

PAUL MULCAHY '19

HE MAY BE SCARLET NOW, BUT HE'S STILL OUR KNIGHT!

By Alice Roche Cody

It has been two BIG years for Paul Mulcahy '19. Our kindhearted, headband-wearing #4 basketball standout is still spreading our school's core value of compassion. On the court, the 6-foot, 6-inch Rutgers point guard psyches up his teammates and extends his hand to help fallen opponents. With the launch of Grateful4 Foundation, Paul seeks to inspire a chain reaction of selfless acts. Big Ten noticed and honored the Bayonne native with its Sportsmanship Award.

His freshman year, Paul played in all 31 Rutgers games, averaging 3.7 points and 2.5 rebounds. Led by Coach Steve Pikiell P'25, the squad was nationally ranked, the first time since 1979. Then, just as the team warmed up for the Big Ten Tournament in Indianapolis, officials canceled all games due to coronavirus fears. This past season, the Scarlet Knights came back strong. Paul helped bring RU to the Big Ten quarterfinals and the second round of the NCAA "March Madness" Tournament.

A tough competitor, he played through a dislocated pinky on his dominant hand and a broken nose that required him to wear a face guard.

This spring, with his casted arm in a sling after surgery to repair his pinky tendon, Paul shared about navigating college sports during COVID, celebrating his 21st birthday, and his best GSB memories.

Question: Congratulations on a great basketball season! How was it, being at Rutgers and playing basketball on such a talented team, all during a pandemic?

Answer: It was a long year. Starting last June, with the team on campus, we got COVID-tested every day, through the end of March. Being around every day, it would take a toll on anybody. I'd go from my apartment to workout to my apartment. No outside anything. Fortunately, we had no shutdowns. We were one of the few schools in the country not to miss a game. We took pride in that. But I missed a lot. I had no social life. I was scared to leave. I didn't want to be that guy. It was a lot of sacrifice.

Q: Let's talk about last year, what was it like having such an awesome season, and then everything being called off right as your team took the court for its Big Ten Tournament game?

A: My freshman year for basketball was really good. The senior class had above-average players. We should have been in the tournament. I played a big role for the team my freshman year.

This year, I knew I had to play it safe and stay healthy. This whole season was about missing freshman year. To get it back. That was big. The way it ended the year before. People talk about how many years Rutgers didn't make tournaments, but I didn't feel any pressure. Rutgers is a huge community with passionate fans. I keep hearing how happy and proud they are of us.

Q: How did you balance college classes and basketball during the pandemic?

A: This past season I was more locked in. There wasn't much to do. I found it easier with classes online. My first and second semester were rough. I was tired and drained. I'd go to practice and get to class. This year I took online classes at our workout facility, and I have a great academic advisor, Ms. Larson. I'd go to basketball – school – room. Every day felt the same. I didn't remember games. The biggest thing was trying to stay safe. There was a lot of fear. I was used to seeing my family and my girlfriend, and I couldn't see them. Then my family got tested to hang out. Now I'm living back at home. I'm seeing the effects. People lose themselves.

Q: How did you manage and what kept you going? Was there anything you drew on to get you through? An inner resilience or your faith?

A: Over the last couple months, I've grown my faith. I find safety in that. It's a growing thing, I'm closer to God and what I believe in. It played a big role. That's the first time someone asked me that – thank you for asking that. I'm not perfect. I have a lot to learn.

Q: That must have been tough being so isolated from your family and friends as well as playing games in empty arenas. The RAC (Rutgers Athletic Center) is usually packed, electric with noise.

A: I'm a Mama's boy, the first son with five siblings. Last year, my freshman year, I'd have 20 to 40 family members and friends at each game. This season, it was hard not seeing them. I'd win a game, go back to my room, lose a game, go back to my room. No fans at the RAC. Sometimes it looked like we had no energy. It was a tough year. It's hard to judge this year because no matter how hard it was, it wasn't normal.

Q: Congrats on the Big 10 Sportsmanship Award. What does it mean to you?

A: That was cool. I didn't know a thing about it. It was more about what I'm doing off-court. It's awesome. The Big 10 and Rutgers have done a lot for me. There are lots of things I want to get done, and to be seen in that light is great.

Q: Can you tell me about why you started your Grateful4 Foundation?

A: This year was tough with COVID. It was hard to get things done. A lot of the guys and I try to do good things within the New Brunswick community, as safe as possible. My girlfriend helps, too. This summer, I'm running a one-day basketball clinic in Bayonne. We'll bring people together from different backgrounds and help people who are less fortunate. It's great to see smiles on people's faces. There's a lot going on in the world and in Bayonne. The people in Bayonne are from all over the world. I want to keep connecting. Gratitude is my main focus. It can change your perspective. Sometimes I struggle, and it's a good way to reset.

Q: Your foundation is centered on gratitude. What are you grateful for and what do you hope to accomplish?

A: Growing up, I saw a lot of different ways of life. I just had my 21st birthday party, and all my best friends who were there are from completely different backgrounds and lifestyles. But we're all the same. Genuine hearts. Gill has amazing people. Families took me in; I lived here with different families. Now I have a platform and want to reach as many people as I can. A lot of people in Bayonne and around the world are exactly the same as me, but they haven't been given the same opportunities. I want to spread the idea of gratitude and inspire a chain reaction of selfless acts. I'm not putting my name on it. Grateful4, it has my number. It's less about me and more about helping people. Keep an open mind, keep gratitude first.

Q: On your Rutgers page, it says one thing that many people don't know about you is that you spoke at your high school graduation. What was that like, giving a speech to your Gill community?

A: That was the coolest thing I did! In eighth grade, coming in, I never thought about it being an option. I was young and immature. At graduation, I was so grateful. I talked about being appreciative and how thankful I was to all the families and teachers who helped me.

Q: What are some of your favorite GSB memories?

A: Every day was something new. Laughing with my friends. Some of my best friends I met my first day here in eighth grade. There are really, really good people at Gill. Graduation was cool. Watching other sports teams, like soccer. Beating Ranney, they were fourth in the country. That was a big win for us.

Q: What do you miss most about Gill?

A: The people. Definitely the people. I don't miss the commute! I love the people. Gill is such a close community. No matter what grade you were in, you were connected. The teachers are amazing. Rutgers is great, but Gill was my first glimpse of the real world. Gill was a great, positive situation for me. I got lots of different perspectives. Amazing people. Mrs. Armstrong took care of me for five years. Glenn, the trainer, is a good dude. Mr. Wendell influenced me. Coach Sina was huge in my life, and Mr. Hercules, my math teacher, helped me. I don't want to forget anyone. Everyone was so good to me.

To view Paul's GSB graduation speech, visit our Alumni Page at www.gsbschool.org/alumni/gsb-magazine.



Photo by Ben Solomon