

SPORTS

Camas' Villaluz heading to Oregon State as walk-on

Volleyball player called 'one of the hardest working'

By **DOUG FLANAGAN**
Post-Record staff writer

To reach her full potential as a volleyball player, Emma Villaluz knows that she has to be ready for any scenario, stay positive with her teammates, learn from her mistakes, try to control only what she can control and, most importantly, have confidence in her abilities. She believes that she's good enough to compete with virtually anybody, no matter how talented they may be.

"I know that when I step onto the court," she said, "I deserve to be there."

That belief will be tested this fall when the recent Camas High School (CHS) graduate joins Oregon State University's volleyball team as a walk-on.

"I had already applied to OSU, so it was a place I was interested in already," she said. "I've been to the campus, and I had a feeling that it would be a good fit for me. I played club (volleyball) with a couple of girls on the team, and they reached out to me and talked about their experiences, and that was a green flag moving forward. And of course playing in the Pac-12 Conference is a big draw. (OSU) can't guarantee me any (scholarship) money — not yet, at least — but I'm honestly excited to be a part of the team."

Villaluz had received interest from smaller schools in Indiana in California, but was waiting to play in front of recruiters at a club tournament in Denver in mid-March before finalizing her decision. She was "freaked out" after the tournament was cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak, which forced some programs to shut down their recruiting efforts, but kept in contact with OSU coaches, who called in late April to offer her a spot on their squad.

"Emma always wants to improve with the best, so going to a small school was not an option, even though playing time was virtually a guarantee," said Chris Osborn, a coach for the Beaverton, Oregon-based Athena Volleyball Club, which Villaluz joined two



POST-RECORD FILE PHOTO

Recent Camas High School graduate Emma Villaluz will walk on to the Oregon State University volleyball team in the fall.

years ago. "She wants to work for every point and (test) her skill amongst the best players she can get around. It's never been enough for her to be a 'big fish in a little pond.' She wants to be the 'whale in the ocean,' and is willing to work for it."

Villaluz established herself as one of the best prep volleyball players in Washington during her senior season, earning her second consecutive 4A Greater St. Helens League player of the year honor while leading the Papermakers to the 4A state tournament.

"I have watched Emma play volleyball since she was in middle school, and I just knew this girl was different," Papermakers coach Michelle Ford said. "She's so humble, and one of the hardest working student-athletes I have ever encountered. She would never say she was good, but (everybody in) the state of Washington knows that Emma is good. For her height and spunk, she is unstoppable."

Villaluz started playing volleyball when she was 10, joined the Vancouver-based Excel Northwest Volleyball Club the following year and moved to Athena when she was 16.

"Being on the court with my teammates is a big thing for me," she said. "I'm usually pretty close with my teammates, and friends with them off the court. I also love the rush I get from long rallies — the sweat, the hard work, finishing with a point, it's the greatest feeling. It's really exciting."

The 5-foot-5 Villaluz will be a libero/defensive specialist for OSU, but

played almost every other position during her time as a Papermaker.

"My mental (approach) has changed so much," she said. "I used to be focused on myself, what position I was playing and what I had to do, but as I began to play different positions, I started to look at my teammates differently and better understand their responsibilities. Playing different positions made me appreciate all of the different work that everybody does, and made me a better player."

Villaluz plans to study bio-health science at OSU.

