



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/CHRIS MCLEAN

Jesse Anzar dances the part of the Snow King with Chloe Foust in the Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Center production of 'Nutcracker in a Nutshell.'

**ON STAGE**

# Fly like Pan, run like a colt

## Pueblo teen thrives on the stage and on the football field

BY LUKE LYONS  
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

**I**n one instant, Jesse Anzar is decked in white, flitting through the air then landing quite gracefully on his toes.

In another moment, he's wearing a tuxedo vest, bow-tie and black slacks, dancing with a cast member.

Later that evening, the South High School senior is on the gridiron catching passes as part of one of the most lethal offenses in all of Colorado high school football.

By day, the tall, muscular 17-year-old is a wide receiver for the Colts and at night he's staring as the Snow King and Herr Stahlbaum in the Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Center's production of "The Nutcracker."

Anzar and the cast will grace the stage at 7:30 p.m. Thursday and Dec. 1-2.

Tickets to the show are \$12-\$15 and can be purchased by visiting [sdc-arts.org](http://sdc-arts.org) or by calling 295-7200.

**The boy that could fly**

At an early age, Anzar fell in love with ballet.

**IF YOU GO**

**Who:** The Sangre de Cristo School of Dance  
**What:** "The Nutcracker"  
**When:** 7:30 p.m. Nov. 30, Dec. 1-2  
**Where:** Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Center, 210 N. Santa Fe Ave.  
**Tickets:** \$12-\$15  
**Info:** [sdc-arts.org](http://sdc-arts.org) or 295-7200

When he was 4, Anzar watched Mikhail Baryshnikov gracefully glide and fly across the dance floor in the film "The White Knight."

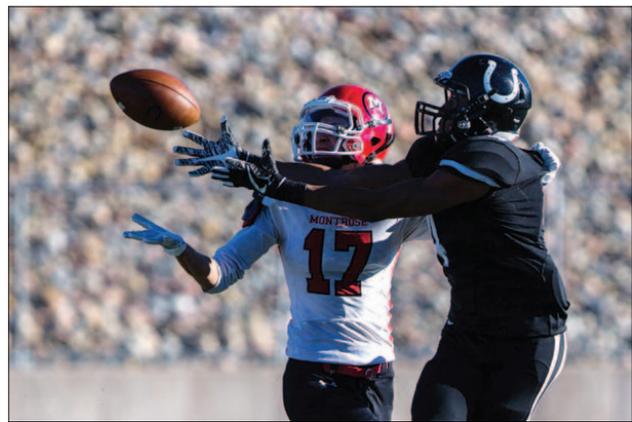
He was instantly enamored. "I saw (Baryshnikov) and I liked to jump around and saw him jumping and he was doing all kinds of stuff," Anzar said. "It just looked cool and I wanted to try that."

His mother bought him the movie and Anzar watched it over and over.

Eventually, he asked his mother if he could take classes.

"He said he wanted to float just like (Baryshnikov)," Jona Anzar said. "He jumps and he stays in the air."

Anzar's favorite character as a child was Peter Pan, his



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/MATT WEIGAND

Montrose defender Zach Ubben, 17, attempts to block Pueblo South's Jesse Anzar, 4, from receiving a long pass during the 4A first round playoff game at Dutch Clark Stadium on Nov. 11.

mother said this was because "Peter Pan could fly."

His mother, however, didn't initially understand his love for ballet and instead insisted he try sports like soccer and baseball.

Finally, she gave in to her child's demands.

"I had never been to a ballet before and I wasn't versed it and or interested in it before," she said. "I finally thought,

maybe there's something there I don't know or see."

She called around and decided the arts center was the best place for her son to learn to dance.

After Anzar had a taste of dance, he fell fully in love.

"Once we got to the part of class with a jump it was fun," Anzar said. "Getting to jump

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across the floor was even better."

**On the field**

In fourth and fifth grade, Anzar discovered another love: football.

In middle school, Anzar focused on other sports like soccer and basketball, but returned to the football field as a freshman.

He continued to play football and dance, and has said that ballet has made him become a better athlete.

"It's helped my flexibility, for sure," Anzar said. "It allows your body to do more things. In ballet, you use a lot of muscles, especially in your legs.

"That's important because usually the lowest man wins. If you have a strong, stable foundation, you're going to be set. Ballet helps with balance."

Anzar has typically played defense, but in his senior season he's become one of South's better offensive players.

It's been an adjustment, and Anzar said learning an offensive playbook is much tougher than learning new dance choreography.

