

Six Years Later, My Second Interview with the Remarkable Erin Matson Who Reflects on a Spectacular 2019

Apr 04, 2020 [admin](#) COLLEGE NEWS



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Time flies! Erin Matson was the first athlete I interviewed when Philafielddhockey.com launched six years ago; she was a rising high school freshman and, I was told, an off-the-chart talent. At that point, Matson was already a member of the U.S. Women's National Indoor Team and had earned international caps at tours in Germany, Canada, and Argentina. She was months away from being named to the U.S. U-19 Women's National Team. Yet, when I asked Matson during that interview, as we sat on

bleachers near the Unionville High School hockey field, what she hoped to contribute to the high school program that fall, she replied that she hoped to make the varsity team. (I had to laugh to myself!) I was immediately stricken by Matson's humble persona, poise, and deep dedication to her sport. And although I hadn't yet seen Matson in action, I knew she was destined for greatness — her hockey reputation combined with the qualities I witnessed during that interview spoke volumes.

And then I saw Matson play. WOW! Fans of Unionville High School field hockey were lucky enough to enjoy Matson's remarkable talents for two seasons — alongside many great Uville Indian players who, together, advanced to the PIAA AAA state tournament. Matson earned numerous field hockey honors during those two years, highlighted by All-America accolades. She was also a formidable force on WC Eagles Field Hockey Club's USA Field Hockey Festival and National Indoor Tournament Championship squads. Having been promoted to the U.S. U-21 Women's National Team and then the U.S. Women's National Team during her sophomore year, Matson made the tough call to focus on her USA Field Hockey commitment for the balance of high school.



Fast forward a few years to Matson's collegiate career at the University of North Carolina — which has been spectacular, both personally and as a team. The Tar Heels posted back-to-back undefeated records (23-0) and NCAA Division I national titles with Matson leading the offensive punch during both of her seasons. In 2019, as a sophomore, Matson posted an astounding 81 points; she was named the First Point USA/NFHCA Division I National

Player of the Year and honored with the prestigious Honda Award for field hockey, among numerous other awards.

Earlier this week, I reached out to Matson for another official interview – six years later – and was not surprised to find the same hyper-focused, team-oriented, smart, and humble Erin. Read on to find out more about Matson's banner 2019 season at UNC, her most memorable '19 USAFH moments, and more including important questions (!) about her favorite campus foods and top Netflix series!

Your best 2019 UNC field hockey moment:

E: "Definitely the championship game! Everything from the number of fans we had, to the controlling of emotions throughout the game, to the connection all of us felt after the final buzzer was perfect. I remember looking up and seeing Eva running full speed towards me with the biggest smile and arms wide open. Imagine that, multiple it by 100, and that's how we all felt."

What did it take for your team to pull off a 6-1 victory over Princeton in the final?

E: "I wouldn't say it took anything special. What it took was all of us working together and playing our game. We went into the game with no different mindset and no tricks up our sleeves. If we played how we played the entire season- two-touch, passing hockey, at speed, with scoring threats and a strong defense- we knew we would walk away with another national championship."

Did you feel pressure to rise in the championship more than in other games?

E: "Not at all. I treat every game as if it is the national championship because I believe that that is the only way to succeed when you actually make it to the final game. My team and I respected every opponent and went into every single game with the same mindset, including the national championship. That's why, when we got to the last game of the season, it felt like any other game, at least to me, once the first whistle blew."

Tell me a little about your relationship with your UNC teammates:

E: "From the time since I stepped foot on campus as a freshman, the relationships that my teammates and I have built are bonds that will last forever. I am a big believer in needing to have a healthy culture and those strong connections off the field in order to succeed on the field. The work that we put into sports psych meetings along with the time that we love to spend together just hanging out definitely correlates to how we connect, support each other, and work together in our play."

What in the 2019 season are you most proud of personally?

E: Personally, I am most proud of the success that our team achieved, players and staff, after coming off of a "perfect" season (23–0). It is easy to become complacent and/or too confident after one, undefeated national championship, but I will forever be impressed with this group because we worked together to be able to do it again.

