

Four miles isn't a long way when you're on a mission.

Thinking back, Jared Ferraez really doesn't remember if he had to ride four or five miles from his home to get to the New Hope High School boys soccer team's summer "practices," which involved running several miles.

But New Hope High soccer coach Andrew Olsen remembers the days before Ferraez had his driver's license fondly because they laid the foundation for future success.

"When the guys saw that, they knew Jared wanted to be here and wanted everybody to succeed," Olsen said. "I think that picked the intensity up a notch because they realized if he could do it, they could do it."

Ferraez maintained that work ethic throughout his career, earning a starting position in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade and carving out a niche as one of New Hope's most valuable players. In the process, Ferraez attracted the attention of college coaches and set himself up to accomplish another longtime goal.

On Monday, Ferraez realized that dream when he signed to play soccer at Mississippi University for Women.

"Day one since he came to us he has been a hard worker," said Olsen, who coached Ferraez since his seventh-grade year. "He is that type of guy who shows up every day and gives 100%."

"The last couple of years, he played on the wing for us, and he is a high-motor guy. He can play 80 minutes if you want him to and he is running box to box. Having him on the outside is a big reason we have been successful the last several years."

Ferraez will join New Hope boys soccer teammates Drew Pack and Josh Wilcox and Victor Gomez, who served as coach of the New Hope junior

high boys and girls soccer coach, at The W. Former New Hope players Cole Crawford, Trey Parnell and Jose Castillo also will be a part of The W men's soccer team in the fall.

All of those players had key roles in helping New Hope win five district championships in a row, advance to three Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA) North Half title games in the last four years and earn a trip to the state title game in 2022.

This past season, New Hope finished 12-6-2 and lost to Lafayette in the Class 5A North Half title game. New Hope has won 57 games in the last four years.

Ferraez laid his foundation by riding eight to 10 miles round trip on his father's old, white, mid-sized bicycle with blue handles to get his running in with his teammates. His motor didn't slow down when he was old enough to trade his bike for a car. Instead, he shifted his focus from earning a spot in the starting lineup to securing an opportunity to play soccer in college.

Looking back, Ferraez said all of the miles on the bike in the year he rode to practices paid off.

"The ride home wasn't as bad because the way I went was more downhill," Ferraez said. "It still took a while, and I was still tired because I had just done practice. What was worse was I would get to practice and I would be sweating and tired and then we would run miles."

Ferraez credited his father, Doug, and one of his brothers, Andrew "Zack", who is a Major in the Marines, for providing inspiration to his development as a soccer player. He said cracking the starting lineup motivated him to take the next step and to push even harder. Relying

on his faith, Ferraez said he focused on getting better every day. Now he will start the process from the beginning again.

“I am going to have to get back into it,” Ferraez said. “I am going to have to start now and see where I end up.”

Olsen said Ferraez improved as he earned more playing time and gained strength in the weight room and endurance through conditioning. As a result, Olsen said Ferraez’s confidence grew and fueled a work ethic that was instrumental in him receiving the Trojan Award this past season.

“It says a lot about his character and who he is as a person,” Olsen said. “I am excited to see how he is going to do.”

Olsen said Ferraez will go through a learning curve, but he is confident he will enter training camp with the right mind-set, even if coach BJ Pheasant asks Ferraez to ride his bicycle to practice.

“He’ll do it,” Olsen said. “I promise you if he is asked to do it, he’ll do it. That is what I love about him. He is not a me guy. He is a team guy.”

Don’t take Olsen’s word for it because Ferraez is more than willing to break out the bike again. If asked, Ferraez will try to find the flattest route to practice and avoid any hills.

“If I go back to that bike, I am going to have to say, ‘Hello old friend, it is time to get at it again,’” Ferraez said. “We have got to go. You have rested long enough.”