

PIMA COLLEGE

She's a keeper: Couple who met while playing soccer at Pima College now planning life together

By Caitlin Schmidt

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Jacob Contreras met Alexis Tapia on the first day of Pima College's 2019 soccer preseason. Jacob was a defender, while Alexis was a midfielder.

In Jacob's eyes, she was also a keeper.

The two former Aztecs turned their shared love of soccer into a whirlwind romance that quickly blossomed into talk of a future together.

This is the story of two Tucsonans who found love on the soccer field.

'It started from there'

Jacob, 23, played soccer at Ironwood Ridge High School, graduating in December 2015 — a semester early — in order to enroll at BYU. In October 2016, he left school to serve a church mission in southern Mexico.

When he returned two years later, BYU's soccer team had moved from the semipro Premier Development League to club status.

"I didn't want to just play club. I decided to go back to my roots," Jacob said. "(Pima coach) Dave Cosgrove reached out and said, 'We just won na-

tionals, want to come play at Pima?'"

With four years of eligibility remaining, Jacob quickly agreed. He returned to Tucson and signed up for the fall semester at Pima College.

At the time they met, Alexis was entering her second season as an Aztecs midfielder. Alexis, 20, started playing soccer when she was 5. She moved up to club soccer in middle school and played at Sahuaro High School.

The first day of preseason, Jacob introduced himself.

"I thought she was a really nice girl," Contreras said. "And

obviously, very beautiful!"

The next day, Jacob asked Alexis out on a date. The pair went to Rubio's, got ice cream at Cold Stone Creamery and made a trip to the pet store at Tucson Mall to look at puppies.

"It started from there," Alexis said. "Basically ever since then, we'd hang out every single day."

The pair kept dating, and saw each other on the soccer field on the days they didn't go out.

"After that first date, it turned into seeing each other every day at practices and

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hanging out between and after," Jacob said.

The pair had a bittersweet parting following their whirlwind romance. Jacob played the 2019 season with the Aztecs, then returned to BYU in January 2020. He planned to spend last summer playing for Ogden City SC in Utah before heading back to BYU for school.

But like most things 2020, Jacob's plan didn't pan out.

"We had to kind of shift to doing long-distance, but fortunately for us, two months into the semester is when COVID hit," he said. "Classes moved online and I was able to go home."

"It was a spark"

The couple spent March through August in Tucson. Alexis called the extra time together a bonus.

"During that time together is when we were able to hit a year of dating," Jacob said. "After we hit a year, that's when I was like, 'I'm pretty sure she's the one.' I started ring shopping and making plans."

Alexis was also quite

smitten with Jacob.

"My favorite thing about Jacob is the passion and love that he has in all aspects of life," she said. "Everything he has in his life is because he has worked hard and had a true passion for it, and it's something I truly admire about him."

Jacob called his bride-to-be "beautiful, inside and out" and praised her maturity and values.

"I absolutely adore how humble she is. I love just the way she's also so compassionate and always thinking of others. That's why I grew very fond of her very fast," he said. "She's very genuine. When I first met her, that was something that instantly clicked. It was a spark."

A secret trip

Jacob flew back to Tucson in November for a secret meeting with Alexis' parents. He wanted to marry their daughter.

He returned to town for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Alexis was "bummed out" by the brevity of the trip, Jacob said.

The day got back to Utah, Jacob called his girlfriend with an idea. His family was



COURTESY OF ALEXIS TAPIA

Jacob Contreras proposed to Alexis Tapia on Dec. 30 at frozen Utah Lake, near Provo. Contreras surprised his girlfriend by flying her family into town from Tucson.

coming to town two days later; would she want to fly out to Utah with them?

Alexis jumped at the chance — and Jacob's plan was set.

The day after she arrived, Alexis' parents and young-

er sisters found themselves on the way to Provo. They would be there for the proposal.

"When her and I first talked about marriage and that it would be something that we wanted to do, she

mentioned to me that she thought it would be really special if her family could be there when she got engaged," Jacob said.

"I knew if I did it up here in Utah, she wouldn't expect a proposal because her family wouldn't be up here for it."

"Everything fell into place"

On Dec. 30, Jacob told Alexis that they were going to visit his family's home at Utah Lake State Park to go ice skating on the frozen lake. He told his girlfriend to dress photo-ready.

When Alexis arrived, she was told her Jacob had a belated Christmas present waiting for her by the lake. She was blindfolded and led to a secluded area set up with a blanket, roses, candles and other decorations. Jacob turned his Alexis toward the dock — "so that the first thing she would see when she opened her eyes were our families" — and stood behind her.

He then removed the blindfold.

"When she turned around to face me, I was already down on one knee," Jacob said.

Alexis said yes.

"It was a surprise," she said, adding that her family being able to witness the proposal was "really cool."

"We had been talking about looking at rings and that, but it was a surprise to me when he did it," Alexis added.

The couple are hoping to hold an outdoor wedding in April or May, after which Alexis will move to Utah and continue her education.

Jacob is playing at Salt Lake Community College while he attends BYU, and hopes to transfer to a Division I school in the fall. This summer, he'll finally get his chance to play with Ogden City SC.

In hindsight, Jacob said, his church mission set everything up for him.

"As soon as I got home, everything fell into place: I came to Pima, met Alexis, went to BYU, now I'm playing at Salt Lake, then this summer in Ogden," Contreras said. "It caught me by surprise, because I wasn't really necessarily expecting to find a fiancée when I went home for a semester."

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COURTESY OF ALEXIS TAPIA

Former Pima College midfielder Alexis Tapia played with the team in 2018 and 2019. The Sahuaro High School graduate plans to move to Salt Lake City following a spring wedding.



COURTESY OF PIMA COLLEGE

Jacob Contreras attended Pima College for one semester in the fall of 2019, playing defender for the men's soccer team. It's there that he met fiancée Alexis Tapia.