



UNSTOPPABLE CARAGA! GIRLS SEPAK TEAM GRABS GOLD IN PALARO

By PONCIANO G. ALNGOG, CATHERINE B. VERDEFLOP

Caraga Region's Girls Sepak Takraw Team claimed the gold medal in the Palarong Pambansa 2025 after defeating MIMAROPA in a heart-pounding three-set match, 11-15, 17-14, and 15-4.

From the first serve, it was clear this was more than a battle for gold—it was a test of will, strategy, and heart. MIMAROPA started strong with sharp serves and aggressive attacks, forcing Caraga to defend. Although Caraga briefly leveled the score at 1-1, MIMAROPA surged ahead 5-8. Caraga's spikers fought back to lead 9-8, but service errors and defensive mistakes allowed MIMAROPA to take the first set, 15-11.

Determined to bounce back, Caraga came out firing in the second set. They quickly took a 3-1 lead and applied intense pressure. Despite a service error that gave MIMAROPA a slight edge, Caraga held firm. The score was tied at 5-all, leading to a fierce exchange of skill. With MIMAROPA only a point away from claiming the championship, Montero's defense, Piner's sharp placements, and Bullo's powerful spikes, gave Caraga the momentum to force a decisive third set, 17-14.

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UNSTOPPABLE CARAGA! GIRLS SEPAK TEAM GRABS GOLD IN PALARO FINALS

In the final set, Caraga's intensity soared. Their movements were sharp, synchronized, and unstoppable. They raced to an 8-0 lead with a flurry of spikes, blocks, and aces that stunned MIMAROPA. Although MIMAROPA scored a few points late, it was too little, too late. Caraga dominated the set, sealing the match with a commanding 15-4 victory.

As the final whistle blew, Caraga celebrated their triumph—an evidence to resilience, teamwork, and spirit. Bullo's spikes, Montero's steady leadership,

and Piner's smart plays were key to their success. "This gold is for Caraga, our schools, families, and every young girl who dares to dream," said a tearful Bullo.

The winning team includes Junalyn L. Bullo, Renelyn C. Montero, Byne N. Piner, Alyzza Mae A. Solmia, and Hannah Grace L. Luna—all from Jacinto P. Elpa National High School, Tandag City Division. They were mentored by Coach Roentgen D. Villasin Jr., with chaperone Catherine B. Verdeflor and trainer Aiken T. Leray.



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A Q&A WITH ADRIENNE DOMINIQUE PADILLA

Caraga Rhythmic Gymnastics Delegate - Secondary
Palarong Pambansa 2025 | Ilocos Norte

By HONEY GRACE BUYAN
Teacher III, SDO Agusan del Norte

Rhythmic gymnastics isn't just a sport—it's a story told through every spin, leap, and ribbon swirl. And the Caraga Region tells theirs beautifully. With years of training, strong bonds, and unflagging focus, this team has become a standout in Palarong Pambansa 2025. Adrienne Dominique Padilla opens up about what it takes to carry a region's hopes and perform with pride.

An Exclusive with Adrienne Padilla:

Q1: What do you think is the reason behind your team's consistent qualification to the Palarong Pambansa, and what strategies or preparations contributed to this achievement?

A: We all began our rhythmic gymnastics journey at an early age under the guidance of Ma'am Selma Tibon. It started as a weekend hobby—we trained every Saturday at Inland. However, as we progressed and began competing, we each found personal trainers to help us further develop our skills. I now train with Arielle Nichole Orella, a former SEA Games athlete.

Sometimes, I go to Manila, or she travels to Butuan to train me. Ate Psalm trains with Inah Josanne Dispo, also a former gymnast, while Ate Yeleina continues with Ma'am Selma. In the elementary team, Therese has the same trainer as I do. Eloise trains with Ma'am Selma and Cherry with Ma'am Caballa. That early foundation, paired with committed coaching, really made a difference.

Q2: What challenges have you encountered in your training journey, particularly in preparing for national-level competitions like Palarong Pambansa?

A: One of the biggest challenges is finding a proper training venue. Most of the time, we have to rent barangay-covered courts. In my case, since I'm part of the Special Sports Program, I've been given a small space in the AVR at school to train. It's not always ideal, but we make it work with what we have.

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RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS

Q3: How do you and your team manage the financial demands that come with training, costumes, and equipment for rhythmic gymnastics?

A: Most of the expenses for our training, costumes, and apparatus are personally funded. While the LGU and DepEd do provide some apparatus, we often prefer to invest in branded ones because there's a real difference in quality. It can be tough financially, but our families are very supportive, and that helps us continue pursuing our passion.

Q4: Beyond training and competitions, what do you think makes the rhythmic gymnastics community in Butuan and the Caraga Region strong and successful?

A: One of our greatest strengths is our tight-knit community. Even though we're small, we're very solid. For example, Jillian May So—the silver medalist from last year's Palaro—has finished her playing years, but she now helps train the younger athletes. Alfrie Ann Boston also assists with the Butuan team's training. We're also blessed with very supportive parents and families. Their encouragement makes a huge difference. We're also grateful for our coaches—Ma'am Chrisna Jane C. Ebale for the elementary team and Ma'am Ingrid L. Alabat and Ma'am Jesse Lou Balmera who's on leave now for the secondary team—who continue to guide and support us through every challenge.

Q5: Could you tell us more about your and your teammates' experiences in Palarong Pambansa over the years?

A: This is my third Palaro. My first was in Marikina, where I was fortunate to win both a gold and a bronze. Psalm is on her fourth Palaro and has twice landed in the Top 10 reserve list. Also, Yeleina, it's her fourth Palaro and also her last. She helped her team win a bronze medal in the team event back in Palaro Vigan. In the elementary team, Therese is in her third Palaro and already placed 6th in ball apparatus during her first one in Marikina. For Eloise and Cherry, this year is their first time competing at Palaro, and we're all excited to see them grow.

The experience gained in Ilocos Norte only fuels the fire for what's ahead. Caraga's rhythmic gymnasts are already laying the groundwork for stronger comebacks and future victories.

Left to Right: Yeleina Mosende, Psalm Breccia Odtojan, and Adrienne Dominique Padilla



Left to Right: Jocelyn Jomaya, Eloise Dominique Yumang, Therese Maria K. Aquino, Syrgia Cherry Badelles, and Chrisna Jane C. Ebale



FROM COMPETITION **TO COMPASSION**

In the high-stakes world of the Palarong Pambansa, where emotions vacillated from triumph and heartbreak, the Caragold Newsmagazine offers a gentle reminder: that the true spirit of the games lives not only in medals, but in the quiet moments of kindness that happen beyond the spotlight.

