

PREPS: A Q&A with La Costa Canyon soccer player Johnny Espinoza

By RICK HOFF - For the North County Times | Monday, February 9, 2009 5:08 PM PST



Johnny Espinoza

With its marquee player, senior striker John Fitzpatrick, sidelined by a groin injury, the La Costa Canyon High boys soccer team appeared to be facing a bumpy road to begin the 2008-09 season.

Count on **Johnny Espinoza** to help smooth over things. Nineteen matches into the season, Espinoza and the Mavericks have yet to lose a match en route to gaining the San Diego Section's No. 1 ranking. As an attacking midfielder, **Espinoza has accounted for 11 goals and 11 assists, and his 33 points rank fourth among North County players. His assists total stands second only to Poway's Alex Henry in North County. Before a recent training session, Espinoza shared his thoughts on the Mavericks' season:**

Q: You and John Fitzpatrick share the same first name. How do your teammates address that?

A: I go by Johnny, and he's Fitzy.

Q: How long have the two of you played soccer together?

A: Since we were in the under-13s, so about 5 or 6 years now. As an attacking midfielder, you seem to have an eye for where Fitzy is on the field. He's always a good target.



Q: Is this the best soccer team you have ever played on?

A: This is the best high school team I've ever played for, by far. Our freshman year we were pretty stacked, and we won CIF. This team has a chance to be even better than that one.

Q: What do you attribute this team's success to?

A: Good feeder clubs. Fitzy and I both played for the (San Diego) Surf, but a lot of the other clubs, such as the (Carlsbad) Lightning and (Rancho Santa Fe) Attack, have developed real good programs. A lot of our players have that good club experience.

Q: But there are good club players at other schools as well. What's the difference with your team?

A: Soccer bond. Everybody here has the same amount of skill, and we have a lot of experience. There are 20 seniors on this team. This is a great group of guys from a soccer aspect and from a friendship aspect.

Q: What's in the water at La Costa Canyon? The football and girls volleyball teams each won CIF section championships in the fall, the boys and girls basketball teams are currently rolling through league competition, the wrestling team recently clinched a league title, and your soccer team is rated No. 1 in the county and No. 2 in the country.

A: This is a special class. We were a good group as freshmen, and we've all grown together like a family. There's a lot of support at this school.

Q: Is soccer the only sport you have played?

A: No. I played basketball, baseball and football when I was growing up in Alpine. I was pretty good at baseball.

Q: What was your best position?

A: Shortstop.

Q: When did you decide to commit to soccer and why?

A: When I was about 14. I just grew to like soccer more than baseball. It was an easy decision.

Q: Your team roster lists you as a midfielder, but don't you play a little more like a forward?

A: As an attacking midfielder, I am offensive-minded, for sure. If we're having trouble scoring, I'll move up a little bit. I played a lot of forward when I was younger, but now that I'm older, I have a few more skills. To play the midfield position, you have to have technical awareness around the entire field.

Q: You are coming off an all-league season, but did your junior year have a bittersweet end?



A: We made the playoffs, but we lost to Chula Vista in the quarterfinals, 2-1 in overtime. But we have already played Chula Vista again this year in the (Southern California Showcase), and we beat them 3-1. (We) recently beat Torrey Pines 3-0, and Coach (David) Cohen said if you guys played every match like you play against Torrey Pines, his job would be a lot easier.

Q: Do you tend to play with a little more intensity against Torrey?

A: Oh my, yes. It's ridiculous how we do when we play against Torrey Pines. We strive for that every game. We tried to do it yesterday (last week vs. Mission Hills), but we got off to a slow start. We played better in the second half (in a 2-0 win over the Grizzlies).

Q: Which is the team to beat this year?

A: Well, I think we're going to be a hard team to beat. Poway has a very good record, too. Torrey Pines is our typical rival, but Poway is always strong.

Q: You recently earned a scholarship to play soccer at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. What type of classes are you looking to take?

A: I like to design shirts and stuff, so I'll be taking a graphic design course. I never really had the money, but now I'll have the background. I'd like to get into screen printing.