

## MAYA MATHIS | UCONN SOCCER

Hello my name is Maya Mathis and I'm a freshman on the uconn women's soccer team I think the things that I focused on were obviously the things that didn't come natural to me I feel like um oftentimes in high school I was described as pretty aggressive player strong um athletic So the parts of my game that I mostly focused on were maintaining those first So I had a pretty good um gym regimen that was approved by my college coaches Now Um I made sure to do a lot of conditioning and a lot of just skill work Um I made sure even my senior year was pretty tough um just because I got ankle surgery but leading up to that I made sure to just um hone in on those like technical skills Um because I think that gives you an edge over over a lot of other players that don't really focus on that You can always be more technical Um I think improving my soccer IQ is something that I still try to work on to this day Um and I think I started that started honing in on that probably in my junior year early junior year Um right after I committed to just improve my game a lot more So I think those are just a few things that I tried to work on I think some of the best advice I've been given just throughout my career is to just play like myself I think when you try to become another player and you like a lot of times people try to emulate people that they look up to Um oftentimes like Ronaldo Messi like that's it's just not me and um like the parts of my game that I was complimented on like aggression athletic athleticism um athleticism I think that um just keeping those parts and staying true to the type of player that you are is just gonna make you so much better than um the other players that are just constantly trying to change their game I think it's good to tweak little parts of your game But um just staying true to who you are on the field and off the field Um Being humble I think is another um thing that was taught to me by early on by my coaches One of my yeah I think my first club coach just taught us um the import the importance of being humble more off the fields Um and just having a winning mentality with that too but kind of how to interconnect being humble and having a winning mentality So I think those are two good pieces of advice Um that came pretty early on through club coaches It was kind of reinforced by my high school coaches as well Um so I think that's pretty important I think a lot of times um something that somebody something that's a lot of people don't talk about is burnout Um people think like oh if you've been burnt out you just quit I I don't think that's the reality of it I think a lot more players go through burnout than people

think they do Um And that's something I've experienced I I think I've experienced it multiple times throughout my career Um and just kind of pulling yourself back in and you have to realize why you're doing this why you keep playing you're not playing for the success of it all you're playing for yourself Um So I think that was definitely a challenge I think injury has been a huge part of just my entire career Um I've had I mentioned I got ankle surgery in my senior year but that was kind of um the breaking point of my injuries I had recur reoccurring ankle sprains since I was 11 years old Um And struggling with that was i it's one of the hardest things is coming back from injury Um Just the mental aspect of it having to take time off from like the thing that for some people and for me it was one of the things that truly like was my drive through life Um at the end of the day all I wanted to do is just get on the field If I was mad I wanted to get on the field If I was happy I wanted to get on the field Um So finding other things that motivate you through life to just keep going other than your sport I think that was just a really tough challenge for me And honestly something that I'm still working on today injury is always gonna happen It can happen to anybody Um And it was through my sorry it was through my ankle surgery that I kind of realized that part of honestly just sports Um just realizing there's more so recruitment was definitely a tough it was a really tough time and I even see I have two younger sisters that are going through one of them just ended their process and the other one's just beginning it um recruitment process It's it's it's a long hard process that you're questioning a lot about yourself You're questioning a lot about your worth Um And for me it was especially tough because I was uh it was COVID when I was getting recruited So coaches couldn't come to our games We had numerous showcases and games canceled Um A lot of things it was a lot of it was centered online So I had a I had a highlight tape which I honestly do suggest for any athlete that's trying to get recruited There's no harm in making a highlight so you can make one yourself I hired someone um that we knew previously to make one they did a great job Um I think it's I it shows your skills it shows what type of player you are right off the bat You can send it to coaches and then that invites them to come to more things I don't think that getting recruited off a highlight tape is ideal I was I was lucky that um uconn and Mags and Carrie and the rest of my coaching staff had watched me throughout my years So they had been watching me since I think my eighth grade year my freshman year of high school Um and we pretty consistent coming to my games They got to know me as a player and then through the recruiting process they got to know me as a person and

