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Softball and engineering for Haley Stripling next year at Rutgers

By Jon Kingdon



Haley Stripling Photo Rutgers athletics

went to College Park High School," Stripling said. "My older sister, Mia, swam but hurt her shoulder and that's why I did not get into competitive swimming."

It was in her second year of playing in the Houseball League in Pleasant Hill at the age of 8 when softball began to be the primary sport for Stripling. "After my grandmother signed me up for softball, I fell in love with it," Stripling said. "I began to be noticed by the other players and their parents. My mother and grandmother both really helped me to improve."

There have been a number of coaches that have been instrumental in Stripling's development. "I'm a natural righty but when I started playing travel ball, my coach, Mike Saulstitch, saw my speed and wanted to put me on the left side," Stripling said. "He taught me how to slap and hit every type of bunt. I'm very thankful that he put me on the left side because otherwise I wouldn't be the player that I am today with all the skills and the threat that I am from that side. He also taught our team that it was more than just a game and that he really cared about us as individuals."

Had she not suffered an injury, Stripling would have played for Ernie and Lindsey Munoz on the Lady Magic team over the summer. "I still take hitting lessons with Ernie at his facility every two weeks, and they have been crucial for me because without those lessons, I can see the difference in my confidence and my performance. Ernie is one of the best hitting coaches out here and I'm thankful that I could work with him."

It all then led to playing for Acalanes and Victor Silva. "You can't play for Victor and not have fun," Stripling said. "He can be very witty and funny, and it was never a dull moment with him. He's a very good coach that knows a lot about the game and really cared for us and about what we wanted and how we wanted to improve."

For Silva, Stripling's intangibles were as valuable as her physical talents. "This year was my favorite team because I did not have to do much," Silva said. "If Haley thought the players needed to be jumped on, she would jump on them. If she felt they needed encouragement, she would encourage them. It was like having another coach out there for me. She set a great example for the underclassmen and hopefully they have learned from her example. She was the perfect role model on and off the field. She is one of the few that made time for the younger players. If an underclassman had a tough day or had problems figuring something out, Haley would go over and talk with her and work things out, which was an example of how she made things easier for me."

In choosing to attend Rutgers University, Stripling knows what she is getting into, weather wise. "I've always lived in California and will have to adjust to living with four seasons. In my first visit to Rutgers, it was 16 degrees, and I bought the clothing that I would need for the winter. The weather will be just fine and won't bother me as much as I thought it would."

Rutgers will be more than softball for Stripling, already choosing to major in Biomedical Engineering. Besides being named the Acalanes Female Athlete of the Year, Stripling also earned a scholar-athlete award all four years. "My dad is an engineer, so I got some wisdom from him from his experience as an athlete and an engineering student," Stripling said. "I took an engineering class at Acalanes, and it was a lot of fun. I've always loved creating things, problem solving and doing puzzles. Engineering is a good balance between creating things and problem solving and I can use my creativity and logic to solve my way out of things."

When Haley Stripling was a freshman, she joined an Acalanes team that was led by Morgan Salmon and Kaylee Pond, both of whom would go on to play Division I softball, Salmon at the University of Santa Clara and Pond at Iowa State and the University of California. Stripling will be following in their footsteps next year by attending and playing softball at Rutgers University.

"Haley belongs on the same level as Morgan and Kaylee," Acalanes head coach Victor Silva said. "From her freshman year, she got stronger, doing a lot of weight work, and really built herself up. Every single game, I appreciated her more and more. For the last two years, she has been the best player on our team."

Stripling comes by her athletic ability honestly. "My dad, (Shaharom) was a swimmer at UC Santa Barbara and my mother, (Alison) played a number of sports when she

Haley was as impressed with Rutgers head coach Kristen Butler as she was with the university. "It was just finding the right school for me, and my parents really supported me in my decision. I knew that (Rutgers Head) Coach Kristen Butler was a good coach because I would just talk non-stop with her, and I could tell that they really cared about me equally as a person and as a player and how I play the game. I want to be available for whatever Coach Butler wants me to do because coming in as a freshman, it's going to be hard to get playing time but whatever the team will need from me, I will do the best that I can with whatever is asked of me."

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