

Welcome to another edition of "*Virginia Athletics*" weekly podcast, which we record in our University Hall studio. I'm Jeff White from VirginiaSports.com, and today we're talking soccer. My guest is Olivia Hazelrigg, one of the leaders of the UVA women's team.

Olivia, I know you had a late night, or an early morning. Thank you for making time for this interview.

Thanks for having me.

So as a lot of UVA fans probably know, Thursday was a big, big night for the team. The Hoos defeated West Virginia, which is ranked either number one or number two nationally, depending on which poll you look at, in front of a large, vocal crowd in Morgantown.

Megan Reid had the golden goal for Virginia in 106th minute. That was quite a celebration after her goal, wasn't it?

Yeah, that was one of the best moments at UVA so far.

Watching online, I was struck by how close the West Virginia students were to UVA's goalkeeper, Laurel Ivory. Is that-- that's not customary, is it? I mean, they literally looked like they were three or four feet behind her with no fence or no wall between them.

Yeah, that was crazy. They were screaming out like personal information, her birthday. I think they sang Happy Birthday to her because--

Was it her birthday?

Next week it is. But she handled it so well. And she's so young. And she handled it like she's been in this forever. So--

What was just the whole scene like? You don't really get top 10 matchups. You don't regularly get those in the nonconference portion of the schedule. You don't always play them on the road. To get a contest like that in the second game of the season, what was that like?

Well, we knew it was going to be a pretty tough game going into it. But we prepared really like we would for any other game, the same priorities, compete, play, play our style of soccer. I think it's great early on to know what we're capable of. And I think it's just a great stepping stone for the rest of the season.

Tell me about the trip home. This is a side of the lives of student athletes that isn't always as glamorous as people on the outside may think. The game ends at I'm thinking roughly 9:15, maybe 9:20.

Around there.

So what's the chronology from that point on?

I mean, first we had to do our own little celebration in the locker room. But after that, it's pretty quick. Like shower, get dressed as quick as you can, grab your food, and we're back on the bus. Some people had 8:00 AM discussions, which you got to go, especially the first discussion of--

Yeah, this is the first week of school.

Yeah, so that was tough.

So you got back here when?

3:30ish AM.

Is it hard to sleep at that point when you get back? Are you--

Yeah.

--kind of wired at all when you finally get to your destination?

Yeah, it's like-- well, first you're all hyped up from the game. And then you can finally fall asleep on the bus. But then you get back up and you're awake and it's 5:00 AM. You're like OK, well, what do I do now?

What about, you had a class today?

Just one, yeah.

What time was that?

11:00. It was not bad.

So I traded emails after the game with Steve Swanson. And he called you the heart and soul of the team. He said you're the hardest working player and quite possibly the best student he's ever coached. Now Steve's in his 18th year at Virginia, his 28th season as a head coach overall. So that is high praise.

He also mentioned the foot injuries that have hindered you in your college career. How's your health right now? I

know you have not played yet this season, right?

Yeah. Well, I'm in practice full time. It's just kind of now a matter of managing it now that we kind of figured out what aggravates the foot and resulting stuff that's going up the chain. And sometimes maybe biking or just managing the amount of load I'm doing. It's just-- it's been a little bit frustrating.

What's the-- are all the injuries you've had connected to the same foot or all feet injuries?

It's oddly consistent. I've had two stress fractures in my left and two in my right in the navicular bone. But there's no good cause for it. Like, I got good bones. There's nothing crazy structurally. But I think at this point, it's just a matter of the amount of wear and tear. And there's just a few bony changes in my foot that are-- I mean, obviously you can't do too much about that.

So you just try to manage the injury as much as you can?

Yeah. And Steve and Bill and the whole staff and my teammates have been awesome and understanding. And it's been frustrating for me, but having really supportive coaches and teammates is awesome.

How do you go-- is it difficult to go about kind of being a leader in the position you're in when you're not playing as much as you would be normally?

It's difficult because it's hard to know how much weight you carry among your teammates if you're not the 90 minute, 110 minute player. But I know no matter where you are on the field or if you're on the bench, what you're doing is important. So whether you can be an example on the field or an example on the bench, cheering on, supporting, helping, I hope that goes a long way. I know it doesn't carry as much weight as on field stuff.

So there's an interesting breakdown of classes on this roster. There are only four fourth years, I believe-- Megan Reid, Veronica Latsko, Annaugh Madsen, and you.

