

# WHERE TO

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

# LAND

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## NEW BEGINNINGS: THE IMPORTANCE OF TELLING MY STORY

By Martin Vergara, ND '06



When I offer career advice in my role as Global Head of Talent Acquisition at Morgan Stanley, I'm truly speaking from experience. My presentation is personal, framed in three sections: Embrace the Struggle, Be Your Own Best Coach, and Persistence. Underlying each of these are hard lessons learned and big dreams fulfilled. My story starts in Paterson, New Jersey, but as I tell every new employee and student-athlete I encounter through work, Monogram Club or Project LAND, all of our stories are never-ending.

### FIRST IN FAMILY

Neither of my parents went to college – only one of them graduated from high school. And they had me when they were quite young, just 17 and 18 years old. But they knew enough to invest in me, by sending me to a great school that would set me up for life and help me to someday elevate my own family. I wanted that, too, and so I chose Notre Dame. I would be the first in my family to go to college, get a high-quality education, and become eligible for the draft again, after choosing the Fighting Irish over Cleveland in high school. That part of the plan didn't quite work out.

While those who get recruited to Notre Dame know their stuff is good enough to compete with anybody, my transition from high school included facing a new lineup of tough hitters – one through nine, not two through five. I learned quickly that there's no letting your hair down in the batting order as you work every hitter.

All told, I was on the field almost 40 hours a week, with long practices and games. It was basically a full-time job, with the added role of student. So this was next level for me, and I struggled a bit off the mound.

Fortunately, the Office of Academic Services for Student-Athletes, and one of its team members in particular, Adam Sargent, helped me to improve my time management skills so I could prioritize being a student as well as an athlete. Adam is now the office's associate director, and we still keep in touch. (As I do with my coach Paul Mainieri, whose son Nick is an academic advisor for today's Notre Dame student-athletes).

Adam's guidance reinforced the significance of my "first in my family to go to college" status, and though I had long held dreams of becoming a doctor, I soon realized how much additional schooling and time that would entail. My interests shifted to the world of Wall Street, and I applied my athletic mindset toward achieving a finance degree and career in this competitive field.

Meanwhile, on the baseball field, my freshman teammates and I were making memorable moments, starting with wins in the super regionals (equivalent: Sweet 16), then competing in a best of three series (Elite 8). To ultimately earn a place in the College World Series, we needed to defeat Florida State, the number one team in the country, by far. And we took them down, on their home field at that. It was awesome – dog pile on the pitcher's mound and next stop Omaha for a chance at the championship.

This marked only the second time a Notre Dame team advanced this far. It happened first in 1957 and a third time in 2022. This most recent team to make it to the World Series still had the banner from the 2002 team. It felt like we made it back.

### BE YOUR OWN BEST COACH



In my third year at Notre Dame, I made a move to re-enter the draft. And if I had been my own best coach, I might have been successful. But at that moment, I didn't understand how to maximize my athletic DNA, to know, deeply, what skills made me great. If I did, I would have tweaked certain things and not given in to being reshaped into someone else.

I left the university to undergo a journey that eventually led me back to Notre Dame to complete my studies and enter the workforce, rather than the draft and professional baseball. This part of my plan resulted in disappointment, but I use this life lesson as I mentor people at work and in life.

There are many great leaders at Morgan Stanley. I can't copy their skills completely; that would be impossible. But what I can do – to use a golf analogy – is copy one or two of their great clubs and put them in my bag. I have continued to do this throughout my career, adding clubs to the bag of skills I brought to the game.

I'm living proof that skills outweigh experiences. I'm currently leading recruiting for the firm, but I never worked in human resources before. What I do know is how to lead people, develop strategies, and spur transformation in a global organization. The technicalities of recruiting – I can figure that out. I remind my Monogram Club group that, because they are student-athletes, they come much more prepared than they think. They, too, have a bag of skills that will fill up over their long careers.

