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UCF KNIGHTS SPORTS

UCF basketball player Matt Milon grateful to return home after long, winding road



By STEPHEN RUIZ
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UCF guard Matt Milon is pictured with his parents, Abby and Wally, after the Knights' loss to Memphis on Wednesday night at Addition Financial Arena.(Stephen M. Dowell/Orlando Sentinel)

Ed Kershner, the former legendary boys basketball coach at Oviedo High School, used to tell Stan Van Gundy about one of his players who aspired to work in an NBA front office.

"What you tell me, he could get there," Van Gundy said.

Since first expressing interest in basketball in the third or fourth grade, Matt Milon has been captivated by the sport at so many levels. That love has been enriched by his collegiate experience.

Milon is the rare player who has switched schools not once but twice. As a graduate transfer, Milon is completing his eligibility at UCF, where his parents are professors.

"In high school, if you had just told me three schools in five years, I would be like, 'Wow, things probably didn't go too well for you,'" Milon said.



UCF KNIGHTS

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Quite the contrary.

In 21 games (nine starts) for the Knights, Milon is averaging 5.0 points in 19.8 minutes per game while making 30.8% (24 of 78) of his 3-point attempts and 33.9% (38 of 112) of his shots overall. The 6-foot-4, 210-pound guard scored a season-high 19 points at SMU on Jan. 8. UCF (11-10, 2-7 American Athletic Conference) plays at East Carolina (9-13, 3-6) Thursday before returning home to host surging Tulsa (11-2, 7-1) Sunday at 2 p.m.

Armed with a smooth left-handed shooting stroke, Milon's stats are down considerably from his career best numbers: 44.8% from the floor, including 41.2% on 3s. His adaptability, though, says more about him than any data.

After helping Oviedo win a state championship in 2014, he signed with Boston College a year later and spent one season in the ACC before leaving for William & Mary in Williamsburg, Va.

The Tribe play in the Colonial Athletic Association, and while the CAA is no ACC, Milon found his comfort zone. After sitting a year because of transfer rules, he played two seasons at William & Mary.

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— MATT MILON, UCF SENIOR GUARD

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Milon earned a finance degree, with a minor in data analytics, there before landing at UCF.

"He's been through something different at Boston College than he did at William & Mary and then something different for us," Knights coach Johnny Dawkins said. "He can bring that with him and share that with his

teammates."

Milon's parents, Abby and Wally, attend his home games, and they are dwindling to a precious few. Five remain on UCF's schedule before the conference tournament in Fort Worth, Texas, in March.

Beyond saving on airfare, Wally said watching his son play close to home has been gratifying.

"He had the opportunity to learn more about the college game and the whole atmosphere surrounding college sports," said Wally, an economics professor. "That's given him a whole different perspective than just playing for one school."

Born in Gainesville, Matt is the middle of three children.

His parents enrolled him in area city leagues and registered him for camps. As his talent progressed, elite camps and travel teams became the norm. Milon started his first game at Oviedo and was a stalwart for the Lions during his four-year career, which ended with a state semifinal appearance in 2015.

"As soon as I saw him as an eighth-grader, I knew he had greatness wrapped around him," Kershner said.

Through all of those hours of basketball, one thing became apparent.

"I know when the ball is going to go in or not," said Abby Milon, a legal studies professor. "It's that moment of, 'Oh, no,' or, 'Oh, no, that one's going in.' Or I'll see, 'Oh, you left it a little short.' The net gods, they are so cruel at times."

While Milon experienced highlights at BC — a 25-point showing against Syracuse that still makes his mother beam, facing bluebloods Duke and North Carolina, playing nearly 17 minutes a night — the Eagles finished 7-25 overall and 0-18 in the ACC.

The losing stung, and Milon said the style of play wasn't a good fit.

It was on to William & Mary, where he averaged 13 points a game in both of his seasons for the Tribe. They finished 19-12 when Milon was a redshirt sophomore during the 2017-18 season but dropped to 14-17 last season, costing coach Tony Shaver his job.

"He spends hours in the gym that no one notices," said North Carolina senior Justin Pierce, who was Milon's roommate at William & Mary the past two years. "He's probably one of the hardest workers I've

ever been around in terms of mastering his craft. That really rubbed off on me."

UCF guard Matt Milon greets fans after the Knights suffered a 59-57 loss to Memphis on Wednesday night at Addition Financial Arena.(Stephen M. Dowell/Orlando Sentinel)

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Said Milon: "There hasn't been a situation I haven't seen on the court."

While Milon could not have predicted his path, he has no regrets.

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Something good has come out of each stop. He met his girlfriend at Boston College, he developed lasting friendships and earned his degree at William & Mary, and he is working toward an MBA and is in the DeVos Sport Business Management Program at UCF.

Plus, he's back home.

"Some people would say three schools in five years is a lot, but it's really the situation," Milon said. "I always wanted to go to one school. People always talk about the transfer epidemic. I was like, 'Well, I'm never going to transfer.' Three schools later ...

"I'm just really happy that it's kind of happened that way."

Stephen Ruiz



Stephen is an online content editor and sports writer for the Sentinel. He is in charge of the home page for the website in the morning and writes sports features, mainly on endurance sports such as running and triathlons. Stephen enjoys rooting for the New Orleans Saints and Houston Astros, working out, reading and cooking. He graduated from LSU.

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