

# Mercy Student Athletes' Game Plans: SUCCEEDING *in* SPORTS *and* LIFE

## Juan Casas Campillo '25

For Mercy College student Juan Casas Campillo '25, a first-generation student, going to college meant playing soccer – in his mind, one didn't exist without the other – as well as solidifying a future in the sports field. That's why Mercy's soccer program, as well as the option to major in sports management, appealed most to Casas Campillo, who describes soccer as “part of him.” In the same way that eating or sleeping are basic needs to survive, he subsists on soccer.

Even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic, playing soccer was something that “kept everything normal.” He found finishing his last years in high school during a pandemic, and the transition from high school to life after graduation, easier with soccer as a constant.

So, finding a perfect marriage that combined his love of sports with college and career opportunity was vitally important to Casas Campillo, as well as his family.

Casas Campillo was born in Medellín, Colombia and moved to Clifton, New Jersey when he was young. His parents made the decision to relocate from Colombia to the United States to expand their children's world of opportunities, both academic and economic. “My parents and grandparents never had the opportunity to go to college,” said Casas Campillo. “For them, when they came to this country, it was all about work. For me to be able to go to college and pursue a degree – it's big.”



Photo by Leslie Kahan Photography

The assimilation to Mercy felt natural for Casas Campillo and was made even more smooth by his teammates and how the athletic program receives students. “We have a really good bond player to player,” he described.

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Plus, the Division II soccer team excited Casas Campillo with its large international student draw and overall performance. “The men’s soccer

team is on the rise,” said Casas Campillo. “I knew it was a program that would be very competitive – where I would become a better athlete and myself a better person, and I see that happening.”

A favorite pastime of Casas Campillo is watching Atlético Nacional with his dad and grandfather, a Colombian professional football team he was born into backing. His other favorite team is FC Barcelona, a personal preference he advertises less overtly. Despite what may be considered a crater between them, Casas Campillo’s family supports his every play – especially his move to becoming a Maverick.

## Savanna James '22

“I felt a connection to Mercy because of field hockey,” recalled communication disorders major Savanna James '22, a first-generation college student. In fact, when she visited the Dobbs Ferry Campus with her mom on a college scouting trip, the moment they parked the car and saw the athletic field, James knew: “This is it.”

After joining the team and gaining her footing, she was taken with the familial and supportive dynamic cultivated by her coaches, and Mercy’s athletic program as a whole. “We push each other to be 110% and are basically like family,” James described. What’s sweetened her experience even more is that a former teammate is now one of her coaches.

Especially during the ups and downs of the pandemic, James appreciates field hockey at Mercy for a host of reasons. “Not only are we making sure that we were okay physically on the field, but we’re making sure that everyone is okay mentally – we bring each other up. You never know if it’s going to be your last game – COVID taught me to cherish every game, every moment, both on and off the field.”

“I am working up to go where I want to be. It’s a lot of pressure, but at the same time, I have a lot of support.” James’s mother is particularly proud of her achievements.

The backing she has received from her family, Mercy’s PACT mentorship program and the field hockey program has successfully carried her through to her senior year confident in the prospect of practicing speech pathology in a school after graduation.

In her last season, James takes to heart her “celebrate every moment” mantra and looks forward to the senior game in which the team honors seniors before the game starts. With her mom in the stands for as many games as possible, cheering her on as field hockey comes to an end, James realizes more and more what the sport, and Mercy, has meant for her and her family.



Photo by Mercy Athletics