"I'm not really use to hand signals, which they do, and learning offensive plays is not what I've had to do," he said. "I go into a game and ask the coach at least 10 different plays because we add in new plays every week."

Despite his self-described shortcomings, he's caught on quickly, catching 22 passes for 401 yards and five touchdowns.

The Colts are ranked No. 6 in the state and play Broomfield in the state semifinals Saturday.

If South wins, Anzar will have to chose between a second performance of "The Nutcracker" and a state championship game.

He said the choice is tough, but he would play in a state title game if he has to make it.

"It's a really hard choice because I'm involved with each one," he said. "It isn't like I like one more than the other. They're equal. With football right now, I have a priority before I had the priority to do the show."

**A four-year itch**

Anzar has been back in Pueblo for less than a year, after living in California — where he was born before moving



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/CHRIS MCLEAN

**Jesse Anzar (second from right) dances the role of Herr Stahlbaum in 'Nutcracker in a Nutshell.'**

to Colorado as a small child — for the past four years.

During his absence, he took an involuntary break from ballet.

Before he took his sabbatical, he had been burned out from dancing six days a week.

The absence made his love of dance grow stronger.

"I missed it though, especially the performances," Anzar said. "You get intimidated but once you perform or know there's a crowd coming, you ... want to own it."

Anzar feared he would be behind with his dancing, and knew with football he wouldn't be able to take classes.

The family returned earlier this year, and Anzar knew he wanted to both play football and get back into dance.

"I thought maybe I'd do a performance and maybe I'll do Mr. Stahlbaum," he said. "I ended up getting two parts even though I hadn't danced for two years."

In fact, Anzar got that (Stahlbaum) role and the role of the Snow King.

**Regaining his footing**

Like his break from football in middle school, for Anzar it wasn't a matter of if as much as when he'd regain his footing.

"Every sport can help you with the next," he said. "Football is just like getting used to formations and playing again. I knew it wasn't going to take that long compared to dance, where you have to learn how to count music again and how to

stand and use certain muscles again. There's a lot to it."

Once he got into the music, the rest came naturally.

"With choreography, once you get into music ... each note you remember a step," he said. "You kind of just go with it."

**A delicate balance**

Perhaps the toughest task for Anzar has been balancing school, football and ballet.

Much like dancing, he's had to maintain his balance with all facets of his life.

Luckily, his mom helps him.

"My mom helps me a lot," Anzar said. "I'd be late to probably everything. She's my transportation."

She also helps Anzar keep to his tight schedule, transporting him from practice to rehearsals.

The senior rarely has too much homework, but still finds time to do what he needs to.

"It works out," Anzar said. "I still get home in time to do an hour of homework if I need to before I go to bed."

For the past two weeks, Anzar has gone between football practice, four-hour rehearsals, state playoff games and six "Nutcracker in a Nutshell" performances (which took place in a two-day span).

But it's his senior year, so he knows he has to leave it all on the field and dance floor.

"It's been a fun senior year for me, so far," he said.

**'The Nutcracker'**

Anzar has performed in "The Nutcracker" before, including once when he was nine and received a standing ovation for performing a "Russian" dance.

His mother and the interim artistic director at the arts center, Nanine Wainwright, both believe his performances this year will top it.

"Jesse is great to watch," Wainwright said.

"I think this year his snowpiece will get a standing ovation," Jona Anzar said.

The timeless production will return to a more classical feel, thanks to Wainwright and much to Anzar's delight.

"Ms. Nanine has been doing a good job," he said. "It's more of a story or a tale."

Anzar said the production captures the spirit of Christmas — his favorite holiday.

"You're supposed to be into giving," he said. "To get this show done right, the atmosphere has to give off a Christmas vibe."

Anzar knows that people will enjoy the show.

"I'm looking forward to what people say after the first performance," he said. "I want to see what their opinion is. I think we'll get a lot of good compliments."

Jona Anzar knows regardless, she'll be proud.

"I love to watch him score a touchdown or intercept a pass or block right, it brings a lot of joy to me," she said. "But, when I see him on stage, there's no words to explain."

"To me, he is amazing. He's an amazing dancer, especially being gone for four years."

**A big-time Saturday**

If all goes according to plan, "The Nutcracker" will premier the same weekend that South would compete for a state title.

The weekend would be a perfect memory to add to his senior year.

There aren't many people who can say they got to dance in a ballet and win a state championship.

"It would be a big weekend for me," Anzar said. "And a busy week before that."

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