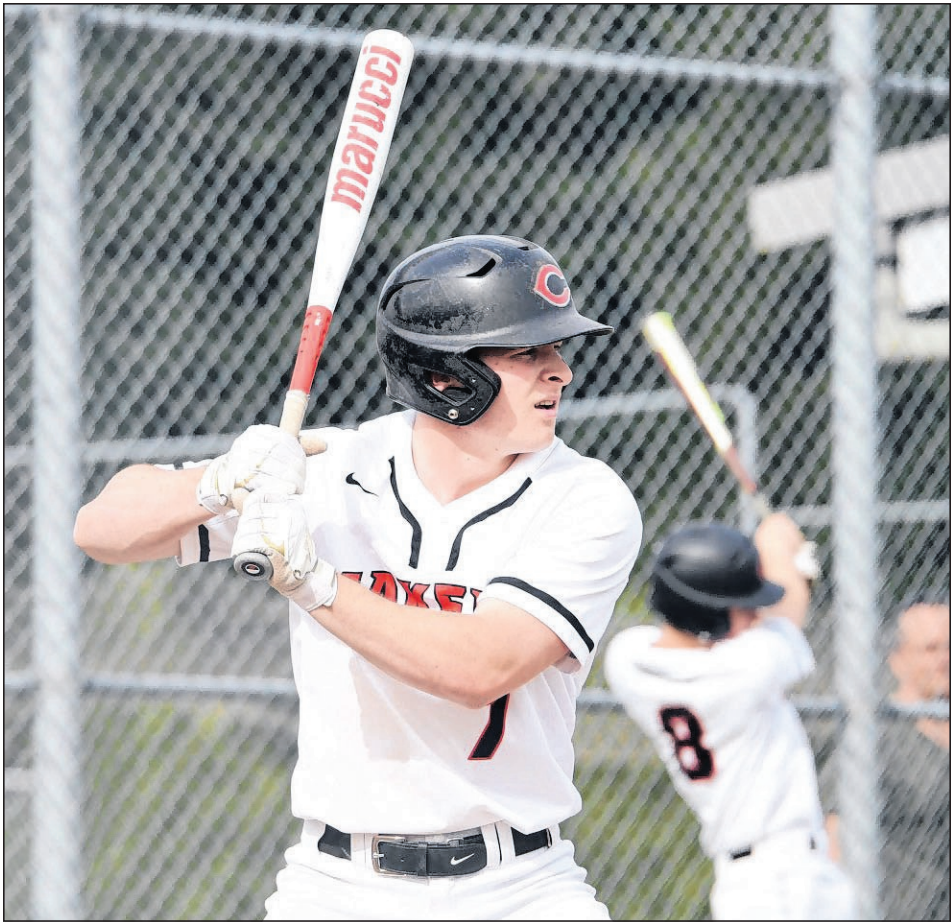
"Emma was an amazing student," said CHS science teacher Charlotte Waters. "She paid attention in class, and was very good about asking clarifying questions and getting help when she didn't understand a particular problem. Honestly, the best part (about her) is that she is unbelievably kind. I don't think she ever let her bad days show. She smiled and seemed genuinely happy to be at school. I was always impressed that a kid could be that good at a sport, and so intelligent and kind, and still remain humble. I was so excited to hear that she is going to OSU. I think she will be great."

Villaluz has been interested in science for as long as she can remember, no doubt partially influenced by her parents, who are dentists.

"Science just comes (easy) to me. I understand it very well," she said. "For my senior project, I shadowed a surgeon, and that was good for me; I wasn't really grossed out by the blood while watching surgeries or anything like that. My big thing is I want to work with people and care for others. I've thought about going pre-med, which I know requires a lot of school, but I'm ready for it."

Even though Villaluz's life still revolves around volleyball, she's embraced the opportunity to revisit one of her old hobbies after the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered schools in mid-March.

"Lately I've been baking a lot," she said. "I make some pretty good chocolate chip cookies, if I do say so myself. When I was young, I used to bake with my grandmother all of the time. Whenever I went over to her house, we'd bake a cake and she'd show me tips and tricks. I had to give it up as I got more and more into volleyball, but now I'm starting to get back into it. My mom is actually getting upset with me because I'm baking so much, and she thinks it's time I take a break."



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO COURTESY OF KRIS CAVIN

Tyler Forner stares down a pitcher during a 2019 game. The recent Camas High School graduate signed with the San Francisco Giants in June.

GIANT LEAP

Camas High graduate signs with San Francisco Giants

By **DOUG FLANAGAN**
Post-Record staff writer

When Tyler Forner was 9 months old, his family moved from Vancouver to San Mateo, California. They relocated to Camas five years later, but have made several visits to the Bay Area since then. Those trips allowed Forner to attend several San Francisco Giants games and become a devoted fan of the Major League Baseball team.

"Every time we went (to Oracle Park), he would say, 'This is such a neat place. I'm going to play here someday,'" said Wade Forner, Tyler's father.

