

FLAG

1ST EDITION

FOOTBALL

NATION

**FINLAND
WELCOMES THE
WORLD**

**BAD
RABBITS**

TEAM SPOTLIGHT

**INSIDERS
CUT WITH
BALLGAMEMX
& BOLTZ**

JANUARY 2024

**SILVIA
CONTRERAS**

FLAG IS LIFE, FLAG IS LOVE

**VIDEO
INTERVIEWS**

**PLAYER
SPOTLIGHTS**

**COACHES
CORNER**

**WITH RUDY
FERNANDEZ**



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WORLD'S BEST FLAG FOOTBALL TEAMS IN 2024 SET SIGHTS ON FINLAND

By Ernesto Campuzano, FFN Insider

The top 10 men's and women's teams will convene for the 2024 IFAF Flag Football World Championships at the Pajulahti Olympic and Paralympic Training Center

Flag football, one of the world's fastest-growing sports, is set to reach new heights in 2024, as Finland gears up to host the 2024 IFAF Flag Football World Championships. The event will take place from August 25th through the 30th and bring together the top 10 men's and women's teams from across the globe.

"We are thrilled to award Finland and SAJL (the

American Football Association of Finland) the hosting rights to the 2024 IFAF Flag Football World Championships," IFAF President Pierre Trochet said in a statement. "Which will be the most magnificent IFAF competition event ever. Finland has always been an excellent partner for IFAF events, and we trust that they will produce a remarkable event that reflects the exceptional growth of flag football worldwide."



The championships in Lahti will mark the culmination of the most extensive and inclusive flag football competition cycle ever, with teams from all six continents participating for the first time. IFAF, the global governing body of American football, has been striving to establish a stable and fair competition system for flag football, with regional qualifiers and rankings to identify the best teams in each continent.

Finland has a long and rich history of American football, in both tackle and flag. The country has been a successful host of several IFAF events, such as the 2022 IFAF Women's World Championship in tackle football, where the USA women's national team triumphed over the unexpected finalists Great Britain in the gold medal game. Finland also boasts a thriving domestic scene, with more than 100 clubs and 10,000 players participating in the sport.

Pajulahti, the venue for the 2024 Flag Football World Championships, is Finland's only official Olympic and Paralympic training center, and provides world-class facilities and services for athletes and coaches. The center, located 90 minutes north of Helsinki, the capital of Finland, has a rich legacy of hosting international sports events, such as the 2017 IBSA Goalball European Championships and the 2018 World Junior Curling Championships.

The 2024 Flag Football World Championships will be the pinnacle of the sport, as it will follow the historic debut of flag football at the 2022 World Games in Birmingham, Alabama. It was in Birmingham where Mexico's women's team stunned the world by defeating USA in the gold medal game. Italy and Panama also made their mark, securing bronze medals in the men's and women's events.



"We are eager to welcome the best teams and players to Pajulahti, where they will experience the stunning landscapes, the magical August midnight sun, and the warm hospitality of Finland."



The 2024 IFAF Flag Football World Championships will showcase 20 teams, 10 men's and 10 women's, competing in a round-robin format, followed by a knockout stage. The teams will be selected based on the IFAF rankings, which reflect the outcomes of the previous IFAF Flag Football World Championships, the regional qualifiers, and other IFAF-sanctioned

tournaments. The event will also celebrate the sport, its values, and its community while showcasing its potential to a global audience through various activities and programs. The event will be live-streamed on various platforms, reaching millions of viewers worldwide.



SHOWDOWN

las vegas, nv

ZORTS

MARCH 9-10, 2024

NOV. 9-10, 2024



Dessert Oasis High School

AGE CUTOFF: JAN. 1, 2024

BOYS: 6U-7U-8U-9U-10U-11U-12U-13U-14U

GIRLS: 11U-13U-15U-18U

REC: 8U-10U-12U



FLAG IS LIFE, FLAG IS LOVE

By Scott Gross, **FFN Insider**

Silvia Contreras shares how a chance encounter in a high school hallway set her on a path to flag football stardom

“Welcome to the sport that can change your life,” Silvia Contreras said with a smile on her face.

Contreras is one of the most recognizable names and faces in the sport of women’s flag football. She says growing up, she wasn’t into football, and really knew nothing about it. Instead, she enjoyed gymnastics and cheer. At 15 years old, she felt cheer would be the way for her to attend CETYS Universidad in Tijuana.