Across five issues, the newsmagazine weaves the story of the Caragold athletes—how they met each challenge with grit and grace, enduring pain, savoring victory, and accepting defeat with dignity. But what makes this publication resonate is its spotlight on moments that often go unseen.

There's the driver who offered free rides to tired delegates without expecting anything in return. The store owner who welcomed newcomers with both goods and generosity. The silent workers—the cooks, dishwashers, electricians, decorators, trash collectors, food servers, coaches, trainers, and the members of the Technical Working Group—who labored before sunrise and after sundown, ensuring every delegate are taken care of, even if their efforts went unacknowledged. There were experiences shared not for recognition, but for compassion. These scenes—humble, fleeting, yet deeply moving—speak to a different kind of strength: that of community.

To all the athletes who gave their all, and to the strangers who gave a piece of themselves—thank you. You remind us that behind every game, there is a greater game being played—the one that asks us to be more human.



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Caraga's Braveheart: Equibal's Silver Clutch in Taekwondo

By ELAINE L. NEGRO

It all started with a dream—a dream shared by a young girl with quiet determination and by the team who believed in something bigger than just winning.

For Jamilla Yesha D. Equibal, a student-athlete from Ipil National High School, the road to the Palarong Pambansa 2025 was paved with early mornings, ached muscles, missed breaks, and sapped trainings. But more than anything, it was built on heart.

From the division meet, where she and her teammates

gave it their all, to the regional games, where they fought bravely, Jamilla kept pushing forward. While many of her teammates earned medals, it was Jamilla alone who qualified for the national stage. That didn't make her better than them—it simply made her journey a little longer and a little lonelier. But she carried them all with her in spirit.

"It wasn't easy," shared David Y. Gilbero, her coach highlighting how hard was the training the whole day- the injury, bruises, and unrelenting exhaustion from the beginning until the end.

"Despite sa kakulangan sa sports equipment, mangita nalang ug paagi nga naay magamit bisan ug improvise lang jud," said Leemibeth Diola Equibal, her mother who was influential in the success of Jamilla since 9 years old up to present.

Her mother stood right beside her through every step—quietly sacrificing, and constantly praying. Despite the financial challenges, her parents travelled to Ilocos Norte, knowing that this chance—this once-in-a-lifetime experience—was worth everything.

"We just trusted Jamilla. At 9 years old, nagsugod na siya ug apil sa poompae competition during the 2024 regional athletic meet," recalled Gilbero as trainer who always continuously asks for God's guidance and protection to every game of Equibal.

The competition was intense. Every match, every round, was a mix of emotions—joy, fear, pain.

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It was the kind of day where time seemed to stretch with every kick thrown and every point gained.

"There were moments we couldn't even breathe. It was close, emotional," said Gilbero as he witnessed how his prodigy displayed her jaw-dropping performance.

When it was all over, Jamilla stood tall with a silver medal. Not just a piece of metal—but a symbol of everything she had worked for, symbol of her courage, her grit, and her faith.

Dr. Marilou B. Dedumo, Schools Division Superintendent of Surigao City, acknowledged Equibal's feat and said, "Keep pushing, keep kicking, keep dreaming. Silver today, but we know you're aiming for gold tomorrow. To God be all the glory."

"Gusto nako pasalamatan si Sir Edmond Argente, na sa iya I learned my basic skills in taekwondo, Sir Junrey Robles and Sir Edgar Pantohan of PNPTA Surigao and Caraga nga pinakaunang nagtabang naku nga makajoin ug mga tournaments nga nagtabang naku nga ma expose ug maanad ko ug dula, kay Kuya David Y. Gilbero, nga maoy nagsilbi naku nga trainer," said Equibal.

Jamilla's story is not just about victory. It's about faith, sacrifice, and strength to keep going, even when the odds seem too big.

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By FELIX N. BAGNOL, PhD

As the 65th Palarong Pambansa drew to a close in Laoag City, Ilocos Norte, I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of pride witnessing our Surigao City athletes shine on the national stage. Across social media and news platforms, we saw not only their medal-winning moments but the passion and perseverance they poured into every match, every lap, and every fight.

Our Surigaonon athletes brought home a total of ten medals— one gold in wrestling, one gold in swimming, one silver in swimming, two silver in taekwondo, one silver in wrestling, one bronze in swimming, and one bronze in wrestling. These achievements go beyond statistics—they carry the heart and soul of a city that believes in its youth.

These young athletes brought honor not just to the

Schools Division of Surigao City, but to every Surigaonon who stood behind them in spirit. They carried the Surigao pride with every stride, every kick, every dive—and now, as they return home, I believe they deserve more than applause. They deserve a hero's welcome.

Why a hero's welcome?
Because these athletes are more than competitors. They are dreamers who dared, fighters who endured, and youth who inspired. Their journey has shown that greatness can rise from our very own classrooms, barangays, and sports grounds. Our learners who are at home deserve to know who these young champions are—to see that they, too, can dream big and rise high.

That's why I fully support the initiative of the Schools Division Office of Surigao City, led by Superintendent Dr. Marilou B. Dedumo, in hosting a hero's welcome this June 2, 2025.

The celebration doesn't end there. Following the hero's welcome, our athletes will also pay a courtesy call to City Mayor Hon. Paul Yves L. Dumlao II—a fitting recognition from the city's highest office. This moment of acknowledgment from our local leadership reinforces how valued these youth are, and how their accomplishments resonate beyond the playing field. This is our city's celebration. Every coach who trained them, every parent who cheered from afar, every classmate who waited for updates—this victory belongs to all of us.

And so, as we await their return, let us prepare not only to welcome them with banners and cheers but with hearts full of gratitude. Now, it's our turn to show them how proud we are.

They left as athletes. They
return as heroes.



Back-to-Back Brilliance: Sumaylo Pins Bronze For Caraga in Palaro Wrestling

By CHRISTIAN RAY F. ELIZAGA

Laoag City, Ilocos Norte — April Sumaylo, a student-athlete from Taft National High School under the Surigao City Division, brought pride once again to the Caraga Region as she clinched the bronze medal in the junior girls 60kg wrestling category at the 65th Palarong Pambansa held at Northwestern University Stadium.

