

Published June 13th, 2018

Ryan Nall - Three sport star heading to MIT

By Jon Kingdon



Ryan Nall Photos Gint Federas

If one was to look up the word student-athlete, it might show a picture of Ryan Nall.

Nall, who earned nine letters in high school (football, basketball and track), also found the time to study enough to get the grades to get accepted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

With the onset of club teams and so many athletes playing one sport, Nall took the opposite tack: "I've always had a love of sports and since I always played different sports and did not join a club teams, I did not burn out on any of it."

With so many games and practices during the week that would go into the evenings, balancing sports and studying is not easy. "The evening practices and games took a lot of time," Nall said. "The key was managing my time, but I still ended up doing my schoolwork late into the evening. It helped that none of the sports overlapped."

Nall appreciated the freedom his parents gave him to make his decisions on sports and academia: "My parents never really pressured me to play one sport or to go to a particular college. They allowed me to make my own decisions and let me do what I wanted to do."

Acalanes head football coach Floyd Burnsed spoke glowingly of Nall's play last season: "Ryan was one of the few two-way players for our team, playing offensive tackle and linebacker. As a tackle, he would take his man 10 yards down the field and put him on his back. Ryan was a leader by example, a quiet kid. He just did his job and did it well. He was all business. I know that he could have received scholarship offers from some Pac 12 schools but he always had MIT in the back of his mind."

Nall was named third team all-league in football and led the team in sacks.

Though MIT does have a football team, at this point Nall only anticipates going out for the track team.

Choosing a college for Nall came down to two choices: "I was really thinking about go to Cal as a preferred walk-on (like his college teammate Robbie Rowell). However, I am looking to be a mechanical engineer and when I was accepted to MIT, I jumped at that."

It's the grades not sports that ultimately get one accepted to MIT, which Nall understood and appreciated where Acalanes put its priorities: "Acalanes was very serious about academics and I put that first and sports second."

In a year when the basketball team he played on went to the playoffs and when he went to the state finals in track for the shot and discus, what was Nall's highlight his senior year? "Hands down, it was beating Campolindo in football (for the first time since 2010) when the fans stormed the field," Nall said.

Nall spoke highly of Coach Burnsed: "He brought in a very experienced staff of coaches and he turned the program around. I just wish he had been here earlier. In a couple of years, this program will be really successful."

Nall appreciated "the great coaching at Acalanes in all the sports, particularly my track coach Chris Clark."

Clark spoke highly of Nall as a person, a student and as an athlete: "Ryan's physical prowess is very evident but he did not carry himself that way. He's strong as an ox but Ryan's very unassuming with zero ego. He's a brilliant student and very analytical. He's a grinder. Academics came first for him and he was only late if he had a late class. His time management was on point."

As impressed as Clark is with Nall's three-sport skills, he feels he may have only scratched the surface in track due to his playing basketball: "If we could have had Ryan for the three months he played basketball, there's no telling what he could have done. Ryan's just a great, unassuming kid that would do anything for his teammates."

It wasn't just the coaches that helped Nall and the other athletes when they were underclassman. It was the

seniors like Jack Brydon, said Nall. "We all looked up to him and he was very supportive and showed me the ropes."

When Nall leaves for MIT, it's obvious that he will bring with him a confluence of his family, his school, his coaches and his classmates.



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