

## Navy's Dominique Wright is a fast learner at lacrosse

By Christian Swezey | May 13, 2011



Figure 1 - Phil Hoffmann/ USNA - Dominique Wright was a prep track and field standout at Kennedy. After taking up lacrosse as a sophomore at Navy, now she is a starting defender as the Patriot League champion Midshipmen face No. 1 Maryland in the NCAA tournament

Navy junior Dominique Wright, a defender on the women's lacrosse team, forced a turnover and picked up the loose ball in the final seconds of the Patriot League championship game against Colgate last month. Navy was holding a one-goal lead.

"I was standing right there, she had this awesome backcheck and then picked up the ball," said Danielle Vivonetto, a junior attacker. "After the game she came over and said, 'All I heard was you yelling, 'Run!'"

As she showed by keeping the ball until Navy had secured its 15-14 victory, running is the easy part for Wright. Lacrosse is not.

Wright will start on defense when the Midshipmen face No. 1 Maryland in an NCAA tournament game Saturday at noon at the Field Hockey and Lacrosse Complex in

College Park. Navy (15-5) is in the tournament after winning its conference, then defeating Quinnipiac, 20-5, in a play-in game last Saturday.

Wright's path to the game is a little different from most: She had not played the sport until her sophomore year at Navy. Wright was a track and field standout as a sprinter and hurdler at Kennedy High and with the Hummingbirds track club in Hyattsville.

She competed in the Junior Olympics in 2002 and 2004, was part of three state championship relay teams at Kennedy and helped Navy to the 2009 conference title in indoor track.

After her freshman year, however, Wright left the track program, citing burnout. Close friends Vivonetto and senior Caitlin Mandrin Hill, a starting attacker, saw their chance to have Wright try out for lacrosse.

It wasn't as easy as it sounds. Wright said she didn't decide to attend until the morning of tryouts. She showed up with a borrowed stick (from Mandrin Hill) and, by her own admission, little to no knowledge of the rules.

In the final minutes of a scrimmage that fall, Coach Cindy Timchal inserted Wright for the first time.

A few seconds after she entered, a whistle blew; players must stand still while an infraction is meted out by referees. Wright ran another 20 yards.

“We don’t practice with whistles,” Wright said. “So I had no idea I was supposed to stop. The refs were yelling at me to stop, and I was saying, ‘I’m really sorry!’ ”

Wright’s introduction to the sport as a neophyte is unique but not unprecedented.

Northwestern’s streak of five consecutive NCAA championships began in 2005. Two of its best players that year, all-American midfielders Courtney and Ashley Koester, had been recruited from the school’s rugby team as freshmen. They had not played high school lacrosse in their native Richmond, Ind.

What made Wright’s transition different is that track, unlike lacrosse, requires little hand-eye coordination and is not a team sport.

“Someone like Dominique, she really stood up to the challenge,” Timchal said. “It’s a bit intimidating to pick up lacrosse as a stranger to the sport.”

Wright is not the only Navy women’s player to be playing in a new role. Mandrin Hill plays attack and has 35 goals and 32 assists. As a freshman and sophomore, however, she was a starting defender.

“Cindy’s model is, if you have athletic ability and want to be here and are determined to do well, she will make you a good lacrosse player,” Mandrin Hill said. “I was a defender and now am playing straight attack. It says a ton about what our coaches can do.”

Whether the coaches can coax an upset victory over Maryland remains to be seen. The Terrapins (18-1) are the No. 1 seed for the second straight year. Last year, they ended Northwestern’s five-year run of NCAA titles with a 13-11 victory in the championship game.

Wright and Navy’s defense will face an offense that has four players with at least 36 goals. Senior Sarah Mollison, a native of Australia, is the leading scorer with 44 goals and 40 assists.

“They have a bunch of talented athletes,” Wright said. “I saw some of them play over the summer at the Navy summer camp, and even just throwing the ball around they were pretty impressive.”

Wright is doing her part on the throwing-and-catching skills, too. She hones her game at her mother’s house in the District by throwing the ball against a nearby brick wall.

“People ask me if I’m playing cricket,” Wright said. “I have to explain to them what lacrosse is, and they look at me like I’m crazy. . . . Last year I played for two minutes against [traditional power] North Carolina, I just ran up and down and didn’t really do anything. But that took me to the point where I go everywhere with my lacrosse stick.”

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