Sumaylo competed fiercely in bout number 74, where she defeated her opponent from Region VIII with a commanding 4-0 score through a pin-down finish. Her performance demonstrated strength, discipline, and technical precision, making her one of the standout athletes in the wrestling event.

This marks Sumaylo's second consecutive bronze medal in the same category, having also earned third place during last year's

Palarong Pambansa held in Cebu City. Her consistent performance on the national stage is a testament to her hard work and commitment to the sport.

While Surigao City hoped for more gold medals to elevate the Caraga Region's overall standings in this year's competition, Sumaylo's victory still brought joy and honor to the team. Her bronze medal adds to Caraga's growing collection of accolades, showcasing the region's emerging athletic talent.

Despite the pressure and high expectations placed upon her as a known Palaro contender, Sumaylo gave her all for the team. She displayed unwavering determination and heart, proving her readiness to represent her division and region with pride.



"She really tried her very best to contribute for the team. Her spirit and perseverance continue to inspire many of our young athletes."

-Mentors

April Sumaylo remains one of the most commendable athletes from Surigao City Division. Her achievements in wrestling not only bring fame to her name and school but also exemplify true sportsmanship and athleticism—leaving a lasting legacy in the hearts of many and memories to cherish for a lifetime.

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Silver Grit: Cheerish Figuron shines again for Caraga in Wrestling

By CHRISTIAN RAY F. ELIZAGA

Laoag City, Ilocos Norte — Cheerish Figuron of Surigao City National High School once again proved her strength and determination as she brought home the silver medal in the junior girls' 56kg wrestling category at the 65th Palarong Pambansa 2025, held at the Northwestern University Stadium.

Figuron stepped into bout number 73 with confidence and heart. Facing a well-trained opponent from Leyte, Region VIII—who hailed from a wrestling academy—she fought valiantly but ultimately fell short, with a final score of 0-5.

Despite the loss, Figuron maintained her placement as silver medalist, repeating her performance from last year's Palaro in Cebu City. Her consistency in the national arena solidifies her status as one of Caraga's most dependable and commendable young athletes.

Hopes were high for a gold-medal finish, especially with the full support of Surigao City's Schools Division Superintendent, Dr. Marilou B. Dedumo, and Division Sports Coordinator, Dr. Tessie C. Dolores, who personally witnessed the match. Still, the delegation celebrated the silver medal with pride, knowing the heart and effort Cheerish poured into the bout.

"Cheerish really fought a great fight," one of the coaches shared. "Even against a well-trained opponent, she showed true grit and sportsmanship without excuses."

Figuron's performance not only upheld her personal athletic record but also marked another proud moment for the Caraga Region's wrestling delegation. Her perseverance and fighting spirit continue to uplift the morale of her fellow athletes and inspire younger Batang Surigaonon wrestlers.

In the end, it was a silver won with gold-worthy courage—an achievement that brought honor and glory to Surigao City and the entire Caraga Region.



Cabadbaran's Young Chess Talent wins Bronze in Rapid Chess Showdown

By DORES P. CLARO & PRELYN P. SANDIMAS-BARSAGA
Education Program Supervisors, SDO Cabadbaran City

In a display of sharp intellect and strategic brilliance, Jacqpatch Immanuel C. Abalo, a student of Cabadbaran City National High School, clinched the bronze medal in the Rapid Chess (Individual) Tournament held on May 30, 2025, at the Mariano Marcos State University Library.

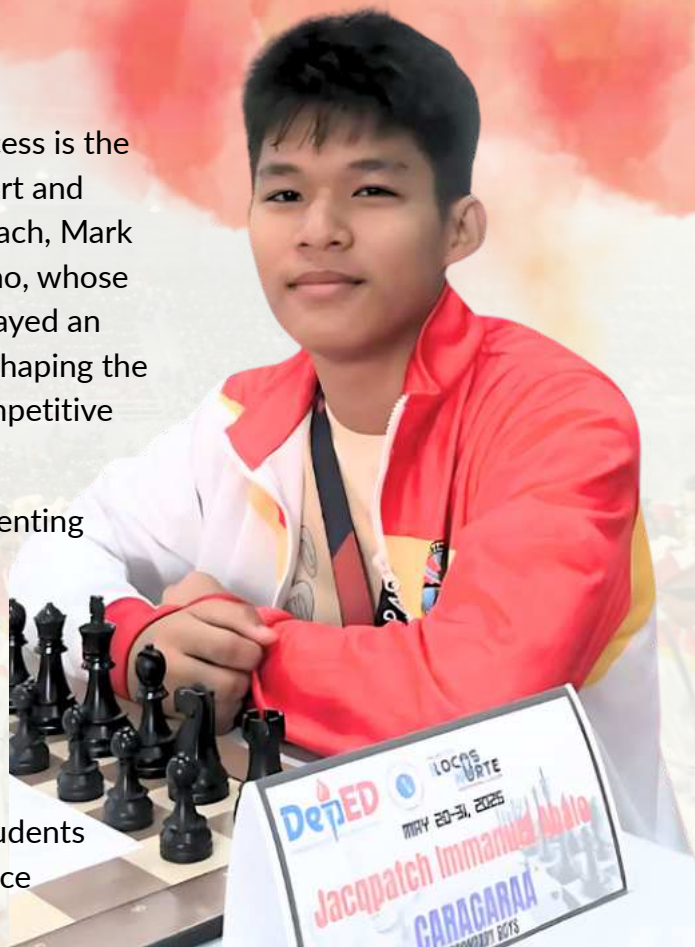
With a final score of 5.5, Jacqpatch outmaneuvered tough contenders in an intense day-long competition. His outstanding performance secured him a well-earned spot on the winners' podium, showcasing his exceptional skill and composure under pressure.

The tournament drew top young chess players from across the region, making Jacqpatch's podium finish even more impressive.

Behind his success is the unwavering support and guidance of his coach, Mark Anthony D. Morano, whose mentorship has played an important role in shaping the young talent's competitive edge.

Proudly representing Caraga Region, Jacqpatch continues to bring honor to his school and community, inspiring fellow students to pursue excellence in both academics and sports.

This bronze medal marks yet another achievement in his growing list of accolades, solidifying his reputation as one of the most promising young minds in Philippine chess.



Congratulations! Jacqpatch Immanuel C. Abalo, your victory is a checkmate moment for Cabadbaran!