“It is an expensive school,” Contreras said. “I tried to look for a scholarship in different ways and I saw that they had a cheer team so I thought that maybe once

I entered I could apply for the team and increase my scholarship.”

Silvia was able to get into the school but soon found out the cheer team wouldn’t be an option. A few months later, Silvia was walking through the halls with some friends when a chance encounter would forever change her life.

“We see a sign that says something like, would you like to join the school’s first flag football team?” Contreras recalls. “At that time I didn’t know what flag football was. I didn’t watch American football, nor did I really understand it, but one of my friends



“Welcome to the sport that can change your life”

did. She liked it a lot, so she invited us to go together.”

“We see a sign that says something like, would you like to join the school’s first flag football team?” - Silvia Contreras on how she was introduced to flag football for the very first time.

Silvia agreed because that’s what friends do, signed up to be together, and attended the information meeting. From the start, Silvia didn’t know what she was getting into because frankly, there was no football being played.

“At that time I didn’t know what flag football was.” - Silvia Contreras

“The first training session we didn’t see or do anything concerning flag football,” Contreras said. “It was pure conditioning and physical but I liked it and I came back the next day, then the next, and so on until today, 14 years later.”

Now one of the biggest names in the sport, Contreras says she grew to enjoy the sport but it also provided and still provides so much more.

“What initially made me fall in love with the sport was teamwork,” Contreras said. “In the sports I had practiced before, most of it was solo work and I didn’t enjoy it as much. The coexistence that was created with the team in which I started those first years made my experience super special and magical. To the point that I say that first I fell in love with my OSAS team and then with the sport. Although now I am super in love with everything that this sport involves in particular.

“The coexistence that was created with the team in which I started those first years made my experience super special and magical.” - Silvia Contreras on what she loved early on about flag football

Contreras shares that with flag football, like anything in life, the more you put in the more you get out of it. She shares that while the hard work and training has brought a lot of success, it’s also the failures that have had a positive impact.

“I have gone through so many feelings in this sport that has shaped me as a person.” - Silvia Contreras

“Just as there have been days when I think I can do everything,” Contreras said. “There have been moments where I question if I will be able to do it. Then, I overcome those phases and prove to myself that I can and I trust again. I have gone through so many feelings in this sport that has shaped me as a person. I think something that undoubtedly marked me was being selected as a member of Mexican National Team for the first time in 2018 and everything I had to do and overcome to achieve it.”

FROM NOT UNDERSTANDING the game to winning gold at the 2022 World Games, Contreras says it was a clear example that dreams come true with a lot of dedication, discipline, love and teamwork.

“The sacrifices that all the people involved made,” Contreras said. “The unity that was created in the team, the stage, what it meant for flag football in general. The impact it had and the role I had within the team and on the field made it very special.”

The game from when Silvia first started, has come a very long way in its evolution.



"I look back and I see how I started," Contreras said. "How flag football began in Baja California. We didn't dream of the opportunities that exist now. The excitement it gives me to think about what this will be in the future."

THE FUTURE IS NOW, flag football will debut as an Olympic sport in 2028 when the games come to Los Angeles. Contreras says she's not surprised to see how fast the sport is growing especially once people understand how it benefits the athletes.

"As a girl I watched the Olympic Games dreaming of being there at some point even though I never knew for sure how or why I wanted to be there." Contreras said. "Then I started practicing a sport that was not Olympic and I got frustrated because I knew I could be there but I didn't understand why I wasn't there. Now that it's official, Los Angeles in 2028, the flame and desire in my heart are more than lit. If I don't have the opportunity to play in those Olympic games, rest assured that I will be supporting."

*"As a girl I watched the Olympic Games dreaming of being there at some point."
- Silvia Contreras*

Contreras feels with flag football now recognized as an Olympic sport, its popularity will continue to expand. She adds that she's contributing to that growth in a variety of ways.

"I created something that every athlete dreams of, a scholarship to study the career of their dreams and become a professional," Contreras said. "As well as recreational leagues to continue practicing the sport for many more years. The future has things that we have not even imagined."

From a little girl born in Ciudad Obregón, Sonora, Mexico, to a chance encounter with a flag football flyer in a school hallway, to now one of the most famous athletes in the sport, Silvia shares a message for any young girl or boy reading this story.

