

Schram defined by success before Penn State

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Thirty seconds remained in Taylor Schram's high school career.

So certain was the outcome, one of the opposing players had just told Schram to hold her head up, that she was a great player.

But Schram wasn't listening. Instead, she kept her eye on the clock, looking for that one chance.

About 10 seconds later, Schram got the ball and did what a great player does — beat two defenders off the dribble, then burned the goalkeeper to score the game-winning goal with 15.6 seconds left.

Now a freshman on the Penn State women's soccer team, Schram has quickly established herself in the starting lineup thanks to a long history of hard work, leadership and a knack for scoring goals.

A true Lion

The first time Penn State coach Erica Walsh and Schram met and toured the Penn State campus, they immediately connected.

"She had her first visit here and we really clicked with her," Walsh said. "We really enjoyed her, we had a great time with the family and we could tell she was somebody we wanted in the program, and it seemed to be both ways."

For a while though, Penn State didn't rank in Schram's top 15 choices. Heavily recruited, Schram initially harbored dreams of playing in the South until she heard Penn State's coaches were very interested in talking to her.

Finally, Schram narrowed her list down to Penn State and Florida State. All along, Schram's father, Ron, knew his daughter would side with a coach she wanted to play for.

"I told my wife, 'She's going to end up with a coach she likes and feels comfortable with,'" Ron Schram said. "She really hit it off with Erica. She loves it up here, not just soccer, but the whole school."

When Schram made her unofficial visit to Penn State in 2008, the Lions' opponent ironically was Florida State. Though the Seminoles won 4-1, Schram said it didn't change her mind — she was going to be a Nittany Lion.

After committing to Penn State as a high school junior, Schram said the next two years of waiting to get to State College were tough.

"It honestly felt like it was never going to happen," Schram said. "Still to this day, I say, 'Wow, I can't believe I'm finally here.' I've been waiting so long, so it's great to be here. It was tough waiting but it gave me something to keep looking forward to and working hard for."

A lot of goals

When Schram first started at Canon-McMillan High School, her coach knew she had talent. What Dave Derrico came to realize was how much Schram's work ethic allowed her to develop those skills over four years. The countless hours spent in practice, shooting after, running and lifting on her own not only helped Schram, but rubbed off on her teammates as well.

"Her junior and senior year she really became the captain because she set the example," Derrico said. "She set the bar for the others in terms of her behavior, in terms of her work ethic, in terms of her off-season work. She showed them by example."

It's not uncommon for a high school forward to score a large portion of a team's goals, but Schram's 145 career tallies obliterated Canon-McMillan's scoring record. While Schram dismisses a lot of them as "scrap goals" and credits her teammates for setting them up, she views the goals as an accomplishment.

"High school is a lot different than club or college. It's not as competitive, especially in my area," Schram said. "I wasn't up against huge defenders that were rocking me and hitting me every play and we didn't have a lot of finishers on my team, so I got the job."

However humble Schram may be, it still takes a lot of work and dedication to score 145 times.

The prolific scoring started as soon as Schram got to Canon-McMillan, located about 20 miles outside Pittsburgh, where she put away 21 goals as a freshman, then 37 as a sophomore. She eclipsed the scoring record as a junior during a 35-goal campaign, then went on an absolute tear as a senior, tallying 52 goals, the second-highest total in the country.

With so many goals, Schram said she tried to keep a record of when and how she scored each one, but it became a difficult task.

"A lot of them were simple, off corner kicks or headers off crosses," Schram said.

"I tried to keep track, but I can't remember specific ones, there's just a few that stand out."

Flying high

Taylor Schram's uncanny ability in the air started in her backyard. Starting when she was 5 years old, Taylor would chase down fly balls her father would launch in the sky. Each baseball Ron Schram threw forced Taylor not only to read its flight, but also adjust to it and chase it down.

"That's funny because I think of people I think judging fly balls helps, especially with girls," Ron Schram said. "That helped when she was in high school, she was always way advanced heading the ball and I think most girls have a problem with that and I think baseball did help her."

But reading the ball is one thing — players still have to get to it. A quick look at Schram, listed at 5-foot-5 on Penn State's roster but easily a few inches shorter, wouldn't give the strongest impression she could sky up to get a cross.

Her coaches know that impression is dead wrong.

"I think defenders fall asleep and don't think she has the vertical leap she does. For being such a small girl, she's really strong and she has an incredible vertical leap



Taylor Schram (19) takes a shot during the team's Blue-White scrimmage in August. Prior to Penn State, Schram scored 145 goals over the last four years at Canon-McMillan high school, 20 miles outside Pittsburgh.

for a girl that size," Derrico said. "She would sky up and put a ball over there and they wouldn't know it was coming because they would have no clue somebody that small could get that high."