CARAGA'S SECONDARY GIRLS ARNISADORS

By PONCIANO G. ALNGOG

amass 2 golds, 2 bronzes

Three young warriors from Jacinto P. Elpa National High School (JPENHS) showcased Caraga Region's strength in Arnis during the 2025 Palarong Pambansa, earning two gold medals and two bronze medals in the Secondary Girls Division.

Celia Mer C. Najaro, Ysai Winsleth T. Lorejo, and Charlyn Diaz formed a formidable trio, bringing pride to the Tandag City Division. The team struck gold in the Synchronized Double Weapon and Espada y Daga events, impressing judges with their timing, precision, and harmony—highlighting both teamwork and mastery of the Filipino martial art.

In individual events, Najaro secured a bronze medal in the Featherweight Category (44–48kg), while Lorejo earned bronze in the Extra Lightweight Category (48–52kg).

Both displayed courage and tactical skill in their matches.

Though Diaz did not compete individually, her strong presence contributed significantly to their synchronized gold victories.

With two golds and two bronzes, JPENHS continues to raise the bar, solidifying its reputation as a cradle of champions and a source of pride for the Caraga Region.



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SILVER SOUL:

Jamilla Equibal's Graceful battle in Ilocos Norte

By GILMORE MANATAD GENON



Amid the fierce kicks and thunderous yells of the Secondary Girls Taekwondo Kyurogi Category 4 at the 2025 Palarong Pambansa, one young warrior from Mindanao stood with poise and power. Jamilla Yesha D. Equibal, from Ipil National High School in the Surigao City Division, claimed the silver medal, etching her name into the story of this year's national games — not merely with her technique, but with her unwavering faith and discipline.

Coach Emmarose L. Cadavos, the mentor behind Jamilla's rise, shared the heart behind her coaching philosophy. She said, "Ginaingnan gyud nako sila permi nga salig lang sa imong kaugalingon labi na sa Ginoo. Just do your best. Nisalig ko sa inyo nga kaya ninyo, niabot mo ani sa Palaro kay maayo mo. Salig lang tapos focus sa dula. I-apply kung unsay gitudlo sa inyo during sa training." Her words show a balance of technical preparation and spiritual confidence, a blend that guided her players even under the national spotlight.

14 Despite the glamour of the national stage, financial hurdles were

part of the journey. The coach admitted that behind every medal lies a silent sacrifice.

"About sa financial, dako kaayo akong pasalamat sa parents nila. Sa sugod pa lang, ang supporta nga gihatag nila sa ilang bata hantud karon sa Palaro, grabe ka dako," she said, acknowledging the parents' vital role in sustaining their children's dreams despite limited resources.

When asked what she would tell other aspiring athletes, Coach Cadavos offered a message that echoed her experience and hope: "Padayon lang sa pagpaningkamot ug pag-ampo. Ang kalampusan dili basta-basta maangkon, pero pinaagi sa disiplina, determinasyon, ug kaisog makab-ot ra gyud ang mga,

pangandoy." Her words are a quiet torch for all young athletes seeking their own path to the Palaro. As for Jamilla herself, her answer to victory was as humble as it was powerful.

"Ang ako lang gyud masulti kung unsay akong techniques para modaug, mao lang gyud ang pagsalig sa Ginoo sa tanan. Kay bisan unsa pa ka abtik mo dula, daghan kay'g techniques nga nahibal-an, kung dili gyud itugot sa Ginoo nga makuha ang kadaugan, wala gyud," she said with a quiet grace. Her message to her supporters was equally heartfelt: "Thank you sa mga tao nga padayon nga naga-supporta nako sugod pa sa sinugdanan, sa akong family, trainors, ug coaches nga nagsalig nako from the very beginning. Thank you so much."

From the coastal winds of Surigao to the courts of Ilocos Norte, Jamilla's silver is more than a medal — it's a story of grit, gratitude, and Godly faith.

As the curtains fall on the Palaro, her name remains not just on a podium, but in the hearts of every dreamer who dares to fight with soul.



PLIANT LIKE A BAMBOO

The Spirit of the 2025 Palarong Pambansa Athletes

By PONCIANO G. ALNGOG

In the heart of the 2025 Palarong Pambansa, where dreams were tested and limits were pushed, Caraga athletes stood tall—not just in triumph, but in the way they carried themselves through defeat, perseverance, and growth. Like the bamboo that bends with the wind yet never breaks, these young warriors embodied the quiet strength of resilience, humility, and unwavering determination.

Some returned home with gold medals glistening proudly around their necks. Their victories are stories of discipline, sacrifice, and grit. But even more inspiring were those who returned without podium finishes yet bore something greater: the values formed through the fire of competition—the values of sportsmanship, teamwork, endurance, and grace.

In victory, they remained humble. In defeat, they remained hopeful. In every run, jump, strike, and serve, they carried the heart of the Filipino—one that does not crumble under pressure, one that learns and stands stronger after every fall.

Much like the bamboo, these athletes have learned to sway with life's unpredictability. Injuries, losses, doubts, and setbacks—none of these could snap the spirit that had already been rooted deeply in discipline and passion. They may have bent under the weight of exhaustion and disappointment, but they did not break. They rose, bowed in respect, and moved forward.

The bamboo thrives because it is deeply rooted, and so are our athletes—rooted in the love of family, support of coaches, pride of community, and a burning hope for a better future. They have come to realize that medals and records are fleeting, but the character built through hard work, the friendships formed through shared struggle, and the lessons learned in every match—these are the true victories that last a lifetime.

The Palarong Pambansa was never just about winning. It was about discovering oneself, building confidence, and embracing challenges. It was about the journey—of growing not just as an athlete, but as a human person molded by values.

As they return to their schools, to their fields, to their courts, and to their dreams, may they always remember: Be pliant like the bamboo. Bend, but never break. And rise again, stronger each time.

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Bronze with a Kick: Esguerra triumphs over NCR in Palaro Taekwondo

By DAISY C. BALASABAS

Sheera Pauleen G. Esguerra, a Grade 11 ABM student of Timber City Academy (TCA) Butuan City, showcased her prowess in Taekwondo Kyorugi by securing a bronze medal against National Capital Region (NCR) in the Welterweight Secondary Category 6, at the 2025 Palarong Pambansa.

Esguerra faced formidable opponents but expressed immense pride stating, "The only technique nako para mudaug kay maminaw ug e-apply tanan gipang-tudlo sa amoang coach nga ihatag namo ang best, and of course, pray."

