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Tiger Garcia on the 'Rhodes' to success

By Jon Kingdon



Tiger Garcia in the State Championship game in 2014 Photos Gint Federas
in the last few seconds was a great way to end my

If there has been one constant in Tiger Garcia's life besides his participation in sports and an excellence in academics (3.92 GPA at UC Davis), it has been having to consistently correct people who mispronounce his first name: "It's Tee-Gur. My great grandfather was from Germany and his nickname was Teegur, which is tiger in German. My father's side is Navajo and Spanish so it's a big mix there."

With incredible family support, academics and athletics have served as a strong foundation throughout Garcia's life, culminating with his currently applying for a prestigious Rhodes Scholarship.

Growing up in Moraga, Garcia played basketball, soccer and baseball, but only one year of football due to not making the weight minimum until his freshman year in high school.

Even at a young age, Campolindo head coach Kevin Macy was there for Garcia who attended Macy's summer camp every year up until high school: "Coach Macy was awesome. He has always believed and been there for me. When I was 7, Coach would let me stand on the sidelines next to my brother, Oliver, who was in full uniform. We have a photo of us together and to this day it hangs proudly in my mom's house."

As a senior in 2014, Garcia started at safety for the Campolindo football team that won the state championship, forcing a fumble that was returned for the winning score and then recovering a fumble on the ensuing kickoff to clinch the victory: "Winning the game

high school football career. I got to live my dream in that moment."
If that wasn't enough, Garcia also played on the Cougar's basketball team that made it to the state championship game, though losing to Damien High School: "I missed the first 10 games because of the extended football season but I did play a lot, hit a three-pointer in the championship game."

Garcia's father (Sam) did not allow Tiger and his brothers (Oliver and Lev) to overlook their studies: "Academics has always been important in our life. My father would not allow us to play sports unless we had the grades, though it was never an issue. He always stressed how it would open up doors later in our lives."

The classes at Campolindo proved to be consistent with the standards that Garcia's father set for him: "Campolindo was pretty tough academically. It really forced me to learn how to manage my time. The teachers really pushed us and made us work hard. Overall, the teachers were superb and Lamorinda seems to get the best teachers which really helps the students get better outcomes in college because of how much they made us work in all of our classes."

Looking for a top academic college and wanting to continue to play football, despite only weighing 160 pounds, Garcia chose to attend UC Davis: "I was the smallest and skinniest guy on the team so I redshirted as a freshman. After that I worked on putting on more weight (185) and played mostly on special teams to earn the respect of my teammates and coaches, culminating in my senior year when I earned a scholarship, became a starter and was voted co-captain by my peers. I started at the bottom and eventually was elevated to the highest position on the team. I liked the journey and it taught me a lot. I stuck to my dream even though a lot of people told me it wasn't possible, I still made it happen and I'm grateful to God for that opportunity."

After being named Academic All-American twice, Garcia graduated with a degree in managerial economics. Garcia was then named the initial recipient of the Bruce Edwards EVO Award at Davis. "It acknowledged a student's long-term plans - graduating, determining where you are going and having a plan going forward," Garcia said.

Last March, Garcia got a position with Apple in a financial development program, though with the onset of the coronavirus, he only spent one week in the office, spending the rest of his contract working out of his home.

"It was a stressful time, but I learned a lot about corporate finance and myself. My job was analyzing the newest iPad Pro's sales versus previous generations and what was happening on a world-wide basis, looking at all iPad Pro sales in every country. I had a lot of fun talking to finance teams from Japan, China, Singapore, Italy and France. It also helped to raise my cultural understanding, talking with people from places I've never been to and being exposed to cultures that I had never enacted with."

Though never lacking in confidence, Garcia's time at UC Davis strengthened his ability to not be intimidated by any challenge, he said: "The big thing that I learned at Davis was that I could do anything that I wanted, that I could choose the life that I desired and to pursue my dreams regardless of what

society tells me is possible. It allowed me to believe that I did not have to lock myself inside a box and to have the freedom to choose the path I wanted to move forward."

With such a background, Garcia began the application process for a Rhodes Scholarship, an international postgraduate award for students to study in London, England. Recipients of this award receive a full scholarship to the University of Oxford, with a monthly stipend that covers accommodations and living expenses. It was established in 1902 by diamond magnate Cecil Rhodes and is widely considered the most prestigious international scholarship with only 32 Americans out of 3,000 applicants accepted each year.

When it was suggested by Garcia's academic advisor that he would be a great fit for a Rhodes Scholarship, he met with Scott Palmer, the Prestigious Scholarships Advisor at Davis who has guided him through the process. It consists of multiple phases and requirements, ranging from the obvious (government-issued ID, transcript) to the strategic (building a CV, identifying 5-8 references). Garcia has spent hours researching Oxford's curriculum and faculty to strengthen his application. "I've been reaching out to the professors in the United Kingdom," Garcia said. "My goal is to build a relationship with them and show my interest in the program. Personal contact runs the world. It's awfully hard to apply for something cold or try to get a job without personal contact with the company. I think it's the biggest thing when you're an applicant anywhere. Reach out and touch base with someone beforehand. Otherwise, you're just another name in the pile."

One of the eight people who are writing a reference for Garcia is UC Davis Professor Jerry Lundblad, who had Garcia in two classes - Organizational Behavior and Corporate Finance - someone who did not find it difficult to share his feelings about Garcia: "He was a top notch student. I got to know him well and often talked with him about his career paths. I played rugby at Berkeley and I understood how difficult it was to be a good athlete and student at a big university. During the season, he would come in my office and he would look tired, but he would always ask very good questions. He is very mature with a good presence and is comfortable in his own skin. I stressed that he was more than just a good student. He is a great candidate for this kind of experience in his life."

Garcia will soon be submitting his application and after final interviews around Thanksgiving, the final decision as to who will be accepted will be made soon after that.

At this point, Garcia has been most interested in data business and financial analytics: "I like to do the research and digging into numbers to come up with powerful insights." He is also looking into computer-based financial advising. "With technology, financial advice can be scaled to be much more accessible to all income classes," Garcia said. "It will allow more people to get premier financial and investment advice and live a financially responsible life due to the advancements in technology."

Garcia recently married another athlete, his wife Lauren, who threw the javelin for Sacramento State. As with most things, Garcia's wedding was outside the box, Garcia said: "Lauren brought up the idea of my younger brother Lev officiating our wedding. He loves Jesus and is a special man and was only 20 at the time. He got a pastoral license and we now refer to him as Rev Lev. It was a surprise to everyone, and he knocked it out of the park."

Even with such an extensive academic background, Garcia still points to what he took away from sports for much of his success: "Athletics makes you focus on daily development. The self-growth is huge aspect in developing your personae and becoming more confident. When you know you're striving to be the best person you can be, it helps you to have a belief in yourself and to focus on what you can accomplish and how you can grow. That confidence has to be present on the field for you to be successful. Athletics has taught me how to fight for my dreams and boosted a belief in myself."

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