Running Into Change

Fresh leadership for SHS XC

Addie Peck
Echoes Writer

Photos by Addison Gollas

The boys and girls cross-country team is starting their year with a change.
Mary Sanchez has been appointed the head coach for the 2025-2026 school year. Cross Country is an outdoor running sport with races of varying distances. Varsity races are five kilometers (3.1 miles). The races take place over natural terrain, often including grass, dirt, and gravel. It is a fall season sport, but training takes place year-round. Due to it being a team sport, athletes have to support each other while running, develop team tactics for races, and score as a team at meets.

Coach Sanchez believes "when you're competing for your team, it means a little bit more."

Sanchez is a 1994 graduate of SHS and is no stranger to the sport. During her time at SHS, she was a student-athlete participating in cross-country and track, so the sport has been an influential part of her life.

For the past two years, she has served as the assistant cross-country coach. Due to this experience, she has built relationships with athletes and helped build the program to what it is today. But it is a bit of a change for her because she used to just come to the practice to run and have fun with the kids, but now she has to adjust to making the practice plans, meeting kids where they are.

The recently appointed activities director, Nate Rock, stated, "We are excited for Mary and our student-athletes in the cross country program."

Having Sanchez step into the head coach role provides continuity for athletes, allowing them to build on the trust and relationship they've already developed with her while adjusting to a brand-new coach. Many of the runners are excited and looking forward to their season with a new head coach.

In addition to her coach role, Sanchez is a teacher of the Health Science Career Academy here at SHS and sponsors the HOSA organization. Before her time teaching, she worked for 27 years in the nursing field, including 22 years at Regional West Medical Center. This will be her 6th year as a part of the SHS teaching staff.

With her passion for both coaching and teaching, Sanchez is eager to lead the Bearcats into a new season of growth and success. This team is ready to hit the ground running, united under a coach who understands the heart of the sport and the value of teamwork.

Coach Sanchez

Hitting All the Right Notes for 37 Years

The Legacy of Barb Becker

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For decades, Barb Becker has been at the heart of the Scottsbluff High School choir program. Now, in her 37th year as accompanist for the SHS Choirs, Becker is preparing to step away from the keys.

Becker is a graduate of SHS, and her time as an accompanist began right here, as a student. Little did she know then that it would become a lifelong endeavor.

"Originally, I was going to be a math teacher, and then I didn't finish my degree, and I got married, so it just kind of happened. But music has always been a part of it," said Becker.

After returning to Scottsbluff and starting a family, Becker's former choir teacher reached out, asking her to return as accompanist because he had no students who could fill the role. Luckily for choir members over the last 37 years, she said yes.

But Becker's role goes far beyond just an accompanist. She has been a vital part of the program and has made a monumental impact on many students' lives. Over the years, she has accompanied countless classes, concerts, and musicals. She especially loved the time when her own children were in choir, and she had the opportunity to teach them, but there are simply too many great memories to choose just one favorite.

To say Becker is a celebrity is an understatement. Not only did she go viral last year through a reel on the musical's Instagram page with almost two million views, but at every performance her introduction is met with roaring applause from alumni and current students alike. And those are the people who have kept her motivated all these years.

"I just love music, and I love the kids."

Part of this love comes not only from the students' adoration of Barb, but also from the family that choir truly is. Becker notes that there are so many opportunities for students today, so those who choose choir really want to be there, and that dedication shows.

Every concert and every choir is different, and that's reflected in Becker's own routine. She doesn't have a set pre-concert ritual but enjoys relaxing afterwards, often celebrating with a milkshake to help the adrenaline wear off.

It's clear that Becker is not only extremely talented at what she does, but also that the legacy she leaves behind will be even greater than she could have imagined.

"I hope people will remember me fondly," Becker shared.

That hope will no doubt be fulfilled. Without Becker behind the piano, the music program will look vastly different. She has given so much to the program and touched so many lives. From a student pianist in the SHS choir to the heart of its music program, Barb Becker's story has come full circle.

Though she may no longer sit behind the piano, her legacy will continue to be felt, and remembered, for years to come.

Barb Becker with her high school friends. Courtesy Photo

Barb playing the piano in choir in 2021.

Barb with Susan Ronne. Courtesy Photo

Barb in 2013 playing the piano for musical.

Fueled by Grit and Community

Bearcat Volleyball Shines

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The volleyball team is in the middle of a season filled with growth, excitement, and unforgettable moments. They've had big wins and tough competition, and they continue to set their sights high.

For many of the players, one of the highlights of the season so far has been facing off against Douglas. After an early setback against them, the Bearcats came back stronger and swept their rival.

"My favorite moment from this season so far is sweeping Douglas the weekend after they beat us," Senior Ava Reed says.

Fellow Senior Addy Bowlin agrees, saying her favorite moment was also "when we beat Douglas after losing to them the first time."

The win not only showed the Bearcats' resilience but also reinforced their belief that hard work pays off.

That determination has become a defining trait of this year's team.

Senior Heidi Groskopf describes the team in one word: "Determined. We all have the drive to be better and accomplish as high a level as we can by the end of the season."

Bowlin chose "resilient," while Reed summed it up with "family." Whether it's determination, resilience, or the sense of togetherness, the players agree the team's chemistry and grit are fueling their success.

Part of that success comes from the energy in the gym. The Bearcats say the student section has a huge impact on the atmosphere of home games.

"I think having a student section at home games gives us a huge advantage," Groskopf explaines.

This is why it is so important for students to come out and support the team!

The players say the community's support makes those nights special as well. They love so many things about home games, such as the hype videos, starting lineup moments, and everyone from school watching them play.

Pregame rituals also help the team stay locked in. One thing the team does before each game is gather their thoughts and visualize the match ahead. This small tradition has become a meaningful part of the team's preparation and focus.

As for goals, the Bearcats are aiming high; the team hopes to host a District final game. And players have individual goals, such as Bowlin's ambition to break the single-game kill record. Collectively, they hope their journey leads them all the way to state.

Through determination, resilience, and the energy of their community, the volleyball team is proving they are more than just athletes on the court; they're a family working toward something bigger.

Watch them in action at their next home game against Sidney on September 30 at 6 pm!

Photos by Shelby Ford