Her journey to the bronze medal was marked by rigorous training and unwavering dedication from elimination round, first fight against CALABARZON, second from Region X, third fight from MIMAROPA until she reached the quarter finals against NCR.

“ The only technique nako para mudaug kay maminaw ug e-apply tanan gipangtudlo sa amoang coach nga ihatag namo ang best, and of couse, pray.”

Under the guidance of Coach Emmarose L. Cadavos and from her gym Philippine National Police Taekwondo Association (PNPTA) – Caraga with trainer Stanley Laguio and Zhanelo Budiongan where she honed her skills and built the endurance necessary for high level competition.

Esguerra's journey in taekwondo began at the age of seven. Since then, she has committed herself to the sport, culminating in this significant accomplishment at the national scene which marks her third time participating in the Palarong Pambansa—a journey filled with countless lessons and, finally, a bronze medal. Her success in taekwondo proves that patience and persistence always lead somewhere.

The taekwondo events at the Palaro continue to highlight the talents of young athletes across the Philippines, with Caraga demonstrating its commitment to excellence in martial arts.



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Young aces from Caraga bring home medals in Palaro 2025 badminton

By ROBERT PEPE JR., SDO Agusan del Norte

The Caraga Region badminton team made a proud showing at the Palarong Pambansa 2025, held at the Piddig Gym in Ilocos Norte, where young athletes from all over the country gathered to compete with heart and honor.

Leading the charge for Caraga in the Elementary Mixed Doubles were Yzra Nicole B. Galeon of Agusan del Norte and Derrick Gusto S. Bertulfo of Bislig City. The duo showed excellent teamwork and skill on the court. They made it to the championship match and brought home the silver medal after facing a strong team from Region III - Central Luzon. Though they did not win the gold, their performance was a proud moment for the region.

Their coaches, Ariel P. Pacencia and Resthy G. Besin, along with trainer Rochanie Dicatoria, guided them through tough matches and intense training. The young athletes displayed not only talent but also the values of respect, discipline, honesty, and sportsmanship throughout the competition.

In the Elementary Boys Doubles, Ethan G. Madria from Bayugan City and Derrick Gusto S. Bertulfo also made Caraga proud by securing a bronze medal. Coach Ariel P. Pacencia and Trainer Jonathan Acosta supported their journey.

Caraga also celebrated a win in the Secondary Boys Doubles category. John Paul Badang and Ariel John Casinillo from Agusan National High School, under the guidance of Coach Lovell Sugian and Trainer 4Days, brought home a silver medal for the Butuan City Division.

These athletes trained hard made sacrifices and competed with everything they had. While some fell short of gold, each of them stood tall—grateful and proud to wear the Caraga colors. More than medals, they gained experience, friendship, and the spirit of true sportsmanship.



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By FELIX N. BAGNOL, PhD

It wasn't too long ago when a renowned political analyst casually compared my beloved Mindanao to Sub-Saharan Africa. In the same breath, he praised Northern Luzon—calling it European-like, progressive, and refined—while casting my homeland in a harsh and unfavorable light.

I remember feeling a mix of anger and sadness. It stung.

Then came the 65th Palarong Pambansa in Laoag City. A fellow Mindanaoan who attended the opening took to social media, expressing disappointment about the venue. She said it was “*nothing as grand*” as the Patin-ay Sports Complex in Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur. Another comparison. Another crack in the bridge between two regions that should be standing side by side.

I don't deny that everyone has the right to their opinion. But careless words like these—especially when spoken from a place of pride or pain—don't just spark debates. They divide people. They deepen old wounds.

And they ignore something I've come to know deeply and personally: the heart of the Ilocano people.

You see, I've lived in Luzon. I've worked side by side with Ilocanos. I've dined with them, prayed with them, and spent long days under the sun planting and harvesting rice with them. These people aren't just faces in a crowd to me—they became my family.

Years ago, I joined a recruitment caravan to Manila. I was young, uncertain, and searching for a second chance. That journey brought me to Barangay Victoria, Llanera, Nueva Ecija, where I began working for an Ilocano family. My employer was a local councilor who owned a small farm, a palay-buying station, and a grocery store. I helped

with all of it—whatever needed to be done. I didn't expect what came next.

He saw something in me and offered me the opportunity to return to school—an offer I grabbed with both hands. My first attempt at college, in an agricultural school back in Magpayang, Mainit, Surigao del Norte, had ended in failure. But here was a second chance, gifted to me by someone who didn't owe me anything—but chose to believe in me anyway.

His nephew helped me enroll at Central Luzon State University (CLSU) in the Science City of Muñoz. I was determined not to waste the opportunity. I studied hard. I became a University Scholar. Along the way, I was welcomed by Ilocano classmates and even supported by a local Christian organization. Slowly, Luzon began to feel like home.

In my second year, I met Kuya Angelo, a senior in the College of Education. He was from Sta. Barbara, Pangasinan, and spoke fluent Ilocano and Pangasinense. I became his boardmate and, during the summer, I stayed with his family in Brgy. Carosucan. I helped them on their farm, planting rice, harvesting under the sun, and eating meals that introduced me to the richness of Ilocano cuisine—dishes I still crave to this day.

Later, I met Kuya Rey, my professor in Rizal and an Ilocano from Isabela. He believed in me so much that he helped finance my studies until graduation. His support was more than financial—it was a lifeline.

A gesture that reminded me I wasn't alone.

These were not random acts of kindness. They were consistent, unwavering, and sincere. That's who the Ilocanos are.

They're not loud about their generosity, but they show up when it matters. They may be reserved at first, but once they welcome you into their fold, they do so with full hearts. I admire their hard work, their simplicity, their deep sense of family, and their unwavering faith. They don't seek recognition. They just live with quiet strength and dignity.

So when I hear people—especially fellow Mindanaoans—question the hospitality or sincerity of Ilocanos, I can't stay silent.

I've lived among them. I know them. And I owe so much of who I am to them.

I am a proud Surigaonon. That will never change.

But the Ilocanos helped raise me.

They gave me a second shot at life. They gave me hope when I had none. They gave me family when I was far from home.

I eat like them. I speak like them. I live like them.

And I carry their kindness with me, always.

18





FEMM Stadium: A Monument of Dreams and Ilocano Heart

By PONCIANO G. ALNGOG



<https://tinyurl.com/7xayvt24%20>

As the sun sets on the weeklong journey of Palarong Pambansa 2025 in Ilocos Norte, our athletes begin their journey back home—tired but triumphant, sun-kissed but soul-filled. In their hearts, they carry medals, memories, and moments that will last a lifetime. At the heart of it all stands the Ferdinand E. Marcos Memorial (FEMM) Stadium, not just as a venue, but as a living witness to the nation's spirit, pride, and unity.