"This sport will allow you to create connections and meet people who can become very important in your life," Contreras said. "Friendships, relationships, work and more can make your life happier, easier or bring opportunities. Have fun, support each other, and dream big!"





PLAYER



SPOTLIGHTS





1. **Name**
Dante Leon
2. **Hometown and state**
Chula Vista CA
3. **Age**
13 Years old
4. **Position(s)**
WR, LB, QB
5. **Team you play for**
Leones , Zopilotes(Ensenada, Tijuana MX)
6. **Top accomplishments**
Winning Tournaments
7. **Years Playing flag football**
7 years playing
8. **Something you most people may not know about you**
I am a National Champion in Muay Thai
9. **Advice or a quote you live by**
"Always run at Maximum speed"



- Name**
David Fanter Jr.
- Hometown and state**
Las Vegas, Nevada
- Age**
8 Years old
- Position(s)**
Quarterback
- Team you play for**
Rebels
- Top accomplishments**
4x All Star, 2x MVP
- Years Playing flag football**
3 years playing
- Something you most people may not know about you**
I like to draw free hand art
- Advice or a quote you live by**
"If God is for me, who can be against me"



1. Name

Frankie Solomon Jr. "CAP"

2. Hometown and state

Highland Hills, Tx

3. Age

36

4. Position(s)

DB/WR

5. Team(s) you play for

US National Team/Freaks/Dallas Ocelots

6. Top accomplishments

In flag winning 3 national championships in 4man, 2 in 9man, 1 in 5man, 4 in coed, and 5 8man state championships

7. Years Playing flag football

15 Years

8. Something you most people may not know about you

I do not like scary movies

9. Advice or a quote you live by

A&E is controlled by me.. A stands for attitude and E stands for effort. (Coach G),

*it's nothing personal,
just business...*

***“Might as well be good at it” - Edwin Cera
(My dad/coach)***



- 1. Name**
Hayden-Elyzabeth Ka'ahanui-Cera
- 2. Hometown and state**
Makakilo, Hawaii
- 3. Age**
14
- 4. Position(s)**
QB/DB
- 5. Team(s) you play for**
Island Empire
- 6. Top accomplishments**
NFL Regionals - Arizona Cardinals ,

NFL Regionals- Seattle Seahawks FFL - National Championship Tampa , LA Hardcount Championship , Accepted into a AA cohort and that I will graduate with my diploma and an AA degree

- 7. Years Playing flag football**
10 Years

- 8. Something you most people may not know about you**
Something that people may not know about me is that my heart is very rooted in my culture and where I come from

- 9. Advice or a quote you live by**
“A champion is simply someone who did not give up when they wanted to.” - Tom Landry



- | | | | |
|----|--|----|--|
| 1. | Name Madison Coger | 6. | Top accomplishments 2023 5A state champion, 5A player of the year, 2024 US national team trial invitee |
| 2. | Hometown and state Queen Creek, AZ | 7. | Years Playing flag football 4 Years |
| 3. | Age 16 | 8. | Something you most people may not know about you I have a raw tomato allergy |
| 4. | Position(s) WR/DB | 9. | Advice or a quote you live by "The best way out is always through"- Robert Frost |
| 5. | Team(s) you play for Club HFHB / Campo Verde High School | | |



- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Name Maliyah Estrada | 7. Years Playing flag football 7 Years |
| 2. Hometown and state Ontario, CA | 8. Something you most people may not know about you I love animals. I have 6 pets. 3 dogs, 2 Guinea pigs, and 1 cat. |
| 3. Age 13 | 9. Advice or a quote you live by "I want to remind all the girls and women that you are powerful. You are strong. You are smart. You are capable of doing everything you set your mind to." - Diana Flores. Women's Mexico National Team QB |
| 4. Position(s) QB/DB | |
| 5. Team(s) you play for So Cal Reign | |
| 6. Top accomplishments Qualifying for the NFL Flag Championships at the Pro Bowl in Orlando this year. I'm | |

RYLEN BOURGUET

Interview



SAMAYA TAYLOR JENKINS *Interview*





Lizbeth Ortiz, Azul Trujillo, Jessica Manriquez, Maddie Montes, Valentina Lopez

The Baddest Bunch of Ballers in Youth Flag Football

By Ernesto Campuzano, FFN Insider

The Bad Rabbits Select is a youth flag football team that has taken the world by storm. Based in Calexico, California, the team consists of girls aged 12 to 14 who have demonstrated exceptional skills and passion for the sport. Their motto, “Corri a maxima”, meaning “run at maximum speed”, reflects their dynamic and energetic style of play.



