

WHERE TO

A resource dedicated to student-athletes and their Life after Notre Dame.



LAND

APRIL 2024

YOU ARE MORE THAN QUALIFIED

By Jemma Yeadon (ND '20)



I started playing volleyball at 7 years old, spurred on by my older sister Lorial's success in the sport and my relentless desire to compete. The grind and hustle of the game energized me.

As a short outside hitter at 5'8", I could jump high and hit hard, and had all the athleticism required to play at the highest level. Volleyball is a scrappy and strategic game that requires teamwork to be successful, and I was determined to master every skill required to win. I loved it, excelled at it, and in my freshman year of high school, I knew I wanted to play at the next level.

As a straight-A student, academics mattered just as much to me, and it was never an option to sacrifice an outstanding education to my sport. Amazing academics, amazing volleyball – that's what I was after as I toured colleges with my family and assessed my offers.

I knew one school at the top of my list would be the University of Washington, which was near my hometown. The coach at UW, American Volleyball Coaches Association Hall of Famer Jim McLaughlin, was an icon at the school's youth camps and closely watched me grow into the sport, while recruiting me throughout the years. When I was close to accepting an offer in the last month of my college recruiting process, I learned Jim and his coaching team had joined Notre Dame. "I'd really love for you to come and see the campus," he said, which prompted my question, "and where is Notre Dame?"



I really had to think about Coach McLaughlin's request. Duke was in my sights and on my list of final visits after a year of college tours. But my mom suggested I consider the university in South Bend. "What's the harm in taking a look?" she said.

FEELS LIKE HOME

As soon as I stepped foot on the Notre Dame campus, everywhere else I had visited receded into the background. I knew I was where I needed to be; this was God's plan. And yes, moms also do know best.

Within two weeks, I committed verbally, and Notre Dame began to fulfill everything I wanted and more. Amazing academics, amazing volleyball, and something else: a campus atmosphere and culture that always felt like home.

What I call this homey "hug" enveloped me often over my four years. For starters, Jim, his staff, and I were beginning our journeys from the Seattle area together. As

he had done since our volleyball camp days, Jim took me under his wing and always had my back at Notre Dame, including advocating for my four-year scholarship.

My professors fully supported my switch after the first semester from the business program to one centered on science and math. At first, the seemingly less rigorous course of study appeared to help me to balance schoolwork with practice and games, but soon I was struggling; business wasn't my passion. When I shifted to Neuroscience, my GPA soared – I was learning what I loved. My instructors did everything they could to help me achieve my academic goals, and I gained an important lesson: it's worth doing the things that mean something to you, even if more challenging.

Then, as my experience at Notre Dame was coming to an end, this extraordinary community again showed me that it wanted what was best for Jemma, the human being, not just the athlete. When I suffered a devastating ankle injury and faced the choice of either pushing through or having surgery, my coaches encouraged me to consider my mobility years down the line. So, I made the difficult decision to have the surgery that ended my playing days, but it was not the end of my contributions to the team. My coaches asked me to remain a captain my senior year, honoring me as the leader I was and had been on the team my entire career, but this time from the sidelines.

CONNECTIONS GROW STRONGER

The consequences of my injury jump-started me into exploring my life after sports. Of course, I would have loved to play volleyball my senior season, but now I was going to make the most of my situation. I spent my senior year interning at the Notre Dame Development Office and connecting with the Notre Dame alumni network. The more I asked alumni about their experiences and gained their advice, the more I felt that hug again. These were people "on the other side" waiting for me to cross over, welcoming me with open arms, and willing to offer me guidance and opportunities.

My first job after completing my graduate program came from an alumni connection. Being embraced by this network has been pivotal for me, and now I'm returning the favor. Whenever I see a Notre Dame reference in my LinkedIn messages, I am always excited to make the connection.

As we navigate adulthood, there will continue to be times when things don't pan out. In those moments, we can tap into the intangibles we developed as student-athletes: the grit and the willingness to grind it out. The ability to wake from late study nights and still give our all at practice. Emptying the tank when the game clock is ticking down. Pushing ourselves harder than we think we can. As student-athletes, we are trained to always find a way.

I love to remind myself and my fellow Fighting Irish that having the Notre Dame degree is incredibly impressive. However, being a former student-athlete with that degree is truly next level. I was recently told by a fellow alumna, "Jemma, you are more than qualified." That's a message I'm thrilled to be able to pass on to you, in my role as an Ambassador for LAND, and as a fellow former student-athlete – that you, too, are more than qualified!

Jemma Yeadon (ND '20) is from Mercer Island, Washington. In high school, Jemma earned four letters in volleyball as an outside hitter, with 1,200 kills, 170 service aces, 1,000 digs and 75 blocks, and helped her team win conference, region and state championships. Jemma received a four-year scholarship to play volleyball at Notre Dame, where she earned both academic and athletic honors throughout her entire career. In her freshman year, she led the team in attacks. As a sophomore, she averaged a team-high 3.91 kills per set to total 453 on the season, which ranks sixth in program history. In her junior year, Jemma finished second on the team with 272 kills and averaged a team best 3.44 kills per set, with 122 digs and 48 blocks, earning her All-ACC recognition. After a career-ending injury before her senior year, she served as team captain her final season. Jemma received her undergraduate degree in Neuroscience and Behavior, and her Business Management graduate degree from Georgetown University. She is currently an NBA Marketing Strategist at Turner Sports. Her family includes sisters Lorial and Stirling, also star volleyball players at Mercer Island, her mother Loria, and father Joseph.