

Blehar "Chino" Mejia Nomination

Blehar Mejia's story begins in Honduras where his father died of a heart attack at a very young age. His mother left him with his maternal grandparents when he was only 5 years old and traveled to the US with his younger brother, Maicol, who was a toddler. Blehar as a child struggled with the conditions that many children face in his country, cartels, hunger, and gangs. These factors caused a great deal of emotional and physical trauma. His mother shared that Blehar did not attend school and spent most of his childhood living on the streets. Sadly, he started using alcohol and illegal substances before his 13th birthday. At this point, his family decided that he needed to leave Honduras and come to the US to live with his mother.

Blehar came to this country as an unaccompanied minor at the age of 14, traveling through Guatemala and Mexico. He arrived in the United States in early 2019 but was detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for an unspecified amount of time, from March to early June. He was held in an Immigration detention center in Texas until his family was contacted and his paperwork was sorted out.

Upon his release from ICE, he arrived in Norwalk in late September of 2019, at this time he enrolled at Brien McMahon High School. Immediately, he experienced difficulty assimilating to new cultural norms and language and found high school overwhelming. He was struggling with his past trauma, accepting and reestablishing a relationship with his mother, and battling substance abuse.

Blehar was falling apart, and his mental health trauma resurfaced. In early January 2020, Blehar was referred to intensive counseling, which was disrupted by Covid very soon after (March 2020). Blehar spent the next school year (2020-21) until March 2021 learning remotely, which further affected his mental health and he missed a great deal of school after his return. His mother reported that in the summer of 2021, he was hospitalized for health-related concerns. After that summer, he was referred by teachers and evaluated by the school which led to him receiving specialized education services, in addition to counseling services to treat the trauma and addiction.

Blehar took therapy very seriously and attended all his therapy sessions with the outside counseling agency. Blehar also received help with addiction recovery and was given services for his academic deficits at school. Blehar has been clean for more than two years and has not had attendance issues since. His grades have improved and his English is progressing. His relationship with his mother and family is also flourishing. Blehar joined the high school soccer team during the fall of 2022 and missed his first 3 games of the season due to a medical concern. Despite all these obstacles, he was named All-State and All-FCIAC first team. He continued to flourish during his senior season as he was once again named All-FCIAC, All-State, and he was named to the Connecticut High School Coaches Association Senior Bowl.

Blehar is a success story that represents many immigrant students who come to the United States to better their lives and escape the horrible conditions that they are forced to face in the

countries they were born. Blehar came to the United States with nothing and had the odds stacked against him. His success, both on and off the soccer field, inspires those like him to feel empowered and more confident in themselves. Blejar is an amazing individual with an amazing story of survival and resilience. He was given a chance to improve his life and he took it! Furthermore, he continues to grow and learn every day.

Please accept my nomination of Blehar "Chino" Mejia for the Michael Savage "Spirt of Sport Award".