Yeah.

Does that create maybe an unusual dynamic when, I mean, ideally or normally I think classes are a little bit more balanced throughout a program? What's it like to have such a small senior group in a class with so many second and third years, particularly? Because the first-year class is small, too.

Yeah, it's four, four, and then everybody in-between. It's pretty weird. I don't know, but we're a really tight group. That's the nice part about it, is we're all pretty much on the same page, and we know each other so well. But then also we're just really close with all the underclassmen and the third years. And so it really doesn't make too much of a difference. We're like a family, so.

You are a kinesiology major--

Yes.

--right? In the Curry School of Education. Where are you in regards to graduation? And what comes after graduation for you?

Well I'm graduating in December. I'm going to be here through the next semester and the year after that because I'm doing the exercise physiology master's program, which I'm really excited about. And my target is to get into medical school. So it's quite a bit of school.

Do you have doctors in your family?

No, I don't.

Technically, in terms of athletic eligibility, you're a redshirt junior, right?

Mm-hmm.

So you could come back and play next year?

Yes.

Is that something you're considering? Or have the injuries taken a toll on you?

That's something I'm struggling with right now, because especially after a night like last night, it's like how could I ever not continue. But I just want to do whatever's best for the team. And I'm going to be here no matter what. So I'll be with all these people I love so much. But it's just a discussion I need to have among my teammates, with Steve, and just do what's best for everyone involved.

So your hometown is Rolling Hills, California, right? Which, according to Google Maps, is about 12 miles west of Long Beach. How far are you from the Pacific Ocean?

Well, we live on a hill. And if you go like five minutes over the hill, you can see the ocean. Of course, everything's wind-y and traffic-y over there, so it probably takes a little bit longer to get there, but we're right on the beach basically.

Sometimes I wonder, when I talk to student athletes here who are from Southern California, why they leave there. Do you get tired of all the sunshine and just want to experience something different?

I'm not a very good California girl. I don't know. I mean, I just-- the soccer piece and always wanting to play in the ACC since I was little took me over here.

Did you have any family connections to the east coast or to UVA?

Nope.

So you also played basketball, field hockey, and softball in high school, right?

Oh, no. That's Megan Reid probably.

OK. Then the bio needs to be updated. But what other options did you have for college? I'm sure the west coast schools recruited you, too.

Yeah. It was a surprisingly quick and simple process. I mean, I had a couple of options in the ACC and a couple over on the west coast. But it really didn't take too much, because I visited here, I visited one other ACC school. And between those two I was like, I can't really go wrong. But I'm so, so happy I ended up here. This is the perfect place.

You were ranked number 22 nationally in your high school graduating class, which is 2014. You had played for the United States under-17 national team. At that point, were you injury free? And if so, what kind of aspirations did you have when you came here from a soccer standpoint?

Well, in terms of the national team thing, I got invited to a camp, but that was the extent of it. Man, soccer is just what I wanted to do. I wanted to go to the Olympics. I wanted to go to the World Cup. It was everything. And the injuries, first one, came back strong. Second one, came back strong. Third one, not so great. Fourth one, kind of messed things up for me a little bit.

But that's also kind of a blessing, because it helped me figure out maybe I want to explore other things through kinesiology, through pre-med, through becoming a doctor.

In 2015, the team traveled to California to play UCLA and Pepperdine early in the season. That was the season you ended up redshirting because of an injury. Was that trip bittersweet for you, to be back home, to be back in Southern California, but not be able to play?

Yeah, I mean, it was nice being where I'm from. And the hotel we were at, you could literally see the hill I live on from our balcony. And I was like, wow. So, yeah. I mean, it's tough not playing, especially at that point I didn't know if I was redshirting or not. But it's always good to be in the home environment and see your friends and family.

You often hear people say that athletes should pick a college where they would be happy if for some reason they couldn't participate in their sport. Were you thinking along those lines at all when you chose Virginia? Or has it just turned out that way?

I mean, I think when I was a little younger, when I committed here, I was probably like, oh, the soccer is just amazing. It doesn't really matter what else is going on. But in retrospect, Virginia is such a great place to end up, no matter what you're doing. So I'm extremely grateful.

You took part one summer, didn't you, in the summer in Valencia program in Spain. What year was that?

That was after our first year, so 2015.

What was that experience like? I saw something you wrote about it on the VAF website.

