

Saints Game day

THURSDAY,
FEBRUARY 1, 2018

*Alejandro
Santos
Piqueras has
his sights set
on the big time*

Chasing his pro dream

Independent Record | helenatv.com



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Carroll College's Alejandro Santos drives under the hoop for a layup against Lewis-Clark State in Helena.

Professional aspirations

Alejandro Santos Piqueras chasing dream of pro ball

ERIK C. ANDERSON
406mtsports.com

When you see Alejandro Santos Piqueras – or as his teammates call him “Alex” or “tos” – on the court, you’re seeing a kid chasing his dream.

When he reacts to big plays or officiating, it’s a type of bravado unlike any other Saints. He also possesses a skillset unlike anybody else, with his ability to shoot from anywhere on the court or drop no-look passes with ease.

A 6-foot-8 point forward is not something you see in the NAIA very often. His European flair enriches the Saints.

The Spaniard out of Madrid is a big-city transplant, building toward a dream to one day play professional basketball. A redshirt junior majoring in business administration, he’s taken on a variety of roles with the Saints this season. His stats won’t jump off the page, but his playmaking and passion are key parts of the Saints.

“How hard he pulls for everyone, whether he’s playing a lot or not so much,” Saints coach Carson Cunningham said partly defines Santos. “He’s always been that way. It’s a very endearing quality.”

It’s no surprise after you learn Santos’ story. He’s keen on making the most of his journey in America.

Santos comes from a family of hoopers. His father, older and younger brother all played basketball and found different levels of success. It’s part of the reason at a young age – “three or four years old” – Santos with the utmost certainly knew what he wanted to

do with his life: play pro basketball.

“Growing up you hear a lot of people saying that,” Santos relates in his accented English. “They act like it’s something easy to say. I’ve always actually wanted to be (a pro).”

Santos parents put him on a pathway toward that dream, consulting early on and researching the best possible route. Santos’ elder brother, Jorge, is three years older than him and he, too, had a dream to play professionally. In Spain, however, it’s nearly impossible to pursue higher education and play competitive basketball. There is no college basketball, only clubs.

Alex and Jorge both played in one of those clubs, CB Estudiantes. Until you reach the top level, they are age restricted teams, U-14, U-15, etc. Jorge learned from experience that being contracted with the club meant he’d miss exams. Missing an exam meant a zero and likely failure of the course. He was forced to choose education or basketball. He chose education.

“He had to quit basketball,” Santos said. “That was the main reason I chose the path.”

Santos knew he wanted to pursue basketball, but valued an education, too. His mother learned of American college basketball through another parent of Santos’ brothers’ teammate. She asked if he would be interested, noting there would be no ultimatum between basketball or an education. His teachers in Spain – whose voices grew louder when he was 14 or 15 – constantly reminded him he would need to choose basketball or studies.

Now Santos could do both.

