

# Setting the bar high

How a perspective change brought Taylorn Langin joy in her vaulting journey



TAYLORN LANGIN

Three generations of track athletes run through the veins of Liberty track star Taylorn Langin. A senior season full of success saw Langin break the ASUN Conference all-time record of 13-7.25 on the outdoor women's pole vault with a jump of 13-9.25 on April 15. This effort contributed to the ASUN labeling Langin as Women's Field Athlete of the Week for the second time this year.

Though the senior has enjoyed much success in her career as a pole vaulter, it took a perspective

By Caleb Barnes  
@calebbarnes\_ju



KJ JUCIA | LIBERTY PHOTOGRAPHERS  
STAR – Taylorn Langin broke the ASUN All-time pole vaulting record, achieving 13-9.25.

change for her to once again find joy in jumping.

Langin's vault to the top began with her family. Her mom's side consisted of track stars and her granddad was an All-American decathlete.

"I just knew I wanted to do track because I'd done little meets when I was young and stuff," Langin said. "My mom decided to sign me up for a pole vault camp without telling me. I did it and was like, this is the coolest thing ever. It was so much fun. I loved it ever since I first tried it."

Taylorn's talent in pole vaulting became apparent very early. During her freshman year of high school, Langin took homeschool courses. She was not allowed to compete for the local high school, so she joined the club track team and competed in D3 college meets, the only competitions available to her.

"I was actually placing in the top three in several of the meets," Langin said. "I was just doing well, and I didn't really realize I was that good until several of the coaches approached me as a freshman and were like, hey, you're really good. That's

when I realized I could probably go to college for this and possibly even do D1."

Once she landed in Liberty's D1 program, Langin's success continued through her junior track season. She began to find, however, that the accolades she was earning at this level didn't carry the weight she had hoped.

"I actually PR'ed that (junior) indoor season, which I had been looking forward to for so long," Langin said. "I finally got it, and it was exciting, but it was almost just that temporary joy that you have like, oh that was it, that wasn't as exciting as I thought. I just kind of struggled throughout the rest of the season to be honest, just really trying to find joy in what I was doing."

This season of struggle prompted a shift in perspective.

"I got (a perspective switch) of just being able to let the pressure off and just jump for God," Langin said. "Over time just really praying about it and inviting God into track. The reason I'm doing this is (God) giving me this talent."

Now, Langin's motivation comes from within. Despite struggling slightly in this year's indoor season, she found joy in the mere ability to compete. As the track season moved outdoors, Langin's jumping for joy resulted in the ASUN record and she continues to climb the national ranks.

"I'm not doing it for the success," Langin clarified.

"It's given me an opportunity to be able to have people ask me questions. I can point it to what God's blessed me with, and he wanted me to have that success and he gave me the ability to do that to bring him glory. It's fun to make high bars, but I don't do it because of that. If God wants me to do that, I'm going to be able to enjoy the byproduct of the talents that he's given me and use it."

BARNES is a sports reporter.

# A path of persistence

Liberty wrestler achieves aspiration of playing for Flames football team

Two-time NCWA National Champion, three-time All-American winner, Liberty wrestler Rick Weaver has achieved just about every accolade attainable as a collegiate athlete.

By Annie Cory  
@annieecory1

After four years of sheer domination on the wrestling mat, one would think that Weaver stepped away from this year's NCWA National Meet content with the culmination of a journey. The end of this year's wrestling season, however, is merely where the journey began.

While superiority on the mat has always come naturally to the senior, the sport of wrestling was not his first love. When Weaver thinks back on his high school days, fond memories on the football field come to mind.

The Virginia native played running back and defensive end for Covenant High School in Charlottesville, Virginia, soaking up every moment. The drive to succeed in his sport was present, and the student's determination pushed him to improve in any fashion possible.

"I actually took up wrestling to help me get better at football," Weaver said. "You can't teach effort. You just have it, or you don't."

Weaver's ultimate aspirations were to play college ball. This dream, however, immediately saw a slew of obstacles thrown in the way come high school.

"I tore my meniscus my sophomore year," Weaver said. "And then my junior year, I tore my ACL. My senior year I got to actually play, but junior year is when you're supposed to get noticed by colleges, and I missed mine... I had to figure out what my game plan was."

“This is really what I've always wanted. Football has always been my first love.”  
– Rick Weaver

Rather than fielding calls for his football abilities, Weaver was heavily recruited as a wrestler. He received offers from illustrious programs such as the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech, but it was the Mountain that ultimately called his name.