The team has gained popularity on social media, thanks to the viral videos of their highlights and the charismatic personality of Valentina Lopez, who coined the phrase. But they are not just online sensations; they are also formidable competitors on the field. Under the guidance of coach Eduardo Trujillo, who instills good family values in the players, the Bad Rabbits Select has achieved remarkable success in both national and international tournaments.

In July 2023, the team won their first national title at USA Football's "The ONE" in the 10-12 division, beating some of the best teams in the country. In November, they represented the state of Baja California, Mexico, as part of the Baja Selection team, and participated in the Mexican National Flag Football tournament held by FMFA in Tecamac, Mexico. There, they won the championship in the 14u division, with seven Bad Rabbit players on the roster. Two of their stars, Azul Trujillo and Jessica Manriquez, have been invited to try out for the Jr US National teams for their age group.

The Bad Rabbits Select is a youth flag football team that has made history and inspired many fans around the globe. They have proven that they can excel in any challenge and overcome any obstacle. The only question that remains for these talented and ambitious ladies is: what's next?



FLAG FOOTBALL, A SPORT FOR EVERYONE

Team USA assistant coach Rudy Fernandez shares his love of the sport, the opportunities it unlocks and its potential for future growth

By Scott Gross, FFN Insider

"If you would've told me five years ago that flag football would be an Olympic sport, I would've laughed at you," Rudy Fernandez said with a chuckle. "I love the fact that it's growing, it's pretty amazing. It's giving so many kids a chance to do something different."

"If you would've told me five years ago that flag football would be an Olympic sport, I would've laughed at you," Rudy Fernandez

Rudy Fernandez first started coaching flag football at the school his mother worked at in Miami, Florida in 2003.

"They needed a coach, a guy called me and explained he knew nothing about football, knew I played high school football, and asked if I could do this flag thing for him," Fernandez said. "I replied, yeah, why not? He said I'll shoot you \$500. As an 18 year old \$500 is a lot of money."

The early years of flag football were tough, Fernandez recounts some of the challenges his teams faced, especially the girls.

"My girls never got a chance to play girls," Fernandez said. "That was until 2013. My girl's team played in the boy's division because there was no one to play."

Fast forward to the present day, Rudy Fernandez and the game of flag football have both evolved. Fernandez is an assistant coach for the 17U boys Team USA squad. His resume also includes two decades of coaching experience and 15 years as a player. Fernandez currently is the coach of his daughter's 12U team, Apex Predators out of Las Vegas.

"I love everything about the game," Rudy Fernandez said. "I love the fact that it's for everybody, especially at the recreational level."

Fernandez reflects back on his time as a physical education teacher and the divide he witnessed during gym class.

"It's tough being that kid who isn't athletic in phy-ed class," Fernandez said. "It's always the athletic kids who are the cool kids."



“

*It's a big deal
to be a part of
a team.*

”

FLAG FOOTBALL IS FOR EVERYONE no matter your age, gender or when you start. Fernandez says flag football provides something many other sports do not, a chance to fit in from the start.

"If they didn't start softball, basketball, soccer or gymnastics when they were younger, there really isn't a starting point when they're older," Fernandez said. "Take a 12-year-old girl that wants to play any of those sports, she's way behind. More than likely she'll never catch up and will ride the bench most of the time. With flag football, this is something they can get into and start at a later age."

The sport provides a place where everyone feels they belong and in turn, everyone on the team is the cool kid. A good flag football coach, according to Fernandez, will find a spot for you.

"Let's say you can't catch, you're awful. Okay, we'll teach you how to play defense, we'll teach you how to rush," Fernandez said. "I've coached kids who are great athletes and I'll shoot it to you straight, I've coached kids who are awful athletes but they all enjoy their time."