He enlisted the help of a Span-

Please see **SANTOS**, Page 7



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MEN'S SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION	TIME/RESULT
10/21/2017	Yellowstone Christian College	Helena, Mont.	W 103-53
10/22/2017	Salish Kootenai College	Pablo, Mont.	W 125-53
11/1/2017	Purdue (Exhib.)	West Lafayette, Ind.	L 71-98
11/4/2017	Saint Francis (Ill.)	Joliet, IL	W 67-57
11/17/2017	Our Lady of the Lake University (Texas)	Helena, Mont.	W 78-71
11/18/2017	Southwestern Christian University	Helena, Mont.	W 85-63
11/26/2017	Montana (Exhib.)	Missoula, Mont.	L 75-86
12/2/2017	Montana State University-Northern	Havre, Mont.	W 99-90 OT
12/3/2017	University of Providence (Mont.)	Great Falls, Mont.	W 86-76
12/8/2017	Salish Kootenai College	Helena, Mont.	W 116-57
12/19/2017	Bethesda College Costa	Mesa, Calif.	W 85-55
12/20/2017	Vanguard University (Calif.)	Costa Mesa, Calif.	W 82-73
12/21/2017	Westcliff Universty	Irvine, Calif.	W 96-53
12/28/2017	University of Calgary	Helena, Mont.	W 91-82
12/29/2017	University of Calgary	Helena, Mont.	W 79-78
1/4/2018	University of Montana Western	Helena, Mont.	W 77-63
1/6/2018	Lewis-Clark State College (Idaho)	Helena, Mont.	L 72-70
1/9/2018	Rocky Mountain College (Mont.)	Helena, Mont.	L 59-54
1/11/2018	Montana Tech	Butte, Mont.	W 56-41
1/18/2018	University of Montana Western	Dillon, Mont.	L 88-77
1/20/2018	Lewis-Clark State College (Idaho)	Lewiston, Idaho	W 65-55
1/25/2018	Montana Tech	Butte, Mont.	L 73-70
1/27/2018	Rocky Mountain College (Mont.)	Helena, Mont.	W 90-63
2/1/2018	University of Providence (Mont.)	Helena, Mont.	7:30 p.m.
2/3/2018	Montana State University-Northern	Helena, Mont.	7:30 p.m.
2/7/2018	Montana Tech	Helena, Mont.	7:30 p.m.
2/9/2018	Rocky Mountain College (Mont.)	Billings, Mont.	7:30 p.m.
2/16/2018	Montana State University-Northern	Havre, Mont.	8 p.m.
2/17/2018	University of Providence (Mont.)	Great Falls, Mont.	7:30 p.m.
2/22/2018	Lewis-Clark State College (Idaho)	Helena, Mont.	7:30 p.m.
2/24/2018	University of Montana Western	Helena, Mont.	7:30 p.m.

MEN'S ROSTER

No.	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	YR.	HOMETOWN / HIGH SCHOOL
2	Dane Warp	G	6-4	190	So.	Havre, MT / Havre HS
3	Emilio Mancol	PG	5-9	160	Fr.	Renton, WA / John F. Kennedy Catholic
10	Chase Burnham	G	6-3	200	Fr.	Spangle, WA / Liberty HS
12	Match Burnham	F	6-8	210	Jr.	Spangle, WA / Liberty HS
13	Kyle Nickol	G	6-0	165	Jr.	Helena, Mont. / Capital HS
20	Patrick Colberg	F	6-8	215	Sr.	Missoula, Mont. / Hellgate HS
21	Brad King	F	6-8	210	Fr.	Dromana, Australia / Padua
22	Lorel Johnson	G	6-1	165	Sr.	Downey, Calif. / Cathedral HS
23	Ryan Imhoff	G	6-6	220	Sr.	Napa, Calif. / Napa HS
24	Matt Wyman	G	6-7	180	Jr.	Great Falls, Mont. / Great Falls HS
31	Ife Kalejaiye	G	6-2	168	Jr.	Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif. / Cathedral HS
32	Alejandro Santos Piqueras	F	6-8	195	R-Jr.	Madrid, Spain / Club: Estudiantes
43	Oliver Carr	F	6-6	205	Sr.	Bozeman, Mont. / Bozeman HS

Coaching Staff

Dr. Carson Cunningham: Head Coach

Jesse Repay: Lead Assistant Coach

Scott Menzies: Assistant Coach

Hasani Simmons: Assistant Coach

Getting to know...

Dane Warp

Height: 6-4

Weight: 190

Hometown: Havre

Major: Biochemistry

Favorite Food: Steak

Favorite music: Midland

Favorite show: The Ranch

Sport besides basketball:
Football

Game to play besides a sport:
Texas Hold'em

Favorite basketball player:
Baron Davis

Place to go in Helena: Mountain Ranch House

Outdoor Activity: Hiking



LUKE SHELTON, 406MSPORTS.COM

Carroll College's Dane Warp looks to pass the ball during the first half on Thursday at the HPER Complex.

Random talent: Micropipetting

One thing people don't know

about you: I'm a big John Wayne guy.

If you didn't play basketball

how would you spend your free time: I would travel more.

Hardest thing you've ever done: Backpacked the Grand Canyon.