I got to know them And I think that's another big thing is you need to know what type of family I would say that you're walking into because when you're playing college it's not just about a team anymore You're with these girls you're with these coaches you're with if it's boys too you're you're with your teammates like 78 hours out of the day sometimes more Um If you live with them too like you are with these people you need to make sure that you are at the right place for you which I think does start with the people I think that a lot of times something that I've realized it happens with other people I thought it was just to me Um but everybody talks about this feeling that happens when you kind of walk on campus um that at the school that like you end up going to um I've hosted a few recruits this year just as a freshman It's kind of our duty just to show around the recruits Um and a lot of them that ended up committing talked about like the feeling that they had when they got on campus and talked to the coaches and saw the team So it's like you don't wanna force yourself to go to some school just because it's a big name school or you really like um you think the soccer is good or the sports good You really want to go to a place that feels like home Um for me that was also in proximity to my house I'm an hour and a half away from uconn um which makes it so easy for my entire family to come and drive down to see my games to visit me quickly Um I'm definitely a homebody So even going home for a weekend was rejuvenating to me sometimes say if I was sick or just going through finals and had a stressful time like it was so easy for me Um So I think that's another thing is just paying attention attention to what kind of person you are And again staying true to that Um if I chose somewhere that was far away I don't think that's staying true to myself And I think that honestly I there's a chance I could have been miserable Um so I think that's uh that's all really important when you're going through your recruiting process um to just keep those things in mind So my transition to college and playing in at a college level was definitely really tough Um again I brought up injuries Um there's the mental aspect of it and I think that is a big thing that I picked up was the mental aspect of it Um confidence can make or break your game Um confidence can rise or fall just based on outside factors which is something that I realized a lot this year Um So I think that just making sure you're mentally sound before you're putting your role in the fields Um And just prioritizing your mental health like how you're feeling on a day to day basis while you're playing at a high level is really important Um But some things that I picked up on the field that I think I've developed through the college game is um just the the speed of play is so

different Um It's a lot quicker there's a lot more possession in the game You have to think quicker You really need to be on the same wavelength that would say as your teammates you all need to be um in good standings with each other Like this is you you're only as good as your teammates are Um just as a team like you need to celebrate each other's wins not not put each other down That's a huge thing that I've learned um which I think is really common in high school and club sports just because I think like the immaturity a little bit is like you don't really care about your teammates that much I mean you're with them for a two hour practice at most on a few weekdays and then games over the weekend and maybe you're in a hotel with each other for a few nights and that's that's really it I mean I don't think you get to connect in the same way that um you do with your college teammates and I do think that's kind of a beautiful thing is like um being able to connect with people that the way that I have this year I feel like I've made some of my um closest friends just through playing soccer at uconn Um so yeah I think those are pretty good things that I've picked up just from playing so far and I know that there's a lot more to come So I cannot emphasize enough how much more there is to life than soccer than your sport um as a young athlete I think it's so hard not to get wrapped up in Oh my gosh What school am I going to Did I play well enough in practice Did I play well enough in the game I was at a point and one of my sisters is at a point where soccer used to define every single part of our life outside of it Like um again I said like if I was mad I wanted to go to soccer If I was happy I wanted to go to soccer But also on the flip side if I had a bad practice that would affect my mood at school the next day Um if I had a great practice then I would be happy for the rest of the night Um and I think that that's something that I've learned through this year going along with injuries um which is my ankle surgery Kind of forced me into realizing this that I give so much more to the table Um outside of soccer Um I think it's important to have other hobbies outside of just your sport You need to find things that make you happy Um and just not let everything within your sport dictate your life outside of it Um and I think that my sisters are starting to catch on and I hope that other athletes can understand the message that I'm trying to put out when I say that because your sport is important Um it should bring you happiness but it shouldn't control every single mood that you have It really shouldn't Especially at a young age Like you need to that Like that's the life that you're supposed to live When you're younger you're supposed to be carefree and not really have to worry about Oh where am I going to college And am I good

enough Um I think those are things that really come on later I think when you do play a sport in college it does get more serious Um But if you don't already have that foundation of wow like I'm not just the person I am because of soccer I think going into the college with that Um just knowing that in your heart um I think it's really really really important I can't emphasize that enough So again I am very new to nil as you said Um But I think something that's important for me is what I do with nil I don't want it to just be for the money or just for not there's no stupid deal Um But I think I try to navigate kind of closer to deals that put out more than I receive Um I wanna give advice to younger athletes Um I recently put out a video that's up on my Instagram right now that talks about the mental health um aspect when your mental health isn't prioritized and what issues kind of arise when that does happen And I do like the messages I got in response to that video um like brought tears to my eyes A lot of people were like I didn't know you struggled with this and it makes me feel so much more comfortable So even knowing and hearing things like that um like are just so much more to me than the money that nil brings But I do like the money um for Nil it's it's honestly really cool it's um becoming really big right now Um And I'm definitely interested into getting more involved um with just other deals I wanna get my name out there Um I think starting with what I've learned is starting with smaller deals and just kind of output your name um your brands and just kind of getting those done um is really really important Um And I'm still learning a lot about Nil I know a lot of my teammates that are upperclassmen um are far more educated in it than I am Um But it's inspiring to see what they do with their brands and kind of the face that they put out for themselves and that's kind of something that I want to do and I know that a lot a lot of other people wanna do So that's kind of my piece on Nil right now