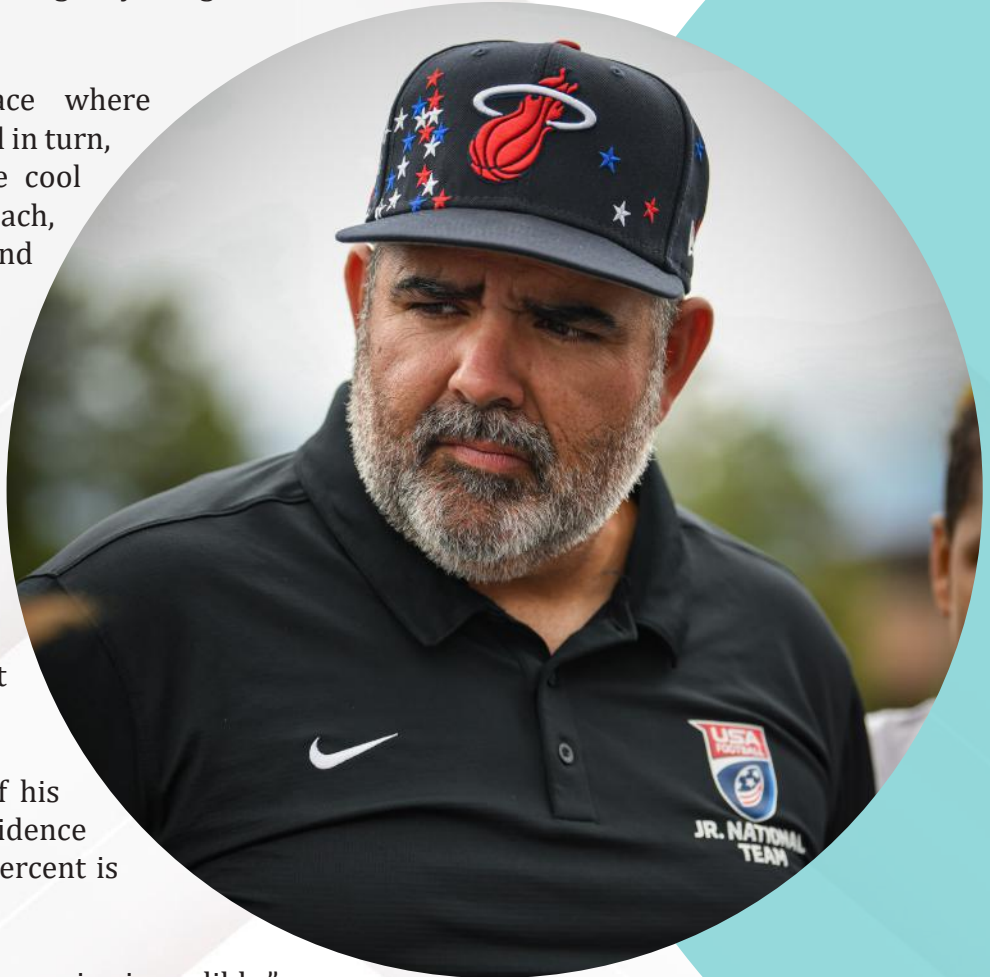
Fernandez says 85 percent of his job is to inspire and instill confidence in the athlete. The other 15 percent is teaching the game.

"What it does for confidence is incredible," Fernandez said. "I had one kid, he was overweight, and didn't have many friends. He joined the team, I found a spot for him, he loved it. He was our extra point player, he'd catch extra points. He's now in college and some of the kids he played with are now lifelong friends. That's what this sport provides regardless of your athletic ability. It's that confidence of playing a sport, I'm out there doing something. It's a big deal to be a part of a team. Did they play on Team USA? No. Did they play five years of flag football and enjoy their time, yes. It's better than going home and playing video games." "It's better than going home and playing video games."

UNITING FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS is one of the many benefits, according to Fernandez, that makes the sport of flag football so special.

"It's pretty amazing, watching girls perform at a high level," Fernandez said. "It's one of the funnest parts of what I do."

The sport rekindles a bond and reignites a family flame that may have been dormant.





“How many dads out there ever thought they’d have a daughter and talk football with her?” Fernandez said with a smile. “It’s pretty amazing. It’s opened up another part of the father-daughter relationship. Now, they sit down and watch football together on Sundays. They go outside and play catch and get to have that talk. I know before my daughter started playing, she could care less about watching football.”

“How many dads out there ever thought they’d have a daughter and talk football with her?” - Rudy Fernandez

THE SPORT OF FLAG FOOTBALL CONTINUES TO GROW especially on the women’s side of the game.