Schram's club coach, Erik Duffy, said Schram started to maximize her aerial talents when she played for the U-13 team at Beadling Inferno. He recalled one year in the Pennsylvania West State Cup where Schram scored a header in five straight games, something he said he had never seen a 13-year-old player achieve, which struck him as "ridiculous."

Winning a ball in the air is a mixture of several things, and in Duffy's eyes, Schram has every one of them. Duffy said to win a header, a player needs good technique, good timing and most importantly, desire.

Part of what makes Schram so good is the way she combines finesse and hard work. Duffy called her "a white-collar player with a blue-collar mentality," which along with her aerial skills, sets her apart.

"She'll battle against 5-foot-10 girls in the air and come out winning the ball from them," Duffy said. "She's just absolutely gifted athletically and she works very hard, and what separates her is she's so much better in the air than all the players around her."

Competitive fire

It might seem logical to ask if any of Schram's coaches were ever concerned about her size.

"It doesn't matter, she's got a huge heart," Penn State assistant coach Michael Coll said. "Her height is of zero concern to us or any of her teammates. And shame on some of these Big Ten schools if they look at her and say she's small, because they better be ready to pull themselves off the floor and wipe the dust and grass off, because she's going to put them right there."

Coming from a competitive family helped. Ron Schram was a wrestler, as are both of Taylor's brothers, Ronny and Connor, who won a state title as a high school freshman last year. Taylor said she and Connor still "beat each other up" and constantly have pingpong battles, some of which last until 3 a.m.

Having coached Schram since she was 11, Duffy has seen the family's competitive nature embodied in the way Taylor trains.

Duffy said she had to push herself to not "go under the radar" with her brothers, and that dedication was evident with Beadling.

When Taylor made the choice to play at Penn State in the physical Big Ten, Schram had a message for his daughter.

"You've always got to prove yourself when you're small, you've got to be a little bit tougher, you've always got to hustle," Ron Schram said. "That's what I told her. When you come here, you've got to prove yourself every day because they're always going to say you're small."

It was 2007 and Canon-McMillan had finally returned to the playoffs and was in a scoreless tie on the road, with a large group of students from the opposing school heckling Schram the entire night. Schram had gotten attention for her torrid scoring in the area, but she had gone goal-less in the game and drew chants of "Overrated" and "Schram Who?"

In overtime, the then-keeper, winning the game and silencing the hecklers.

But Taylor felt obligated to add a little bit more.

"She ripped a really good shot and scored the goal, then, and I don't approve of this, she ran over to near where those fans were sitting and held up one index finger, just 'No. 1' then came back over to where she was supposed to be," Derrico said. "I was just so happy she hadn't lost her head."

Taylor tough

Schram was seething.

During her senior year, an opponent made a hard tackle on her teammate, subsequently breaking her leg.

There was no way Derrico would be able to pull Schram out of the game, even though the outcome had been decided — not from the way she was going up and down the line of her teammates, firing them up and telling them to pick up the level of play.

Canon-McMillan already led 2-0 just 10 minutes into the game on two goals from Schram, and Derrico had planned to pull his star scorer early, knowing the opponents played an overly physical style.

Schram had other ideas. "She comes over to the bench and says, 'Coach, I'm not coming out,'" Derrico said.

Derrico still had her off the field

after 30 minutes, but in that time, Schram had gotten her revenge.

"She got so pissed that they broke her teammate's leg that between the 10-minute mark and the 30-minute mark, she had scored four more goals," Derrico said. "Taylor was so intense, she got them all pumped up and moving. That was a critical junction in our year."

The injury, to one of Canon-McMillan's center defenders, was one of a string that struck the team last year, leaving Schram as the constant in a constantly changing lineup. Regardless of who was around her, Schram continued to elevate the team's play, and Derrico said because of Schram, the team actually started to play better as a unit through the season.

"She's a tough-minded girl, very set on getting the job done and I think that helps, too," Derrico said. "If you weren't that dedicated and that focused on your job, maybe you get a couple bumps and it knocks you off your game. It doesn't happen to Taylor; it makes Taylor more sure she's going to score, it makes her want to score more."

Leaving a legacy

Duffy believes Schram can go down as one of the best players to don a Penn State jersey. But both coaches said soccer is a team game and Schram won't do it all herself and her unselfish attitude will help her grow into a better player.

Prior to Schram, Derrico had never named a sophomore as a captain. However, he had no choice when it was evident Schram just worked harder than anyone else.

"She was absolutely one of the best girls to ever have as a coach," Derrico said.

"I was so lucky for four years to have the opportunity to be able to work with her. I think someone like that comes along once in a coaching career."

Schram's legacy is evident in some of the players still on the Canon-McMillan roster. Derrico thinks Schram's work ethic, dedication and leadership is evident in some of his players, but none have put everything together.

After all, Derrico said it best about Schram.

"She's one in a million."



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