FRONTIER CONFERENCE MEN'S POWER RANKINGS

1. Montana Western: The Bulldogs are finally on top. Western completed a perfect week in the Frontier, knocking off Providence and Montana State-Northern on the road. It's a call-back. The last time Western swept a week? Two weeks ago against - who else - Providence and MSU-N. As Zachheus Darko-Kelly continues to get better, leading Western in scoring in both wins, the Bulldogs claiming the top spot in the power rankings.

2. Carroll: The Saints had the worst loss of any Frontier Conference team this season this week, losing to Montana Tech. You might wonder, how can the Saints be this highly ranked then? Well, the rest of the Frontier didn't do that great either. Carroll bounced back with an impressive 90-63 win over Rocky Mountain College, but the Saints biggest boon this week is the play of the rest of the conference.

3. Montana State-Northern: The Lights crack into the top three of the power rankings for the first time this season, enjoying a home win over No. 8 Lewis-Clark State College 70-67 before falling to Montana Western 86-75. Northern's three-and-D style earned

it a quality win over one of the Frontier's best. Northern earned a split on a week where it faced two of the top teams in the Frontier in consecutive nights. A 1-1 week is definitely something to be excited about up in Havre.

4. Providence: The Argonauts also earned a big win over No. 8 Lewis-Clark State College, but then suffered a huge setback against Western, losing 91-60. The Argonauts, like Northern, earned a 1-1 weekend against two of the Frontier's best and that is good enough to push them up in the rankings.

5. Lewis-Clark State: The Warriors are still high in the conference standings, and likely still one of the best teams when it all shakes out in the final four weeks. But after suffering through a 0-2 week with losses to Providence and Montana-State Northern, the Warriors plummet down the power rankings. Sure, the Warriors lost by a combined six points in two games, but nonetheless LCSC was favored to pull out victories this weekend and fell. The Warriors are in the midst of a three-game losing streak and still have two more road games before returning to Lewiston.

The Warriors need to figure some things out.

6. Rocky Mountain College: Rocky earned a tight 68-65 win over an improved Montana Tech squad, but then got hammered by Carroll College 90-63, a game in which Rocky coach Bill Dreikosen said his team just wasn't ready to play. While Rocky has been a team of intrigue and inconsistency this season, this week's results put the Battlin' Bears low in the power rankings.

7. Montana Tech: We swear we're not picking on Montana Tech. The Orediggers absolutely earned a win over Carroll College and that absolutely matters. But the Warriors then lost a night later to a Rocky Mountain College team that Carroll would eviscerate a night later. The Frontier Conference doesn't make much sense, and maybe these rankings don't either. At the very least, credit the Orediggers for a big win over a top team. As they search for a way to crawl out of the basement of the Frontier, they'll have to show more before moving up the Power Rankings, too.

— Erik C. Anderson, 406mtsports.com

Getting to know...

Jaidyn Lyman

Height: 5-3

Major: Undecided

Hometown: Spokane, Washington

Favorite food: Candy

Favorite music: Frank Ocean and Jaden Smith

TV show: The People vs. OJ

Favorite sport besides basketball: Track and Field

Favorite game besides sports: Uno

Favorite basketball player:

Nate Robinson, "he's small," she said while pointing to a tattoo on her left arm that reads "heart over height."

Favorite place to go in Helena: Host family's house.

Favorite outdoor activity: Cliff jumping



TOMMY MARTINO, MISSOULIAN

Lady Griz's McKenzie Johnston dribbles as Carroll's Jaidyn Lyman defends.

What's one thing people don't know about you: I have three brothers that are all nine years old. All different mothers.

If you didn't play basketball how would you spend your free time: Outdoors, cliff jumping or hanging out at the lake.

FRONTIER CONFERENCE WOMEN'S POWER RANKINGS

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

1. Western: The Bulldogs continued to tear through Frontier competition, posting double-digit wins this week. They knocked off the Cinderella-like story of Providence, blasting the Argonauts 82-55. And then The Bulldogs followed that up with a 67-51 win over the banged up Skylights of Montana-State Northern. Western is on a five-game winning streak and four of those five wins have been by double figures. Watch out for the Bulldogs.

