason**: Reese comes to UTEP as a transfer from UCLA. He will take over the starting spot for the Miners.

5. **Justin Rogers**
   - **Position**: Cornerback
   - **Reason**: Rogers is one of the Miners’ top defensive backs and a key member of the secondary.

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**Blair overcomes health issues to shine at UTEP**

BY ADRIAN BROADDUS

Five players to watch for in spring football

For the first time since his two seasons stepping in as a corner back, Justin Rog­ers has put up some impressive film and turned some heads in the defensive backfield. The junior out of Los Angeles is a playmaker and able to wreak havoc in the pass game. He is also an open-field tackle for the defense, as he finished last season with 39 tackles. Throughout 2017, he caused two key turnovers in adding a talent like Blair, she knew El Paso was where she wanted to continue playing softball.
also wins her first team, she also knows as a person that lifts the spirits of her teammates and helps make the team the family that they are.

"At (Blair’s) nickname on the team" will go through a brick wall for any one on this team," said senior Kaitlyn Ryder. "The definition of a great teammate is AJ. She picks everyone up, she is the first one that offers to do extra to make the team better, and she just the type of person you can really rely on."

From day one with UTEP, Blair would see a lot of playing time as a freshman. During her freshman year, the center fielder played in 34 games and started in 22 of them. She hit .269, scored 15 times and was tied for the team lead with two bases stolen.

In her first year (2016), Blair helped lead the Miners to their only winning conference record in program history (13-11 C-USA) and must wins since 2010 (23).

The following year, she made 32 starts and played in 38 games. Being the speedy player, Blair led the Miners in bases stolen (five). She also tied the team-high five sacriﬁce hits and batted a .265 batting average, totaled 16 runs scored with 47 putouts and four assists.

Fast forward to today, Blair has kicked off her junior season on fire. During the Marucci Desert Classic tournament in Las Vegas earlier this season, Blair paved the way for UTEP to win their ﬁnal three games of the tournament after losing the ﬁrst two games. She batted an eye-popping average of .500, had a .538 on base percentage, stole three bases, scored three times and added one RBI to her impressive weekend.

"She’s starting to put everything together and everything is clicking for her right now," said UTEP head coach Tobin Ecko-Hawk on Blair.

"She really worked hard this off-season to perfect some of her skills. She’s done a great job of listening and being coachable, I think that’s a big reason why she’s having the success she is."

As of now, UTEP is 8-7 after winning eight of their last nine games. Blair has been the lead-off batter for the Miners for the majority of the games this season, and it has improved the overall play for UTEP since the move.

Blair again leads the team in steals (six) so far, but she is much more than just her speed. She’s fourth in batting percentage (.441), has 12 hits, has scored seven times and has a .452 on base percentage so far this season.

Since her ﬁrst year to now, Echo Hawk and Ryder said that the aspect that Blair has improved the most in is her conﬁdence. She has more of the mentality this year to attack the pitcher and not let the pitcher attack her.

Blair’s goal this year is to win Conference USA. She believes UTEP has the tools to do so.

"I know this game we definitely have the potential to do it," she said. "Everybody is 100 percent bought in. That’s deﬁnitely a goal we’re shooting for, if not, past that goal."

Aside from softball, Blair has a health promotion major and would like to pursue her dream of going to nursing school, specializing in oncology.

**By Mike Flores**

**The Prospector**

A two-game win streak doesn’t mean much in the big picture of a basketball season, but the last two wins for the UTEP men’s basketball team, coming against Louisiana Tech (74-72) and Southern Mississippi (73-40), put them in the driver’s seat for a spot in the upcoming Conference USA tournament in Frisco, Texas.

Now at 10-10 and 5-11 in Conference USA, the Miners have a two-game lead over Rice for the final spot in the conference tournament, with only two remaining games in the regular season.

Here are ﬁve things to know for UTEP’s ﬁnal two games on the road against Rice and North Texas to clinch the regular season.

1. One win for UTEP and they’re in

By this time last season, UTEP was facing a ﬁrst-round bye in the C-USA tournament, but this season, the team is battling just to clinch a spot in the tournament.

The top-12 teams in C-USA by the end of the regular season earn their chance to battle against one another to get into the biggest stage in college basketball—the NCAA tournament. UTEP is currently at 12th seed in C-USA, and has a two-game lead on Rice (9-23, 1-11 C-USA) and four-game lead on last place Charlotte (9-22, 3-15 C-USA).

If the Miners were to beat Rice for the second time this season on March 1, that would eliminate the Owls from tournament contention and put UTEP in no matter the outcome the ﬁnal game. But if UTEP were to come up short against Rice, that would mean the Owls would still have a small chance to snatch that 12th spot from the Miners—if UTEP were to lose their last two games and Rice were to win their ﬁnal two games.

