

Casey Roon de Pacheco, Part 1
Former Owl Volleyball Player

What was Derek Jeter like in high school?

I first met Derek when we both played at Westwood Little League long before we entered high school together at Kalamazoo Central. Derek was always a pretty quiet kid, a good student and a very good friend to others. He did have a great sense of humor, too, and had a lot of fun. We were close friends that hung out together outside of school, talked on the phone, and ran with the same group of people all through high school. Derek's friendship was always special to me because he took a serious interest in my volleyball career. Even on school nights, Derek attended all of my volleyball matches, sat quietly up in the stands, either with friends or by himself. His support of my interest in volleyball never waned, not even when I played at Rice. I have always appreciated his genuine support of me.

How did you come to play volleyball at Rice from Kalamazoo?

Women's volleyball was a winter sport in Michigan when I was in high school, therefore making it hard for a high school volleyball player to perk the interest of college programs, as they were always late to the game. As a fall sport in the majority of the country, good prospects were chosen and verbal commitments made by the time the winter volleyball season ever started in Michigan. Knowing this early on, I concentrated on playing on a summer league team, endorsed by USVBA. I played for USA Kalamazoo, a club volleyball team comprised of excellent players from around Kalamazoo, coached by Mik and Lil Austrins. We played a spring and summer tournament schedule that would take us to major tournaments around the country, in hopes of picking up some college interest. Though I had always been an outside hitter on my high school volleyball team, I was the team's setter on USA Kalamazoo, and being tall and ambidextrous, I got plenty of attention from college scouts around the country. Though I was recruited by several big programs from around the country, I had formulated my own criteria when it came to choosing a school: it would be located in a big city, warm climate and I would join a volleyball program where I could make an immediate impact and play, not sit on the bench. And even if the school didn't have the exact academic program I was looking for (Fashion Design), academic reputation would be of utmost importance. Rice University satisfied all of my criteria, and aside from the incredible humidity that greeted me when I stepped off the plane on my recruiting visit, I was in love with Houston.

How did you acclimate to Houston?

To be completely honest, my first year was very difficult and I tried to transfer to a school closer to home several times. I credit my Mom and Dad for having the foresight and selflessness to not allow me to quit. I was suffering from a very bad case of homesickness and there's no question that being a student-athlete at Rice is very challenging. Little by little, I found my way and a deep love for Houston was born. After my first year in the dorms, I moved off campus and explored the city more and more. Being an Art and Art History major, I found my niche in the Museum District and considered Houston to be my home.

What did you study at Rice?

I studied Art and Art History, planning to graduate and continue my studies in Fashion Design, probably in New York. For a brief moment my freshman year, I considered Architecture but quickly learned that the demands of being a student-athlete and architecture were not going to gel well. As an Art student, there were difficulties too, studio classes always interfered with volleyball and practice times. In an unfortunate turn of events, I tore my ACL once in 1993, (redshirting me for my sophomore season) and again in 1995, which kept me out of the volleyball court, but allowed me to take the studio classes that I needed to complete my degree. I found great inspiration and comfort in the studios of Sewall Hall where I painted and hung out with my classmates. Though my volleyball career had come to an abrupt halt with my second ACL tear, those nights I spent painting alone in Sewall Hall made things feel like everything in my life was unfolding as it should.

Favorite memories of Rice not volleyball related?

As I mentioned earlier, I was forced to accept a medical hardship waiver in the fall of 1995, ending my Rice volleyball career. That was a defining moment in my life, of course at the time it was devastating, I was co-captain of the volleyball team and looking forward to a competitive season. It all changed in an instant during preseason. I wouldn't say that it was a favorite memory at all, but it was a pivotal moment in my life that proved to me the old adage, "when one door closes, another one opens". No longer able to work out with the team, I was suddenly able to take the classes that I never could take before (long afternoon or evening studio classes in the art department were necessary for my degree, but never available to me due to practice/playing schedule), and I was never happier than when I was painting in Bas Poulos' Advanced Painting classes. Each student would claim a section of a large, open studio as their own and with moveable walls, create their own, private studio. My 'studio', complete with a mini-fridge, loveseat, and a boombox, became my home away from home.

Favorite memories of playing volleyball at Rice?

The highlights of my volleyball days at Rice don't have one thing to do with the round ball that danced back and forth across the net, but have *everything* to do with the amazing girls I shared my time with. I don't know if it was because we shared the worst of times and the best of times together, but my teammates were (and still are) the most amazing people I have ever met. I have always thought that when you endure preseason workouts, losses, and injuries alongside the training, travel, and responsibilities that come with being a student-athlete, a special bond is created among teammates. That special bond is something that has endured despite the passage of time.

Keep up with any teammates?

Believe it or not, I keep up with almost every single teammate I had while at Rice. Through the wonder that is Facebook, we are able to connect easily and often. Facebook has been wonderful for us as we are all spread out, all over the world. But it isn't just through Facebook. We keep up through email, phone calls and the occasional personal visits.

Interview by Alan Shelby

Statements furnished: by Casey Roon de Pacheco

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