2. Rocky: The Battlin' Bears posted a 2-0 week in the Frontier, capping it off with a 58-50 win over No. 10 Carroll College and winning in Helena for the first time since 2012. Wes Keller has his team playing tenacious defense and doing enough on offense to give his Battlin' Bears a chance each night out.

3. Carroll: The Saints won big in Butte, defeating the Orediggers 65-

49, but then suffered through a cold shooting night and compounding it with mental mistakes late in a 58-50 loss to Rocky. They had opportunities to pull in front of Rocky, but could never make the one extra play they needed. Carroll is still one of the top teams, but other Frontier teams had better weeks.

4. Providence: A very disappointing start to the week puts a halt on the Argonauts meteoric rise in the Frontier. Providence fell to Western 82-55 on Friday, but then rebounded for a 74-71 win over No. 23 Lewis-Clark State College. At the end of the week, it's a 1-1 result, but now the Argonauts begin a four-game road trip in need of some wins.

5. Lewis-Clark State College: The Warriors made the extra long trip up to Havre and found a 55-50 win over Montana State-Northern, but then suffered a 74-71 setback the next night in Great Falls at the hands of

the Argonauts. A 1-1 road trip is a decent result, but for a Warriors team that needs to show consistency, the win over bottom feeder MSU-N isn't enough.

6. Montana Tech: Tech dropped two games this week, losing to top dogs, Carroll College and Rocky Mountain College. The Orediggers lost by 16 in each game, perhaps signaling a problem for Tech going forward. With eight games left in the conference season, the Orediggers have some figuring to do.

7. Montana State-Northern: The Skylights received devastating news this week when they lost senior leader Jacy Thompson. The following results were losses to Lewis-Clark State College and Montana Western. The Skylights haven't won a game since Dec. 30, and at this rate they may not win another game this season.

— Erik C. Anderson, 406mtsports.com

WOMEN'S SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION	TIME/RESULT
10/30/2017	University of Montana (Exhib.)	Missoula, Mont.	L 48-55
11/2/2017	University of Utah (Exhib.)	Salt Lake City, Utah	L 46-70
11/4/2017	The College of Idaho	Caldwell, Idaho	W 48-37
11/5/2017	Boise State (Exhib.)	Boise, Idaho	W 62-61
11/8/2017	Saint Thomas University	Helena, Mont.	W 67-53
11/9/2017	Northwest University	Helena, Mont.	W 74-33
11/18/2017	Westmont College (Calif.)	Santa Barbara, Calif.	W 39-34
11/20/2017	The Master's College (Calif.)	Santa Clarita, Calif.	L 64-74
12/2/2017	Montana State University-Northern	Havre, Mont.	L 42-53
12/3/2017	University of Providence (Mont.)	Great Falls, Mont.	W 78-65
12/8/2017	Whitman College	Spokane, Wash.	L 55-59
12/9/2017	Whitworth University	Spokane, Wash.	W 78-56
12/19/2017	Menlo College	Waikiki, Hawaii	W 75-65
12/20/2017	Saint Xavier University (Ill.)	Waikiki, Hawaii	L 55-52
12/29/2017	University of Calgary	Helena, Mont.	W 59-54
12/30/2017	University of Lethbridge	Helena, Mont.	W 82-16
1/4/2018	University of Montana Western	Helena, Mont.	W 82-45
1/6/2018	Lewis-Clark State College (Idaho)	Helena, Mont.	W 73-67
1/9/2018	Rocky Mountain College (Mont.)	Helena, Mont.	W 58-56
1/11/2018	Montana Tech	Butte, Mont.	W 64-55
1/18/2018	University of Montana Western	Dillon, Mont.	L 59-43
1/20/2018	Lewis-Clark State College (Idaho)	Lewiston, Idaho	W 57-51
1/25/2018	Montana Tech	Butte, Mont.	W 65-49
1/27/2018	Rocky Mountain College (Mont.)	Helena, Mont.	L 58-50
2/1/2018	University of Providence (Mont.)	Helena, Mont.	5:30 p.m.
2/3/2018	Montana State University-Northern	Helena, Mont.	5:30 p.m.
2/7/2018	Montana Tech	Helena, Mont.	5:30 p.m.
2/9/2018	Rocky Mountain College (Mont.)	Billings, Mont.	5:30 p.m.
2/16/2018	Montana State University-Northern	Havre, Mont.	6:00 p.m.
2/17/2018	University of Providence (Mont.)	Great Falls, Mont.	5:30 p.m.
2/22/2018	Lewis-Clark State College (Idaho)	Helena, Mont.	5:30 p.m.
2/24/2018	Montana Western	Helena, Mont.	5:30 p.m.