"I've wanted to play at Liberty since my senior year of high school," Weaver said.

While it may have been his dream to play Flames football, the athlete was recruited to Liberty to be a wrestler. His skill in the sport



PHOTO PROVIDED BY LIBERTY ATHLETICS  
GRIT – Rick Weaver has claimed two NCWA National Championship titles.



NOAH SIEBELT | LIBERTY CHAMPION  
DETERMINED – Rick Weaver made the football team after trying out for four years.

was undeniable, with accolades that speak to the fighter he is on the mat.

Every season, Weaver would dominate the NCWA, bringing heightened success to the Liberty wrestling program. But every year, he would show up at walk-on football tryouts, hoping that this time around he would get his opportunity to return to the gridiron.

The opportunity never came. That is, until the senior gave his dream one final shot at spring walk-on tryouts in February.

"I made the walk-on team," he said. "While the initial reaction for most would be to tell everyone the good news, Weaver decided to keep it to himself. With the big achievement came big expectations, so the information stayed under wraps."

The wrestler was one giant step closer to what he had always aspired to achieve. But while he may have made the walk-on team, he still had to claim an official roster spot.

All that stood between Weaver and that long-anticipated spot was spring practice, and there was no way he would allow the opportunity to pass him by.

As spring football commenced, Weaver was still in the midst of a wrestling season with a team preparing for the national tournament. Balancing football, wrestling and school was no easy feat. The senior,

however, tried his best to keep his busy schedule unnoticeable.

"I was going to football at 6 a.m. and wrestling at 3:45 p.m.," Weaver said. "I was exhausted. It showed a little bit in wrestling, but Coach Castro thought that it was me just slacking off before the season was ending."

Regardless of the exhaustion, Weaver mustered enough energy for his team's trip to the NCWA National Meet in Puerto Rico. It was here in the Caribbean that the heavy weight wrestler claimed yet another national title, adding another accolade to a career defined by excellence. Having achieved greatness once again on the mat, the senior decided it was time to give his parents an update.

"I told my parents that I made the (spring) football team 20 minutes after I won nationals," Weaver said. "They were really confused."

Weaver, however, was nothing but certain of where he wanted his path to lead. With the wrestling season now over, his sole attention could turn to claiming a football roster spot.

Making the transition from high school running back and edge to interior defensive line, Weaver had his work cut out for him in spring ball. Where the position change put him a step behind the rest, however, his time as a wrestler allowed him to regain some ground.

"Wrestling helps a lot with D-line because I can stay low. I can use the force I have at the level I'm at and just drive guys or push them out of the way," Weaver said. "There's a whole lot of footwork sometimes, but you get used to it."

The most difficult aspect of spring practice came off the field, where he was tasked with both digesting and executing a complex playbook.

"I had to really study the plays, knowing them like the back of my hand," Weaver said. "It's fun. Sometimes it can be stressful, but it's still fun."

Day after day, he buried his nose in the playbook, diving deep into what it takes to become a successful lineman. Standing a bit shorter than the average interior lineman would at 6 feet even, the push to achieve his goal was that much more difficult. A mindset of persistence, however, was the one Weaver chose to maintain.

"There are times in wrestling where it's a minute left, and you're down by two. And you either score or you let the other person win," Weaver said. "It's a discipline game. At that point, you have to lock in and figure out, what are you going to do to this guy to win? That's how I think every day."

The thought process carried the college student through a grueling semester of mental and physical exertion, all culminating with the annual Spring Game on April 15. Following the game, Weaver knew that a decision regarding a potential roster spot would soon be made.

Just a few days later, he met with his position coach to receive the final decision.

"(My coach) was talking to me about how I did good in the spring and the bad things I did in between," Weaver said. "And I was like, okay, thank you, I appreciate that. And then he was like, 'Well, we have to talk about what we're gonna do for the summer and then what we're gonna do for the fall.' And I gave him a confused look like, what does that mean? And he said, 'Yes Rick, you made the football team.' So then everything else after that I didn't even hear."

As the realization set in that a roster spot was now his, all he could do was think on the persistence it took to reach that point. With the intention of returning to Liberty for one more year to attend grad school, a long season of college football now awaits Weaver.

As he glances back, it's evident that the journey has been anything but easy. However, he takes pride in the grit it took to claim a spot on the team he's dreamed of playing for.

"This is really what I've always wanted," Weaver said. "Football has always been my first love."

CORY is the sports editor.