### THE NEXT PITCH

When I left Notre Dame in my third year, I received coaching from Tom House. He co-founded the National Pitching Association, and I later completed one of his programs and learned about what he calls "the next pitch." It's the most important pitch in baseball. If you give up a Grand Slam home run in the first inning, what are you going to do? Walk around the mound and mope, or get back on the hill and pitch a shutout the rest of the game? When your team comes back and wins 5-4, that represents a great victory.

In starting and building a career, the next pitch is the next step you take. Step by step, you keep making the next pitch, until you eventually win.

After my first "pitch" to Morgan Stanley, I learned that you can't take things personally. The firm didn't tell me no because they believed Martin Vergara isn't good enough to work here, ever. They said at this moment in time, for this role, I wasn't ready. So I pushed to get feedback, improved myself, and went back. The third time I tried, it worked. I didn't mope; I got back on the mound and won.

### NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK

We're not entitled to a job, and sliding a résumé across the table like I did the first time at Morgan Stanley is not enough. We have to tell our story, explain why we're the person for the job. One way to perfect your story for a particular company and role is through networking. It's the way to navigate the transition from student-athlete to the corporate world. You discover what's behind that curtain, a day in the life, and how you can take your step.

I've seen many candidates come through the door head down and book smart, but they can't have the conversation about what they bring to my organization. Networking helps you gain understanding of what happens there so you can effectively answer when asked, "why you."

If you're in the early stages of pursuing your career, leverage your teammates who are already in the business; if there aren't any, and you're, say, a baseball player who wants to go to Wall Street, I bet you some former lacrosse player will take your call. Leverage the Monogram Club and Project LAND, to make those connections with someone who is in their first, second, or third year in the business or area you're shooting for, because that's the most realistic move to make.

Then, once you get in the game of the business, your competitive spirit – that DNA of a student-athlete – will take over, putting all your preparation into play. Your persistence in gaining your first, third, or tenth job will never stop. Along the way, you'll be adding to your golf bag and articulating why you. And it's not about overworking, because it's important to have a balanced life. It's about refinement and paying attention to the details, practices that are rooted in your authenticity, belief in self, resilience, commitment to service, and connection to place and culture.

**Martin Vergara, ND '06**, was born, raised, and resides in Paterson, New Jersey, and he couldn't be prouder. Founded by Alexander Hamilton and called "America's first Silicon Valley," Paterson continues to inspire Martin's family, service, and professional lives. Baseball is part of the city's history, too, and playing the sport and getting a great education became central pursuits for Martin and his parents. They sacrificed to send him to Catholic schools and with private pitching instruction from supportive community members, Martin honed his natural skills. Named Gatorade High School Player of the Year for New Jersey and selected by Cleveland to play professionally, Martin chose instead to attend Notre Dame for the academic and sports experiences that promised a level of success to match his parents' commitment. As a freshman in 2002, Martin helped the Fighting Irish advance to the College World Series for just the second time in program history. During his career, Notre Dame made five NCAA Tournament appearances, won five Big East Tournament titles and captured three regular-season Big East championships. Martin graduated from Mendoza College of Business, a degree in Finance and earned his MBA from Columbia University. Over 17 years, he has steadily progressed at Morgan Stanley, and today is Managing Director, Global Head of Talent Acquisition. Martin and his wife Deniz and their two children live in Paterson in what they call "the first and last house they'll ever buy," and Martin serves as board chair of two nonprofits. One led the creation of an urban National Park that is home to Hinchliffe Stadium, one of just two remaining Negro League stadiums in the country, as well as a future state-of-the-art Visitors Center; ground-breaking is planned for next year. Martin also founded an organization offering free baseball instruction to Paterson families that helped nurture their children's love of the sport. (He takes his own son to Sunday morning practice on Larry Doby Field, named for the Paterson native and second Black man to break the MLB color barrier.) Martin's focus on the community his grandparents first called home reflects his belief that if you do well in life, you give back to those who helped you get there. This principle extends to Notre Dame and its student-athletes, through Martin's roles as Monogram Club Director and Project LAND Class Rep.