It was-- I'm very grateful that we got to do that, because one of the things about being a student athlete is it's hard to travel abroad and get those experiences in. But I went with Megan and a group of other athletes and a group of other UVA students. And it was awesome being in that soccer culture, because it's Spain.

Yeah, you actually got to play a lot of soccer, right?

Yeah. Me and Megan, we commuted out of Valencia to Torrent to play with this team. And it was just such an interesting way to learn about their culture and how many differences there are in women's soccer over there.

You went back to Europe, a different part of Europe, this spring in late May and early June when the team went to France and I guess Belgium and briefly Germany. What was that like? I talked to Steve Swanson about it and going to see the D-day beaches in Normandy and all that. Had you done anything like that before? And what sticks out to you about that trip?

Well, any time you can travel in Europe for 2 and 1/2 weeks with your best friends, that's amazing. But some of the experiences that Steve and the staff were adamant about us having, like visiting D-day-- those were really valuable.

I mean, we're obviously young and maybe not as familiar with the history of our country as we should be. But it really makes you appreciate the sacrifices people have made. It makes you even more grateful and proud to be part of this country. It was a very educational trip, but it was also great as a team, really bonded us even more.

You mentioned the closeness of the team. A trip the team takes every summer is the training camp experience in Michigan where you go there by bus, right, and come back by bus, which is a long trip.

Oh, yeah.

You have done that now four times, right? What is that like? And how does that bring the team together?

Well, so we have a couple days of training here. And then we have our 15-hour bus ride. It's a great way to bond the team initially, especially-- not so much this year, because we only got four in, but when we were getting 12 and 10 new people, it was a good way to unite there.

But it's also just an isolated environment, away from the distractions of Charlottesville or you have other things going on. You focus on soccer and you focus on your teammates. And it's really a valuable experience. It's also nice to escape the heat. It's not quite as humid up there.

After opening the season with two road games, Virginia plays its home opener Sunday afternoon against Liberty at Klockner Stadium. That is the start of a five-game home stand. How much of a home field advantage is Klockner for the team?

I mean, Klockner's the best field in the country, in my opinion. And I believe that was in a poll at some point. We have great fans. We love playing on Klockner. We can really-- it suits our style of play, playing fast, moving fast. I think people are even more fired up just to be at home too, so that helps a lot.

It can take a while for the identity of a college team to emerge. And the fall sports are kind of thrown together in the summer. They practice for a couple weeks and then they're competing, where the spring sports practice and train all fall and then they tackle it in the spring. Do you have a read on this team yet? There's obviously a lot of talent in there, but there are a lot of young players as well.

Yeah. I think we have a highly technical team. We have some really gifted players with the ball, and also we have some amazing athletes. But I think the most important thing is how hard everybody works. Everybody, whenever they go in the game or at practice, just puts everything they got into it. And the all-in is a huge part of the identity of our team. People fight for each other and truly care about what's happening.

I'm sure you have friends who play on other college soccer teams from back home. Does the Virginia experience-- soccer experience-- sound different than what can be found at other schools?

Yes. From what I've heard, there's maybe some more cliquy stuff, more drama stuff, more crazy coaches, more of things that really don't make you enjoy the game and your teammates going on at some other schools that I've heard about. And there's also great things, obviously. But I think here, I just feel very blessed to have ended up here in such a great environment.

So you are not necessarily in your final semester at UVA, but the final semester of your undergraduate career. What sticks out to you the most about the time you've spent in Charlottesville and at UVA, maybe as a student apart from soccer?

As a student? Well, I really found myself as a student. I came in here thinking, OK, soccer is my priority. School is very important to me too, but soccer is the priority. But I thought I was going to do econ. Heck no. I'm not doing econ. So it's been nice to kind of figure out what I want to-- what direction I want to go with my life academically.

So there are several California players on the team, right? Do you gravitate to each other?

Well, it's definitely-- we're proud of our California origin. But me and Brianna "Croc" played for the same club, so we especially gravitate-- Slammers family. But everybody's just all together, so.

Great. Well, listen. I know it was a long night for you, and I appreciate you stopping by. Best of luck this season academically and on the field. I hope you get back out there.

Thanks.

The 2017-18 athletic year is underway at the University. And there will be games and matches in town pretty much through the end of next spring. For schedules and information on all our teams, check VirginiaSports.com. As always, thanks for listening. And I'll be back next week with another podcast.