The FEMM Stadium cradled the sweat, blood, tears, and uncontainable joy of athletes from all over the Philippines. Across the expanse of its 61,000 square meters, 19 regional delegations found not just a stage to compete, but a place to belong.

This architectural marvel, brought to life by the brilliance of WTA Architecture and Design Studio, is more than concrete and steel—it's a tapestry of Ilocano heritage. The façade, inspired by the abel fabric and the hypnotic binakol pattern,

speaks of craftsmanship passed through generations.

But beyond its striking design, what truly gives the stadium its soul are the people. It is the Ilocano warmth that left an indelible mark on every delegate's journey. The tricycle driver who offered free rides to tired athletes. The local vendor who shared cold water under the sweltering heat. The host families and municipal residents who opened not only their homes but also their hearts.

As we return to our respective

regions, the memories of Ilocos Norte remain—etched in our minds, beating in our hearts. The FEMM Stadium was more than just the main venue; it was the heart of Palarong Pambansa 2025. A place where excellence met empathy. A structure that housed stories, struggles, and soaring victories.

To Ilocos Norte, agyaman kami. You gave us not just a place to compete, but a place to belong. And in the heartbeat of the FEMM Stadium, we found our own rhythm—of resilience, of unity, and of hope.

19



Fritch Jhon de Castro named best tekong in Palaro 2025

By PONCIANO G. ALNGOG

With thunderous serves and unshakable composure, 15-year-old Fritch Jhon H. De Castro of Jacinto P. Elpa National High School stormed into the spotlight at Palarong Pambansa 2025 in Ilocos Norte, where he was hailed Best Tekong—a stunning achievement for a first-time national qualifier and rising Sepak Takraw star.

De Castro showcased precision, power, and poise—attributes that earned him top recognition as the tournament's most outstanding tekong. His serves, marked by force and accuracy, became a highlight of the games, earning praise from players and coaches across the country.

Fritch Jhon has been playing sepak takraw for four years and is currently under the tutelage of Mr. Nestor Dimacuha, an international coach in Sepak Takraw. Under Dimacuha's expert guidance, the young athlete's technique, discipline, and game intelligence have flourished, preparing him for this momentous debut.

His achievement is a source of great pride for Jacinto P. Elpa National High School and the entire Surigao del Sur community. More than just a medal, his award represents the power of grassroots sports development, mentorship, and dedication.

"This is only the beginning," De Castro shared. "Coach Dimacuha pushed me to believe in myself. I'm proud to represent my school, my city, and my region."

From a quiet beginner to a national standout, Fritch Jhon H. De Castro has proven that with talent, heart, and the right guidance, greatness is within reach. As Palarong Pambansa 2025 closes, the country has found in him a rising star in Philippine Sepak Takraw.

20



THE UNSEEN HANDS OF THE 2025 PALARONG PAMBANSA

IN MEDIA RES

By MARLYNE M. VILLAREAL

In media res. In the middle of everything. Yes, they are.

The air inside the kitchen is thick — not just with steam, but with urgency. Amid shouts of “More servings needed,” hands blur over chopping boards, giant ladles stir vats, and the rush never stops. “May bisita sa VIP Lounge!”

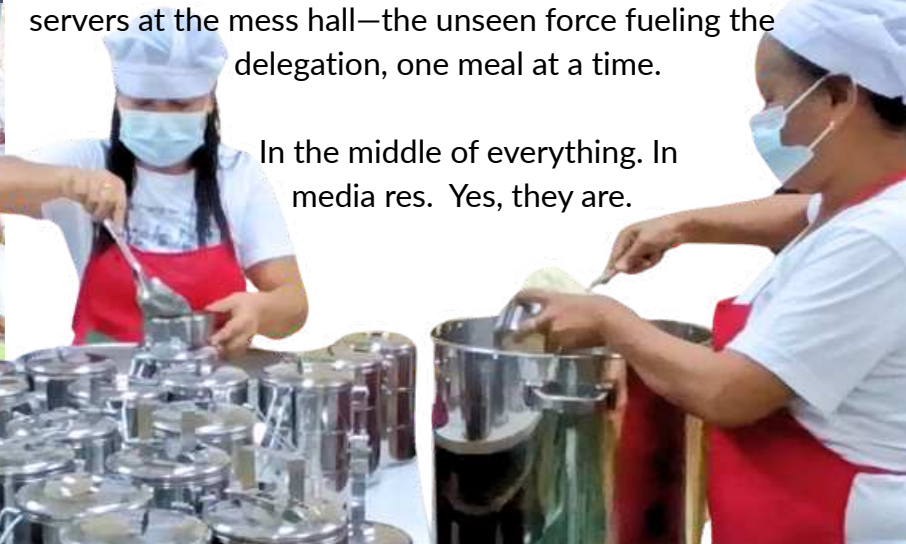


While athletes race under the sun, another kind of marathon unfolds in the heat of the kitchen. Here, in the sweltering space tucked meters away from the grand entrance, behind the athlete quarters, the unsung heroes of the Palaro do their work without fanfare. They wear not medals but aprons stained by labor. They don't race on tracks, but they sprint from stockpots to serving trays, from pantry shelves to prep counters to dish stations, from 2:00 a.m. to past midnight, feeding nearly a thousand student-athletes.



This is the Kitchen Cabinet — marketer, nutritionist, pantry-in-charge, cooks, assistants, dishwashers, porters, and food servers at the mess hall—the unseen force fueling the delegation, one meal at a time.

In the middle of everything. In media res. Yes, they are.



from page 21 ... In Media Res ...



Each day begins when the fire is lit at dawn. Amid the engine-like hums of rice streamers, one team rushes to the market, another starts the cycle of food prep, packing, cooking, delivery, washing, and sterilization that stretches past midnight.

They rise early, stay up late,
and work tirelessly in the heat
— not for praise, but out of
22 deep dedication to
our student-athletes.

And the menu for the day? Not just meals - because they're not simply cooking for hungry mouths; they're feeding the athletes' dreams. Every meal provides strength to run, energy to jump, and endurance to compete to the finish line.

And yet, their service often goes unnoticed. They ask for no applause, yet their labor powers the very event that celebrates winners. Theirs is truly a labor of love.