WOMEN'S ROSTER

No.	NAME	POS.	HT.	YR.	HOMETOWN / HIGHSCHOOL
1	Bailey Pasta	PG	5-6	Sr.	Nampa, Idaho / Skyview HS
3	Jaidyn Lyman	PG	5-3	Fr.	Spokane, Wash. / Mount Spokane HS
4	Danielle Wagner	G	5-9	R-Fr.	Havre, Mont. / Havre HS
5	Michaela Dowdy	C	6-1	Sr.	Helena, Mont. / Capital HS
10	Christine Denny	PG	5-9	Fr.	Fairfield, Wash. / Liberty HS
11	Sara Chalich	G	5-6	Jr.	Coeur d'Alene, Idaho / Coeur d'Alene HS
12	Taylor Salonen	F	6-1	So.	Kalispell, Mont. / Glacier HS
20	Mikaela Olson	G	5-8	Jr.	Lewistown, Mont. / Fergus HS
21	Cassidy Hashley	F	6-2	Sr.	Kalispell, Mont. / Glacier HS
24	Hannah Dean	C	6-1	Jr.	Gardiner, Mont. / Gardiner HS
25	Brittney Johnson	SG	5-7	Jr.	Spokane, Wash. / Ferris HS
30	Nikki Krueger	C	6-1	Fr.	Kalispell, Mont. / Glacier HS
33	Oona Harrington	F	5-11	So.	Spokane, Wash. / Gonzaga Prep HS
35	Molly McDermott	SG/F	6-2	Fr.	Spokane, Wash. / Gonzaga Prep HS
42	Mikaela Robinson	SG	5-9	Jr.	Billings, Mont. / Billings West HS

Coaching Staff

Rachelle Sayers: Head Coach

Gary Turcott: Assistant Coach

J.D. Solomon: Assistant Coach

Joey O'Neill: Assistant Coach

Around the Frontier Conference – Men's Basketball

ERIK C. ANDERSON
406mtsports.com

Here's a look at what the Frontier Conference is up to this week:

Montana Tech

This week: The Orediggers host two of the Frontier's most impressive teams, Montana Western, and then one night later, Lewis-Clark State College. It's a daunting task for the Orediggers who haven't found much traction in the Frontier this season. Glass half full: Montana Tech has a chance to knock off two bullies and stake some ground in the Frontier. Glass half empty: The Orediggers could be looking at a losing streak. Tech has dropped a game to each team once already this season

Carroll College Saints

This week: Carroll welcomes in Montana State Northern and University of Providence, two teams Carroll took advantage of



in the first go around. Carroll has been a steady defensive team and should be able to give them an advantage. Both teams scored a lot of points against Carroll in the first week of December, but lately the Saints defense has been stronger. Carroll got Northern in Havre after an overtime period, 99-90, and defeated Providence 86-76 in the first meeting.

Montana State-Northern

This week: The Skylights are

on the road for two games, first traveling to Billings to face the Rocky Mountain College Battlin' Bears and then a test against Carroll in Helena. Northern has an overtime win over Rocky under its belt, but fell to Carroll in overtime during the same week-end. The Lights have been up and down this year, as Ryan Reeves, the conference's returning defensive player of the year, puts together another strong campaign, the Lights look like they need to find some consistency around him. Four other Lights are scoring in double figures, as the Lights continue to be the best three-point shooting team in the nation, making 13 threes a game and making 43 percent of their total three point attempts.

Rocky Mountain College

This week: The Battlin' Bears play host to Montana State-Northern and Providence. Rocky, who has beaten the top half of the

conference, has lost both of its game against the Lights and Argonauts so far. These home games give the Battlin' Bears a chance at redemption and perhaps valuable chances to make up wins in the Frontier. As Jared Samuelson continues his impressive debut season in the Frontier, the Battlin' Bears will look to make some noise late.