A win over North Texas would secure the Miners C-USA tournament spot as well.

2. UTEP could still move up in the standings

Southern Miss and Hawaii Atlantic have yet to clinch conference wins each and are both only a game above UTEP in the current standings.

For UTEP, they have a winnable game against Rice since the Miners have already handily beat the Owls earlier this season, 80-62.

But for Southern Miss, they are coming off their worst conference loss of the season from the hands of UTEP, 73-44, and have also lost five of their last six games. It won’t get any easier for the Golden Eagles as they are set to face a LA Tech team for the second time this year, who has already beaten them, 89-66.

For FAU, they have a top-three team in Old Dominion coming up on their schedule. ODU has won six of their last seven games and holds C-USA’s top-ranked defense, only giving up 63.5 points per game. However, FAU holds two big wins over UTEP if they were to end with the same record—the Owls have beaten the Miners head-to-head and FAU has last place Charlotte still remaining on their schedule.

3. UTEP avoided a home-losing record

Coming into their ﬁnal homestand of the season, UTEP had a 7-4 home record and won on the verge of winning with a home-losing record for only the second time since they’re the last two games against Rice.

But with a nail-bitting win over LA Tech, 74-72, and a homecourt victory over Southern Miss, the Miners secured their 15th straight winning season at home.

**Final games to decide Miners fate**

**Gary Velasquez, The Prospector**

Away from the Don Haskins Center this year, UTEP is 3-7, with their only road win coming against a one-win Charlotte team on a last-second shot from Paul Thomas.

4. Omega Harris has found his offensive game

In UTEP’s two-game winning streak, senior guard Omega Harris scored 21 points in both games to help lead his team to victories.

The Miners have averaged only 1.16 points per game, but if the last two wins were any indication of how Harris is going to play in the ﬁnal games of his college career, UTEP could ﬁnally lean on his usual consistent scoring.

With UTEP’s second leading scorer Keith Frimer (11 points per game) using very limited playing time since coming back from his mid-season departures, and with a UTEP defense that is last in C-USA in scoring (67.8 points per game), UTEP will need repeat performances from Harris if they hope to keep the season alive.

5. Tournament experience could be crucial for the team to come

UTEP will be losing four players—Harron, Matt Williams, Juke Huggins and Frimer—when they 2017-18 season comes to an end. On the other hand, despite their record and struggles this season, the Miners have some key talent to turn in to over the upcoming years with four freshmen and one sophomore transfer making their UTEP debut this year.

The newly faces this year for UTEP—Brant Giford, Treen Smith, Troy Vaida, Jacho Magus and Josh Obiemo—have played signiﬁcant minutes already but there is nothing like post-season play to gain the experience and knowledge of a one-elimination tournament.

**Follow Mike Flores on Twitter @miﬂores_**
Opportunity in U.S. fuels Zec with Miners

BY JEREMY CARRANCO

Katarina Zec was born in Belgrade, Serbia, and played on the U20 Serbian National Team.

"My mom (Natasa Zec) was a basketball coach for little kids, so I started playing when I was 8 years old," she said. "I played throughout primary school and high school before I received an invitation at 15 to be on the Serbian national team." With the U20 Serbian National Team, Zec helped her team take fourth place (Division A) at the 2016 European Championships, averaging 6.7 points and 3.6 rebounds in four contests.

"I decided because I didn't have the opportunity to play basketball at a professional level and go into a school at a higher level than what was there (in Serbia), I just had to move to the United States because they (UTEP and Wyoming) offered me that opportunity," she said.

Zec signed to play basketball with UTEP over Wyoming in 2016, and enrolled in school as a biochemistry major for the fall semester later that year, which was her first as a collegiate-student athlete in the U.S.

"It took time to adjust and completely focus in school because it was a real challenge to write the English language at first," she said. "My academic English was not at a great level at the time. I could talk and communicate, but someone had to check my spelling and grammar. Now I don't need any help, I'm completely fine." First-year head coach Kevin Baker knows about the challenges Zec had to go through from getting to know her, but is surprised how far she has come in adjusting from what she has told him.

"Can you imagine how scary it must be to come from Serbia and play Division I basketball while trying to learn a new language on a new campus and in a new city?" Baker questioned. "With familiarity brings confidence and that's where she is now." As a freshman, Zec missed part of the season due to a dislocated knee-cap during a practice in early December 2016, which sidelined the newcomer for six contests. Around her injury period, the freshman was productive in 25 appearances and 19 starts, averaging 5.7 points per game in 20.8 minutes played, while shooting 41.4 percent from the field and 77.8 percent from the charity stripe. More importantly, landing on the team’s most dangerous shooter.

