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Grant Harper - Leadership on and off the field

By Jon Kingdon



Grant Harper Photo Gint Federas

For every college bound student, it's very much up in the air as to what to expect next fall. For Grant Harper, a soon-to-be Campolindo graduate who will be attending UC Davis in the fall, the football program is another aspect of college that remains somewhat uncertain.

Harper, who was the starting quarterback the last two years for the Cougars and backed up John Torchio as a sophomore, finished his career with a 30-11 won-loss record having completed 406 out of 661 passes for 6,096 yards with 62 touchdowns and only 15 interceptions.

Harper focused on the major sports growing up in Orinda: "I played in the MOL flag football league growing up and with the tackle football programs in Walnut Creek and San Ramon, along with playing baseball for Max Luckhurst through high school and basketball up until

the eighth grade. My Dad, (Scott), coached me in football and baseball growing up and he still coaches at Monte Vista High School."

Coming into his freshman year at Campolindo, varsity head football coach Kevin Macy was already familiar with Harper's ability as he had attended the Campolindo Youth Football summer program from third grade to eighth grade. Through high school, they developed a relationship of great mutual respect, said Harper: "Coach Macy and I went through everything together. My friends and I would even hang out with him at lunch. That's how close we became. Coach Macy emphasized being a competitor and proving all the doubters wrong. He would toughen you up as your career got going because he would know what you were capable of and so much more."

According to Macy, this past season, Harper's leadership skills were on display as well as his passing ability: "Grant had a brand new group of everything, so much of his energy had to go into not only knowing everyone else's job but also having to communicate to them, making sure they knew what they were doing and that was a lot for him to do as both a junior and senior. It wasn't that we didn't have bright kids; there just were very few returners each season. He just has that natural composure in the huddle and at the line of scrimmage and during the play. When his teammates saw that, they knew they were seeing something special."

It was a challenge that Harper met head on: "That was something that I wasn't quite used to. We had five senior offensive linemen my junior year. This year, our only returning receiver had only played a little the prior year so Ryan O'Neil at running back and Charlie Craig, our tight end, were essentially the only returning starters on offense. It became a normal thing to tell most of the players where to go every play."

Dan Hawkins, the head coach at UC Davis, was aware of Harper's ability: "He's came to our QB camp so we knew about him then. We really like his whole approach to the game. He is extremely accurate and is a smooth thrower and he's really into the x's and o's and the science of football and the culture of quarterbacking. You have to have the grades to get in here, which helps because we give our quarterbacks so much autonomy and so much ownership of what is going on. Grant is all of those things rolled into one."

It did not take long for Harper to know that UC Davis was where he wanted to go after high school: "Besides being impressed with their facilities, I was taught a lot about life and immediately after that camp, I knew I wanted to go there. Later, Coach Hawkins said he expected big things from me and soon after made the offer to me. I had other opportunities, but in my heart, I knew that Davis was where I wanted to go."

Still, there was far more to Harper's high school experience than football. There was his becoming an Eagle Scout the winter of his junior year, something he began working on in middle school. "It was a great experience and there was a lot of work that went into it with Troop 212. I'm glad I went through it and when Coach Hawkins found out that I was an Eagle Scout, his face just lit up, which was a cool moment for me."

As a freshman, Harper volunteered with the Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church to go to Tijuana, Mexico: "I got to spend time with a family who I helped to build a house for. The experience gave me a new perspective on life."

After finishing at Campolindo on May 29, Harper will particularly look back with great appreciation to the teachers there: "There were all very interactive with us. They personalized things, wanting to make sure to

know what is going on with us, establishing a trust with me and my classmates."

For all of these reasons, it's why Coach Hawkins feels Harper will fit so well into the UC Davis academic and athletic philosophy: "It revolves around several things - a concept of excellence with class and a balance of life attitude. We want to win and expect to win championships but we also get that there are other things in life as well and we have an appreciation for that and incorporate that in our program as well. Kids have been coming here for a long time to get a great education and to play great football and we try to combine those two so it's not either or, it's not one or the other, it's both."

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