Providence

This week: The Argonauts have two tests as they travel to Carroll College and Rocky Mountain College. The Argonauts haven't been able to climb into the upper echelon of the Frontier. Two wins against Rocky and Carroll would definitely help the Argonauts cause. Providence fell to Carroll in Great Falls, 86-76, but also earned a home win over Rocky Mountain College, 86-79. To climb any higher in the conference, the Argonauts will need to string together some wins.

Montana Western

This week: The Bulldogs have a home-and-away week, visiting Butte and the Montana Tech Orediggers before returning home to take on a talented Lewis-Clark State team. Western is making a case for the Frontier title, but needs to break through against the Warriors, who defeated the Bulldogs in Lewiston, 91-82. Western should be able to get through Tech, who the Bulldogs defeated 84-66 on Nov. 28.

Lewis-Clark State College

This week: The Warriors travel to Butte and Dillon for a pair of road games that could help them stay near the top of the Frontier. The Warriors own two wins over both Western and Tech, defeating the Bulldogs 91-82 in Lewiston and knocking off the Orediggers 75-67 in Butte. The test against Western will prove if the Warriors' Nov. 30 win over the Bulldogs was indicative of their future success.

Around the Frontier Conference – Women's Basketball

ERIK C. ANDERSON
406mtsports.com

Here's a look at what the Frontier Conference is up to this week:

Carroll College

This week: The Saints host a pesky Providence team and a Montana State-Northern team that defeated Carroll, though the Saints felt they definitely did not play their best game in Havre. Carroll knocked off Providence in Great Falls the last time those two teams met. Carroll will be wanting a sweep this week to both prove the Providence win wasn't a one-time deal, and that the Saints are better than their last outing against Northern, though this Skylights team will be drastically different with Jacy Thompson now sidelined for the season.

Rocky Mountain College

This week: Rocky welcomes

Montana State-Northern and Providence into Billings. As the Battlin' Bears look to continue their upward 2017-18 season, they'll have an opportunity to make amends for their first loss of the season, which came at the hands of the Providence Argonauts. The Argonauts took Rocky down, 60-52, in Great Falls on Dec. 2. Rocky has also taken knocks from some of the Frontier's best, but defending home court this week becomes paramount.

Lewis-Clark State College

This week: A road trip awaits the Warriors of Lewis-Clark State College. The Warriors cap off the end of a four-game road swing this week, traveling to Butte and Dillon. The Warriors own a narrow road win over Butte once already this season, winning 78-

75. LCSC also got a win over the Bulldogs earlier this season, 74-69 in Lewiston. As the Warriors keep looking to forge a new identity this season, coming away with success on the road will be important.

Montana State-Northern

This week: The Skylights received some disappointing news, as guard Jacy Thompson was shut down for the season in late January. Northern has games against Rocky Mountain College and Carroll College this week, but what has already been a hard season for the Skylights could get tougher. Northern does have a win against Carroll under its belt, but it was early in the Frontier season, and both teams are playing dramatically different basketball. The Skylights fell to Rocky in their first matchup, 69-54. It may be a

tough week on the road.

University of Providence

This week: Providence visits Carroll and Rocky and will be looking to put some wins together to keep pace in the ultra-competitive Frontier. Providence has been one of the better stories this season, rising to the top of the Frontier and stringing together impressive winning streaks. Carroll was one of the teams that ended one winning streak, defeating the Argonauts 78-65 on Dec. 3. Providence does hold a 60-52 win over Rocky from earlier in the season, but this week will be perhaps the Argonauts' biggest test of the season.

Montana Tech

This week: Tech has two big challenges coming into Butte. The Orediggers host Montana

Western and Lewis-Clark State College, two teams that have already knocked off the Orediggers. Western took care of the Orediggers in Dillon and the Lewis-Clark State Warriors ventured into Butte and pulled out a 78-75 win. Tech needs to use some home cooking to get itself back into the pack.