"I was born in Belgrade, Serbia, in 1997, and the two years before that and two years after that there was a war," she said. "So I grew up in a war country, with economic, political, and social crisis, and the struggles (financial) are still going on today." Despite these everyday challenges, Zec said she always found a way onto the court.

"I feel really confident when I shoot the 3," she said. "It feels even better when it's a clutch shot, but I also like playing defense because I normally have the job of defending the other team's most dangerous shooter." Although he didn't recruit Zec or see her during her freshman campaign, Baker knows how much Zec has improved since he took over the reins of the women's basketball program.

"When we first got here, we didn't really know what hand we were dealt," Baker said. "It's amazing to me to see how far she's come in such a short period of time—to be that player we can count on consistent­ly to score and guard night in and night out."

So far this season, the sophomore is second on the team in field goals made (94), 3-pointers made (35) and 3-point shooting percentage (38 percent). Zec leads the team in free throw percentage with an 87 percent clip (41-46) and averages 9.7 points per game.

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FILE PHOTO / THE PROSPECTOR

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More importantly, landing on the national roster gave the future Miner some confidence heading into her collegiate career.

"It was a pretty good experience," she said. "You got to feel some honor and pride for getting the opportunity to play for your own country." While coming to the U.S. is a dream for many across the seas, Zec knew she had to make the decision to come to the U.S. to both save her basketball career and to learn in the classroom at a high level.

"It took time to adjust and completely focus in school because it was a real challenge to write the English language at first," she said. "My academic English was not at a great level at the time. I could talk and communicate, but someone had to check my spelling and grammar. Now I don't need any help, I'm completely fine." First-year head coach Kevin Baker knows about the challenges Zec had to go through from getting to know her, but is surprised how far she has come in adjusting from what she has told him.

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see ZEC on page 12

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The beginning of NCAA turmoils

BY DANIEL MENDEZ

Yahoo! Sports dropped a bombshell that could dramatically change college sports’ landscape, according to the Lanez basketball players.

The feds have reportedly been investigating this for three years and have multiple federal authorities monitoring multiple targets and intercepting more than 4,000 calls, providing the FBI with a clear-cut view of how extensive these underground recruiting operations are.

If convicted, some teams may be ineligible to play in the upcoming basketball tournament and some programs might be in major jeopardy in college basketball.

The main agents getting investigated are former NCAA vice president Dan Gumpert, his former associate Christian Dawkins and his agency ASM Sports. The documents include expense reports, balance sheets that list cash advances, as well as entertainment and travel expenses for high school and college prospects and their families.

It all started before the college basketball season with Rick Pitino and the University of Louisville. Authorities say that a Louisville assistant coach sought to spend $100,000 on the father of star recruit Brian Bowen. Bowen committed to Louisville, but is currently playing for the South Carolina Gamecocks. Reports are stating that Bowen was shopped around everywhere to multiple universities.

The NCAA is a billion-dollar venture, with one of its main cash crops being the men’s basketball national championship tournament — better known as March Madness. The tournament dominates spring break with big-name players making big plays and Cinderella teams.

“Everybody knows everybody’s getting paid,” said Lakers guard Lonzo Ball, who played for UCLA last year. “That’s just how it is. Everybody’s getting paid money that might as well make it legal. That’s how I feel.”

At least 20 Division 1 basketball programs and more than 25 players, including major schools such as Duke, Michigan State, Kentucky, North Carolina and Texas are under investigation.

Miller, the only coach to be named so far in the report, did not coach his team against Oregon over the weekend, but Arizona did play and lost a double-double in the overtime loss.

Current players included in the investigation are Alabama guard Collin Sexton, Duke forward Wendell Carter, Kentucky forward Kevin Knox, Michigan State forward Miles Bridges, Texas guard Eric Davis, South Carolina’s Brian Bowen and two USC players.

Former Sacramento State forward Miles Bridges, Texas Tech guard Davide Moretti and North Carolina’s Garrison Brooks are also included in the investigation.

The whole investigation may have opened the floodgates. If the NCAA changed their amateurism rules, this may not have happened to this extent.

The rule that is being called into question is the one-and-done rule. The rule was implemented to prevent highly skilled basketball players from entering the NBA immediately after high school. The NCAA established that the player must be one year removed from high school.

Over the weekend, Detroit Pistons head coach Stan Van Gundy brought up an interesting take on the one-and-done rule. It’s a rule that I think is whole investigation may have opened the floodgates. If the NCAA changed their amateurism rules, this may not have happened to this extent. The rule that is being called into question is the one-and-done rule. The rule was implemented to prevent highly skilled basketball players from entering the NBA immediately after high school. The NCAA established that the player must be one year removed from high school.

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