So before the lights dim and the medals are tucked away, we pause to honor these quiet champions. Their hands nourished victory. Their hearts kept the games alive.

For in the kitchen, as on the courts, victory was forged.

In the middle of everything.
In media res. Yes, they are.

Maraming salamat po.



CARAGA REWRITES HISTORY

by HONEY GRACE BUYAN
Teacher III, SDO Agusan del Norte

In Caraga, every effort counts. The region is no longer just competing—it's rewriting history.

The Caraga Region has shattered expectations and soared to new heights, delivering its best performance ever at the 2025 Palarong Pambansa in Laoag, Ilocos Norte. As the final whistle blew on May 31, Caraga proudly secured 8th place overall — a historic milestone that marks the region's highest finish in the prestigious national games. From grit on the field to glory in the rankings, Caraga's young athletes have proven that determination, heart, and unity can turn dreams into headlines.

Behind this breakthrough is the power of unity. Caraga's historic rise was not by chance—it was the result of stronger grassroots training programs, tireless preparation, and the unyielding support of local government units.

Provincial leaders, school communities, and sports clubs worked hand in hand to give our athletes what they needed: quality training, proper resources, and the fire to dream bigger and aim higher. This is what happens when a region believes in its youth—and invests in their potential.

The leadership and continued support of top officials from the Department of Education also played a key role. Their guidance, policies, and active involvement helped pave the way for better preparation and stronger performance from the athletes.

This moment marks more than just medals and rankings. It's a turning point for Caraga sports, showing what's possible when talent is matched with support, leadership, and willpower.



MEDAL TALLY COMPARISON				
	4	11	20	RANK 15
	11	13	24	RANK 12
	21	20	43	RANK 8

23



Sepak Takraw secondary boys end palaro run with double silver medals



By RANDY P. LAMANILAO | MARGIELYN A. MALTO

The Caraga Region's Sepak Takraw Secondary Boys team has concluded its remarkable journey at the Palarong Pambansa 2025 with an impressive haul of two silver medals, one each from the highly competitive Regu Event and Team Event. Their outstanding performance also earned them the distinct honor of being the second-place overall team in Sepak Takraw at this year's national games.

This significant achievement is a testament to the dedication of the Caraga

Team athletes and the tireless guidance of their coaches: Head Coach Nestor Dimacuja of Tandag City Division, Neiljohn Orilla of Agusan del Sur Division, and Arnel Escabal of Surigao del Norte Division, to whom the team extends never-ending thanks.

The path to the finals was hard-fought and marked by intense competition. After navigating through tough elimination rounds, the Caraga Team faced formidable opponents, ultimately battling for the gold in both the Regu and Team events.

Their consistent high-level play secured their silver finishes, showcasing excellent teamwork and strategic execution on the court.

These two silver medals, culminating in a second-place overall standing in Sepak Takraw, are a momentous achievement for the Caraga Region. This success reflects the intense hard work, strategic prowess, and unwavering spirit instilled by the coaching staff and displayed by the athletes, marking a proud moment for the entire Caraga delegation in this prestigious national sporting event.



KICKstorm

A bronze medal, a bold heart, and a kick that echoed beyond the mat

By GILMORE MANATAD GENON

With the heart of a warrior and the composure of a seasoned fighter, Rachel Ann E. Sarmiento, a proud student of Claver Central Elementary School, delivered a stunning performance at the Pambansang Palaro 2025, securing a bronze medal in the Elementary Taekwondo Kyurogi Category 3.

Hailing from Surigao del Norte Division, Rachel's triumph wasn't merely a matter of athletic skill, it was a story of discipline, courage, and community behind every well-placed kick and focused stance. Guided by her dedicated coach Diane T. Apatan and trainer Kinleo Dador, Rachel trained relentlessly in the weeks leading to the national games.

"She never backed down from a challenge," said Coach Apatan. "Every sparring match was another step toward something greater."

But Rachel did not fight alone. Behind her were the tireless efforts of her regional coaches and the

unwavering support of the Caraga Regional Sports Unit, who made sure every athlete was prepared in strength, strategy, and spirit.

The local government of Surigao del Norte also stepped in as a quiet yet powerful force: ensuring travel, training venues, and full logistic support, allowing young athletes like Rachel to focus on one thing only: giving their best.

In a sport where split seconds determine champions, Rachel stood her ground with maturity beyond her years. Her bronze medal win was more than a place on the podium, it was proof that even in fierce arenas, grace and grit can coexist.

As she bowed in respect after her match in Ilocos Norte, the applause wasn't just for a match well fought, it was for a dream well earned.

Rachel's journey reminds us: true victory isn't always gold—it's the courage to kick forward, no matter the odds.



Every sparring match was another step toward something greater.

25



Table Tennis: Beauty meets Skill in Bronze Medal Triumph

By DAISY CUBERO BALASABAS

In the heart of thrilling action and quick rallies of the ball where every second counts and each point in every sets can change the game at this years 2025 Palarong Pambansa, Angela A. Marianito, a Grade 12 student of Father Saturnino Urios University (FSUU), Butuan City Division, proved that heart, determination, and perseverance can shine just as brightly as gold, not for her winning moves, but for the poise, elegance, and confidence she brought to every match.

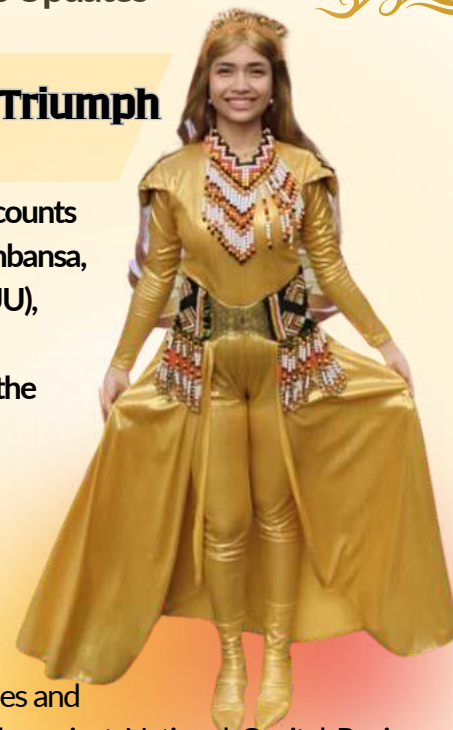
From her very first match until semi-finals, Angela displayed a rare blend of athletic talent and effortless charm. With fluid movements, razor-sharp focus, a powerful yet controlled play style. She brought both beauty and strength to the sport. Each rally was not just a contest, but a performance - one that reflected her deep passion and refined skills.

