

FROM PERALTA PARK TO CAL One Grad's Journey

“IT WAS ALWAYS SAINT MARY’S. I NEVER thought of going anywhere else.”

That’s how Matt Flemer, a member of the Class of 2008 and now a freshman at UC Berkeley, begins a conversation about his four years at Peralta Park.

The 18-year-old from El Cerrito is the consummate Panther. He attended The School of the Madeleine in Berkeley and visited the Saint Mary’s campus many times over the years, including weekly basketball practices in the gym. “Saint Mary’s always felt like a second home,” says Matt. “I felt comfortable right from the start.”

Matt credits the caring and supportive Saint Mary’s staff with preparing him for the rigors of college courses and for giving him the self-confidence to know it’s okay to ask for help when you need it.

“Teachers were always there to answer questions outside of class,” he recalls. “They never made you feel stupid if you needed to ask for help. They made me feel I could ask anyone about anything, at anytime.”

Discipline is another life skill that Matt developed during his four years at Saint Mary’s.

“The teachers definitely made us realize the importance of doing the work inside and outside of class to understand the material,” says Matt, adding that he has really come to appreciate the discipline and time-management skills he learned at Saint Mary’s.

“In college, there’s no one telling you when to study or reminding you to get your work done. Saint Mary’s

challenged me to do the work and be prepared.”

In the classroom and during co-curricular activities, Matt developed close relationships with fellow Panthers. Baseball practices and games, in particular, provided him with the opportunity to “relax and spend time with the guys doing something we all love more than anything.

“There’s nothing like that,” he adds.

Matt’s baseball prowess (he was MVP for the BSAL last year) earned him a spot on the Cal varsity baseball team, along with fellow Saint Mary’s graduate Marcus Semien (’08). The two recent grads room together this year.

Between classes and practices (which total about 30 hours a week), discipline and time management are not optional skills. “I go to classes in the morning and early afternoon and then practice until 6 or 6:30,” says Matt. “After practice I really have no choice but to study and then go to bed,” he adds. “The first couple of weeks it was a challenge to even find time to eat.”

Anyone who spends time on the Saint Mary’s campus has an appreciation for the incredible diversity of the school. The openness to differences is another Saint Mary’s value that, says Matt, has served him well at Cal. “Through my four years at Saint Mary’s, I learned a lot about acceptance. You could be any type of person you wanted to be and still be accepted,” says Matt. “That’s helped me a lot with the transition to Cal.”

Although the UC campus is just a few minutes from Peralta Park, “it’s a whole different planet,” laughs Matt. Still, he says, there’s a sense of comfort in knowing he can drive to Saint Mary’s if he ever needs to talk to a teacher or just to see a few familiar faces.

“I don’t think I could go through a year without going back to see everyone” he says. “Saint Mary’s had a huge impact on me. It’s how I got to where I am today.” 🍌



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