That's a bold proclamation, to be sure. But after signing a contract with the Giants last month, the recent Camas High School (CHS) graduate has put himself in a position to make good on that promise with a lot of hard work and a little good fortune.

"(Signing with the Giants) was definitely a dream come true," Tyler said. "I've been a Giants fan basically my whole life."

"Every time we went to that stadium, something magical happened," Wade added. "The first time, we got a suite, and (radio station KNBR) took care of us. The next time, Tyler was allowed to go down on the field and sit in the dugout and meet people in the Giants' front office. The next time we sat behind home plate to watch the Giants play the Cubs, who went on to win the World Series that year. Whenever he calls me, a photo of him taken when he was 12 at a Giants game pops up. He's been a Giants fan for a long time, so when they showed interest, he kind of locked in on them. (Signing with the Giants) just made sense the whole time."

Tyler received offers to play for highly regarded college programs such as Gonzaga University, the University of Portland and Seattle University, but told his father "probably about 100 times" that he was more interested in attending "the University of Ma-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO COURTESY OF WADE FORNER

Tyler Forner visits AT&T Park in San Francisco in 2016. Forner, a recent Camas High School graduate, signed with the Giants in June.

jor League Baseball."

"I have always been drawn toward pro ball," Tyler said. "I never really liked school, to be honest, so when I (determined) that going pro right out of high school would be an option for me, I knew that was the next step. I like the idea of going straight to the minor leagues and getting trained by professionals. I don't want to get comfortable. I want to be put into an uncomfortable position, grind, get better and move up."

Tyler was prepared to be selected in Major League Baseball's amateur draft, held June 10-11. But the draft was shortened from its typical 40 rounds to five due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and he wasn't chosen. Along with every other undrafted player, Tyler was declared a free agent, and able to sign with any organization for a maximum signing bonus of \$20,000.

"I have a lot of confidence in myself," Tyler said, "so I knew that if I could've played my senior year, my draft stock possibly could've been (elevated). Even without the senior year, I was told that there was a chance that I could be drafted. I knew the chances of that happening were super slim, but the Giants made it real clear that they wanted me."

In a "normal" year, Tyler most likely would've been drafted, assigned to one of his organization's minor league teams and began his pro career this summer. After the Minor League Baseball season was canceled due to the pandemic, however, Tyler can't do anything but wait for the Giants to decide what they want to do with him and the rest of their minor leaguers.

"Things are completely different this year," he said. "I've heard some rumors, but (the situation) is a little unknown. I trust what God has in store

and that everything will fall into place. I get to call baseball my job now, so I can wait here. I have no problem waiting for the call."

Tyler's talents have long been known in the Camas athletic community. At CHS he was a two-sport star, earning first-team all-4A Greater St. Helens League honors as an outfielder and all-state accolades as a linebacker in 2019.

Tyler plays "a very aggressive style of baseball," according to Papermakers coach Stephen Short. "He brings a football mentality to the baseball field, which is awesome."

"He's what I would call a game-wrecker," said Nik Lubisich, Forner's coach for the Vancouver-based Northwest Futures academy. "He destroys a box score. He dominated the high school level, and I think he would've dominated college level. His speed/power combination is a rare thing to find. He's got a lot to learn, but he's got a lot of upside. He has a chance to be a complete stud. He's a special talent."

Tyler doesn't define himself solely by his athletic accomplishments, however.

"A lot of people know what a great athlete he is, but people who don't know he's a great athlete will talk about the kind of character that he has," Lubisich said. "He will be a leader in an organization. That's one of the big reasons why the Giants fell in love with him. On the Zoom calls, (Giants executives) kept talking about his personality and confidence and character. Those things matter to them."

Tyler has already attracted the attention of not only the Giants' leaders, but baseball analysts and media members in the Bay Area. A recent headline on KNBR.com reads, "Giants might have a 'steal' in undrafted free agent Tyler Forner."

And he's already dreaming of making many more visits to Oracle Park in the future — as a player, not a fan.

"I wouldn't put it past him to make it (to the major leagues)," Short said. "He doesn't care what anyone else thinks. He's a very religious person, puts his faith in God, has his own goals and is set on accomplishing them. He'll be successful in whatever chooses to do, but if you ask him, there's only one thing that he's going to be doing as a professional — play baseball."

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