Her journey to the playing venue in table tennis was marked by intense matches and formidable opponents from different regions. After falling short in the semi-finals against National Capital Region (NCR), Angela remained composed and determined using every lesson from the loss to the power through the bronze medal match. Her elegant form, precise spins, and strategic smashes kept the crowd on the edge of their seats until the final 3-2 sets in Singles A bracket.

"I'm overwhelmed, as I really didn't expect to win since grabe ka daghan ug mga maayo and I'm so very happy that I won the bronze medal in the Palarong Pambansa 2025 because it only means that all my hard work, training, sweat, and tears have paid off." She shared with joy and happiness on how fulfilling it was to finally see her efforts pay off after weeks and months preparation.

Coach Sheramel Mabras, her fellow athletes and fans praised her sportsmanship and distinctive style. For many, she redefined what it means to be a table tennis player - someone who competes fiercely while carrying herself with poise and pride.

As the Palarong Pambansa came to a close, one thing was certain: Angela didn't just win a medal - she left a lasting impression specially to her father Ramon Marianito and Butuan Table Tennis Club where she honed her skills, discipline, and sportmanship since her elementary years. A symbol of elegance and excellence, she reminded everyone watching the true beauty lies in passion, discipline, and the courage to rise.



26



GOLDSTREAK

Palaro Arnis Ace 2-Year MVP

By GILMORE MANATAD GENON

In the world of sports, there are prodigies; one is Airielle Ashley C. Lape —the girl who turned the arnis arena into her kingdom, twice. At just Grade 6, this young warrior from Ampayon Elementary School, Butuan City, has already carved her name into the walls of Pambansang Palaro history, claiming back-to-back Most Valuable Player (MVP) titles in 2024 and 2025.

Her first MVP crown was earned under the sun-drenched skies of Cebu City in 2024. A year later, in the northern charm of Laoag City, Ilocos Norte, she did it again, defending her title like a true arnisadora who knows her worth and wields her sticks with poise, precision, and power.

According to her coach, Eldridge Troy D. Go, the MVP honor isn't handed out lightly. "Ang MVP award kay gikuha sa kung kinsa ang pinakadaghan ug gold individually, ug kini gi-sponsor sa STIX Equipment," he explained, his voice tinged with both pride and awe. And in both years, it was Airielle who towered above the rest, not by height but by sheer talent and grit.

Behind this young icon's triumph stands a team that has become her second family. Trainers Brian E. Ellodar, Christian Josemarie R. Irag, and Apol Cello have all seen the spark in her eyes, the kind of fire that doesn't flicker, even under the heat of national competition. They trained her, believed in her, and helped her sharpen not just her moves, but her mind.

Despite her soaring success, Airielle remains the same soft-spoken sixth grader she has always been. "Grade 6 na ni siya karon. Mo-Grade 7 na ni sunod tuig," Coach Go shared, a subtle trace of emotion in his voice. It was a statement that carried more than just a grade level, it hinted at transition, at farewell. Soon, she would move on to a new school, new coaches, and bigger arenas.

In an age where digital distractions pull children away from physical disciplines, Airielle Lape stands as a living paradox, a modern-day heroine in a centuries-old Filipino martial art. Arnis is not merely a sport to her; it's a dance of heritage, a duel of wills, and a stage where she performs her quiet brilliance.

The 2024 and 2025 Pambansang Palaro MVP isn't just a title — it's a testament. And if history is any indication, this golden streak is far from over.

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BUTUAN PRIDE:

Young Arnisadors win Bronze in Palarong Pambansa

By CHARLOTTE NICOLE ACERO

Young athletes from Ampayon Central Elementary School have brought pride and honor to their school and the whole Division of Butuan City by securing the bronze medal in the Arnis Anyo Competition – Elementary Boys Category during the 65th Palarong Pambansa 2025.

The winning team, composed of Chinn-Jo A. Auxtero, Marco R. Sacurom, and Chris Alexious C. Ardimer, competed in the Likhang Anyo Team Synchronized Double Weapon Category. More than a display of athleticism, their performance was a cultural tribute. Every strike, deflection, and anyo told a story of discipline, teamwork, and national pride, showcasing the precision of sinawali, the timing of doble baston, and the spirit of pugay.

“Win or lose, what matters is that you fought with honor, heart, and discipline,” emphasized their Coach Edwin D. Hora.

Guided by their dedicated coach, Mr. Hora, and trainers Mr. Brian E. Ellodar, Mr. Christian Josemarie R. Irag, and Ms. Apol Cello, the trio demonstrated exceptional skill and teamwork that captured the attention of judges and spectators alike.

This achievement not only elevates the status of Craga region in the field of sports but also strengthens the presence of Butuan City in the national athletic competition.



BYNE NARAISO PINER

Palarong Pambansa Best Spiker

By PONCIANO G. ALNGOG

In a remarkable debut at the 65th Palarong Pambansa held in Laoag, Ilocos Norte, Byne Naraiso Piner of Jacinto P. Elpa National High School emerged as the Best Spiker in the girls' sepak takraw event. Piner's exceptional performance showcased her agility and precision in this sport.

While this was Piner's first appearance at the Palarong Pambansa, she is no stranger to national competition. She has been a consistent contender in the Batang Pinoy tournaments, a national youth sports competition in the Philippines for athletes under 18 years old. These experiences have honed her skills and prepared her for the challenges of higher-level competitions.

Piner's achievement not only brings pride to her school and region but also inspiration to the young athletes from Caraga. Her recognition as Best Spiker reflects the rigorous training and commitment invested by both the athlete and her coaching team.

Guiding Piner's development is Coach Roentgen D. Villasin Jr., a former sepak takraw athlete who has transitioned into coaching. His firsthand experience in the sport has been instrumental in mentoring Piner, instilling in her the techniques and discipline required to excel at the national level.

As the Palarong Pambansa continues to be a platform for discovering and nurturing sports talents, Byne Naraiso Piner's success story serves as an inspiration for aspiring athletes nationwide.



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Caraga Makes History

OVERALL CHAMPIONS

2025 NATIONAL PRESS CONFERENCE

8TH IN RANK

2025 PALARONG PAMBANSA

#CARAGOLD

#CARAGALING

#CARAGANDA



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