Montana Western

This week: The Bulldogs look to continue their climb with a road game at Montana Tech and a visit from Lewis-Clark State College. Western defeated Tech earlier this season, 64-56, but fell to Lewis-Clark State 74-69 in Lewiston. Brianna King has already shown she's a force to be reckoned with on the national level, and if the Bulldogs want to showcase her at the NAIA Tournament, they'll need to keep picking up wins in the Frontier.

Santos

From Page 2

ish agency. The agent would contact different coaches in the U.S. and promote Santos. One of those coaches happened to be Cunningham, and the Carroll coach's interest piqued.

"I saw film on Santos," Cunningham recalled. "I liked his length and ball skill and his ability to play pick and roll hoops."

Cunningham made Santos a scholarship offer and Santos' journey began – 10,000 miles into the heart of the Rocky Mountains. A different culture, drastically different weather patterns and an English learning curve awaited him.

Santos knew the weather would be cold in the winter, he packed coats and boots. He didn't know how much spoken English – especially slang – would be different than what he'd practiced writing during his studies for 14 years. English was mandatory in Madrid since he was four years old, but when the conversation shifted to a group of people, Santos couldn't keep up.

"If I was in a one-on-one conversation, I could handle," he said. "I was so lost. I learned so much English so quick. It was a survival thing."

His roommate, senior guard Lorel Johnson, helped Santos pick up on expressions that were foreign to the foreigner. At first simple word choice could trip Santos up. He learned "how are you" and "how are you doing" are similar questions.

"At first I didn't know how to answer," he said. "It really wasn't that hard, but it was a matter of time. I was just talking to people and making a lot of mistakes."

As he adjusted within the community, he also had to acclimate to a new brand of basketball. Santos grew up playing under FIBA rules: a 24-second shot clock, longer 3-point line. The style of game under those constraints lends itself to spacing, shooting and more individual flair. Santos also grew up playing against other teenagers with builds like his.

As soon as he played the college game, he would be taking on more



BMGPHOTOS.COM

Carroll College's Alejandro Santos Piqueras plays with more flair than his teammates from his sports upbringing of European basketball.



Carroll College's Alejandro Santos Piqueras plays different roles for the Saints. He's been slowed by recovering from ACL surgery.

mature, stronger players.

"When I got here I was 17, but we had a 23-year-old on the team," Santos said. "They had grown man strength. I was hard to adjust."

The American game was more brutish, favoring physical play

over finesse. It didn't take long for Santos to learn less fouls would be called. And under Cunningham, the Saints looked to execute within the full frame of the shot clock.

"The way Carson coaches, we play long possessions," Santos

said. "I played (in Spain) with individual stuff and pick and roll and here it was very strict."

Santos at times is still striking that balance between executing what the Saints' want and showing his playmaking.

"Alex is a willing listener and super-competitive and wants the team to do its best – he pulls for everyone," Cunningham said. "So really that has made it much easier. He thinks about the game and brings some neat European perspective to matters."

Santos travels back to Madrid each summer to spend time with his family. His first year in Helena, the Saints had enough downtime during their Christmas break, Santos was able to fly back in the winter. Since then, it's a once a year trip.

A few years ago, it was a devastating one.

Santos went back to Madrid on June 30th and played in a three-on-three tournament on July 4th.

"It wasn't super competitive," he said.

The all-day tournament meant his team would play seven or eight

games. The first game started at 8 a.m. In the very first game, Santos' knee betrayed him.

"I was driving in the lane and I went to jump stop," Santos said. "(Another player) was a lot stronger than me. They were 30 or something. They bumped me and my knee landed funny. It didn't hurt that bad and I nearly kept playing"

To be sure, Santos saw a doctor. The doctor assured Santos he was fine. Yet, Santos asked for a MRI. The MRI revealed an ACL tear. Santos had surgery to repair the ACL in Spain and redshirted his sophomore year. He used to wear a bulky brace on the knee, but now it's usually a single band when he plays.

He's overcome the knee injury and contributed to the Saints in any way he can.

Looking forward, Santos plans to keep playing basketball after college. He sees himself back in Europe after graduation and then searching for a team to play professionally.

"I really don't know where," he said. "That's the plan."



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