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Megan Reid's serpentine path to professional soccer

By Jon Kingdon



Megan Reid Photo Angel City FC

Growing up in Lamorinda, there's been no shortage of sports to play, beginning at an early age. For many people, it's a matter of picking one sport and playing it exclusively, not just for their school but also playing that sport for a club team once the schools' season has completed.

For Orinda native Megan Reid, one sport or two sports or three sports wasn't going to do it. She would compete for two years on the Miramonte track team (100, 200, 400, threw the shot and pole vaulted - all-conference), two years on the water polo team (all-conference) and four years of soccer (all-conference and two times Diablo Foothills Conference player of the year) and basketball (all-conference) along with playing club soccer whenever the school soccer season was completed.

The basketball team in Reid's four years had a combined won-lost record of 111-14 and she was all-conference in basketball. Reid played two years at Miramonte with WNBA star Sabrina Ionescu. "I knew Sab since she was tiny before she hit her growth spurt," Reid said. "I assume she's similar to the way she was in high school - an extremely humble and kind human being who was eager to learn and just perform for her team. I'm really proud to say that I got to play with her."

"I really enjoyed growing up in Orinda," Reid said. "I feel really lucky to have lived in such a safe place with great schools and great sports. There were a lot of great teachers that I will occasionally have contact with like Ms. (Cynthia) Boyko and some other teachers that I see when I'm home. I'm still in contact with my basketball

coach, Kelly Sopak, and my soccer coach Mohammed Mohammed along with a lot of people from Miramonte. My brother Danny played baseball for Vince Dell'Aquila and is still in the area and my sister Katie who played basketball for Darrell Hiroshima is out in Colorado."

Time management became an essential tool for Reid between practices and games while maintaining a top-grade point average. "I would always take six periods which gave me an extra 45 minutes to an hour so I could go home, grab some food, and then come back for practice(s). That could go on from 3:45 to 8 or 9 o'clock. I would eat dinner around 9:30 and then study from 10 to 12:30 just to fit everything in the day and then repeat the process. I didn't get much sleep in my high school years."

Reid played offense for the soccer team at Miramonte but was moved to defense soon after she began attending the University of Virginia. "I loved being a forward but when I got to the University of Virginia, I was playing behind a lot of very skilled players," Reid said. "My coach, Steve Swanson, was known for converting players to different positions, particularly converting forwards into outside backs because they already had this attacking urge and he would then have a type of two-in-one player. I played outside right and left back and in my last two years, I played a lot of centerback and outside back. It was a difficult transition with a big learning curve but at the end of the day, my mindset was to do whatever the team needed in the end, I loved it."

Leaving high school for college, as a rule, is more difficult academically and athletically. For Reid, it was easier. "Way easier," she said. "In high school, with four hours of sports and eight hours in school, I would have to start my homework at lunch. In college classes were 2-3 hours of class each day and soccer practices that would last from one to two hours and then you were gone."

Reid was a foreign affairs major and had considered applying to the Air Force Academy for a career in military intelligence. Having lost her mother at an early age, working for the military was something that Reid's family did not get behind. "My family was not thrilled about my going into the military and my dad (George) encouraged me to do something that would keep me closer to him and my siblings."

When her father unexpectedly passed away in her junior year at Virginia, it hit Reid particularly hard. "It was a really difficult time emotionally for me and when you have a rough time emotionally, it translates to your physical abilities," Reid said. "Sports was what my dad and I shared. Every weekend it was us going to some tournament in L.A. or Oregon or wherever. So, when I lost him, my love for the sport dwindled and it was just a constant reminder of him. Still, I had made a commitment to the team that I wanted to finish."

Coach Swanson had always been more than just a coach to Reid and at this trying time in her life, he provided great support for her. "Steve has been a very important figure in my life," Reid said. "He was big time even before I lost my dad. After he passed away, Steve helped me find my way and was extremely positive. He cared about me and my teammates not just as players but as people. At that point, I thought I just needed to move on to new things to make me happy and allow me to start making new memories."

That new thing was preparing for a career as a firefighter and studying to be an emergency medical technician (EMT), something her father recommended in lieu of a military career because he felt it had the qualities and encompassed what a military career offered. "Going into my senior year at UVA, I started volunteering at a fire station and also began studying to become an EMT. I was just looking for something to make me happy and I remembered my father's words about firefighting. The people at the station were like a mini-family which helped get me through a really difficult time and that's why I came love it so much."

Reid received her firefighter one certification right after graduating from Virginia. When Reid returned to California she began working as an emergency department technician in San Francisco before moving on to John Muir Hospital in Walnut Creek, earning her EMT paramedic license from the state of California in August 2021. "With 80% of all calls for firefighters being medical, I decided to get my paramedic certification after I found out that having this skill helps to elevate one's status and gets you higher up in the recruitment process of being a firefighter," Reid said.

The skills Reid learned on the soccer field in working together, transferred over to her work in medicine: "Working as a paramedic in a crew, you knew what people's responsibilities are without asking and the longer we worked together, the more we operated like a well-oiled machine."

Ironically, it was when Reid was working as an intern at a fire station in Sonoma that she rediscovered her love of soccer. "Our fire captain loved playing soccer," Reid said. "We would clear out the fire trucks and ambulances and set up two foam rollers and we would play 2-on-2 and I had a blast playing the game. I was able to separate sports from the loss of my dad and realized how much I loved the sport of soccer despite not having really touched the ball in years."

After playing for the Lamorinda Soccer team and in Denmark for a short time, Reid heard from Swanson who let her know that he had gotten her on the discover list and a tryout for the San Diego Wave of the National Women's Soccer League. Reid had time to get back in playing shape and even flew back to Virginia to train with Swanson before reporting to San Diego. After a month, Reid was released by San Diego and the first call she made was to Swanson who was then able to get Reid a tryout with the Angel City FC and she reported immediately to Chula Vista with the team.

Though she did not make the team when they broke training camp, Head Coach Freya Coombe suggested to Reid that she return to Los Angeles and continue training with the team. After 2 1/2 weeks, Reid was offered a contract and officially became a professional soccer player.

Not only did Reid make the team, but she stepped in immediately as a defensive starter. "There were many injuries in preseason to our defenders, so I got a chance to start," Reid said. "It's been challenging but a lot of fun and I've been loving it."

For Reid, playing at a major Division I college was similar to playing with Angel City with the main differences being the speed of play and the quality of the players, though on another level she was still having some problems seeing herself as a professional. "At Virginia, Coach Swanson demanded attitude and effort from everyone every day and that's similar to what we have to bring with Angel City. The weirdest thing is for me to see this is a job. In my mind, I'm just playing a sport like I always have and the idea that I'm at work is still one that I don't fully grasp. It seems odd to have grown adults asking for photos and autographs and they are so invested in the team and it's been a little surreal."

When her soccer career concludes, something Reid is not anticipating happening too soon, she already has a tentative plan: "I know when I'm done with soccer, I'll be going back to a fire station and also working as an EMT but not until I am finished playing. At the end of the day, you have to be careful because right now my body is my livelihood and being able to play is important. Looking at the longevity of your body is important. Soccer has just become fun for me. I'm going to stick with it for as long as I love it, or until my body breaks down - one of the two."

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