“It’s growing faster than girls’ lacrosse which is incredible to me,” Fernandez said. “We’re opening it up to more kids. It used to be just a club sport, so it’s almost like a niche or a hobby. Now we’re getting some of the elite high school athletes from other sports playing. Soccer players, basketball players, volleyball players and it’s changing the game.”

Flag football is also becoming a part of collegiate athletics and Fernandez feels it will continue to evolve.

“Now being an Olympic sport, college teams, leagues are growing and it’s becoming a high school sport in more states across the country,” Fernandez said. “NAIA has over 20 teams and I think Division III and Division II colleges will be in it in the next two to three years. Division I will then follow. I wouldn’t be surprised that before you know it, there is a professional league.”

ELITE ATHLETES ARE NOW BECOMING MORE INVOLVED including tackle football players

“It actually works on your game for tackle,” Fernandez said. “You have to learn how to cover with your feet because there is no contact. The routes have to be crisper, because you have a rusher coming from seven



yards away that is unblocked. Quarterback has to make a quick decision, receivers have to have their head on a swivel, turn their head and find the ball. It just helps the game.”

More and more coaches and scouts are also popping up in tournaments and showcases. Fernandez shares what many coaches, including Team USA are watching for.

“This is going to sound crazy but the first thing I look for is body language before I look at the athlete,” Fernandez said. “The truth is, when you get invited to Team USA tryouts, everybody is great. From body language, I can tell your attitude, your work ethic your teammate, everything else.”

Fernandez reminds athletes to play the game the right way.

“The truth is, there are great athletes everywhere, sometimes they don’t have great leadership or are a great teammate,” Fernandez said. “To me, that’s big because that is how you build a successful team. Not just a team with great athletes, you might be winning but it’s not the culture you want.”

Fernandez adds that there are many great athletes from small towns and big towns across the United States. What is it about you and your game that makes you stand out? Are you coachable or a know-it-all?

“There are multiple people that are going to have your skill level,

what are you going to do to be different? What’s your work ethic, what kind of teammate are you?” Fernandez said. “Losing happens, how do you react? Do you make excuses? Do you throw a temper tantrum? Or, do you walk up to your coach and say, I got beat? She got me or he got me. On to the next play. That’s what coaches want to see.”

IN 2028, ALL EYES WILL FOCUS ON LOS ANGELES when flag football makes its debut as an Olympic sport.

“With the popularity of flag football,” Fernandez said. “Now elite athletes are coming out so It’s going to be interesting and exciting to see what happens in the Olympics in 2028.”

FFN INSIDER NESTOR RAZO

 @ballgamemx



La historia de Valentina Lopez



4.5.6.7
De Julio de 2024
Ensenada, Baja California



Calendario / Schedule

- 4 de Julio / July 4th

- Mixto U8 (2015) / Coed 8U (2015)**
- Mixto U10 (2013) / Coed 10U (2013)**
- Mixto U12 (2011) / Coed 12U (2011)**

- 5 de Julio / July 5th

- Playoffs de mixtos under / Unders coed playoffs**
- Femenil U15 (2009) / Girls 15U (2009)**
- Varonil U15 (2009) / Boys 15U (2009)**
- Femenil U18 (2006) / Girls 18U (2006)**
- Varonil U18 (2006) / Boys 18U (2006)**
- Mixto Rookies / Rookies Coed**
- Mixto Open / Open Coed**

- 6 de Julio / July 6th

- Playoffs Mixtos open, var y fem unders / Coed open, boys and girls playoffs**
- Femenil Open D2 / Womens Open D2**
- Varonil Open D2 / Mens Open D2**
- Femenil Open D1 / Womens Open D1**
- Varonil Open D1 / Mens Open D1**
- Femenil Masters 30+ (1994) / Womens Masters 30+ (1994)**
- Varonil Masters 35+ (1989) / Mens Masters 35+ (1989)**

- 7 de Julio / July 7th

- Playoffs var y fem open y masters / Mens and womens open playoffs**

Follow their Instagram for more info @tochella_flag_festival



FFN INSIDER

JULIAN GUERRERO JR



@boltz_sports



MATTMAXX Duo
Matt Araujo and Max Zerega
The rising young stars from Ensenada Baja California.
Members of Leones Flag Football Ensenada
Check out them out on Instagram
@max_zerega
@matt.araujo17

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