Were there any surprises for you in the 2019 season?

E: "I wouldn't say that there were any surprises that stand out to me, but every season brings instances where we need to adapt and problem solve. I think that's one of the things that I enjoy though because I have no doubt that we can work through things as a team, and the times that require more focus make us that much more powerful."

What do you consider to be your biggest contribution to the UNC FH program?

E: "What I hope to be thought of as is a leader who works hard, always wants to learn, is always a competitor, and one who shares my knowledge with my teammates so that we can all succeed together. Working hard on the field and in the classroom while building my reputation has always been and will continue to be something that I take pride in. It is also important to me that the girls who come after me are able to succeed and continue to carry on the Carolina Field Hockey legacy."

What are your goals for the 2020 UNC season and what you think you need to do personally to achieve them?

E: "An obvious goal is another national championship, and that will be a goal every year for not just me but the entire program. Other than that, I plan on continuing to advance my skills on and off the ball along with continuing to work on my leadership roles. Even though all of the awards are nice and it would be easy for me to say that I just want to attain those again, I play my best when I can just go out and not be bogged down with numbers and statistics. I believe that if I continue to do what I've been doing- putting in the extra work and helping my teammates be the best they can be, the rest will take care of itself. In the end, it's about continuing to work as hard as I can to be the best I can be while also doing my best to help my teammates reach their goals as well."

What other things are you involved with at UNC?

E: "I am a representative on the NCAA Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) where I get to provide insight on the student-athlete experience and offer input on rules, regulations, and policies that affect student-athletes' lives. I also am part of the Richard A. Baddour Leadership Academy where work with the community and with other athletes to better understand the values needed to achieve leadership in academics, athletics, and life. I also have always loved to coach, so it is so amazing that Abby Pitcairn and I have the opportunity to mentor and instruct Carolina All-Stars under-10 field hockey players weekly and develop practice plans. Finally, as a team, we participate in multiple volunteer opportunities such as visiting the UNC Cancer Hospital and doing trash pick-up along Raleigh Road."

How's it going with your major in PR/Advertising? What do you like most about it?

E: "Wonderful! I love my major and am happy that I found something that I can see myself continuing with and carrying with me into my future career. I have learned so much and created relationships with professors that I look forward to pursuing. I think what I like most about it is that I can already implement things that I have learned into my daily life and the fact that I can take what I am being taught and run with it in any direction. I'm really excited to be exposed to even more concepts that will be useful in the future."

What's your top personal and team USA FH moments of 2019:

E: "My best personal and team USAFH moment of 2019 would have to be the first half of the game against India that we played in the Olympic Qualifier in Bhubaneswar, India. We scored four goals in the first half. Although people think of the crowd going wild and the stadium being deafening when your team scores, the place was silent. And I mean silent. As strange as it sounds, it was the best feeling in the world because that meant we were doing something right. We played as a team, and I will never forget how connected and unstoppable all of us felt. It was definitely the most inspiring and empowering moment of my field hockey career thus far, and I will forever be proud of us for battling together like we did. Although the second half did not end how we wanted it to, that half and how we acted as a team will always have a special place in my heart."

Tell me a little about your relationship with teammates and how the dynamic is different than at college:

E: "Every team is different, and I have had the luxury of being a part of many spectacular teams over the years. Each team brings different elements to the table including strengths, areas for improvement, leadership styles, standards, etc. My USA team and I share so many memories from traveling the world together and competing at the international level, and I would never trade any of them for anything. We also share bonds that could never be broken, just in different ways. I can't say how lucky I am to be able to have my UNC family but also my USA family; I am forever grateful for the number of empowering women and men that I have surrounded me throughout my field hockey career."

You took off some time from Team USA; when was that and why?

E: "I took some time off from the USA team this spring since we did not qualify for the Tokyo Olympics and it was the perfect time to focus on my academics so that I can graduate on time and be a full-time member as soon as possible! I am taking advantage of taking a heavier course load this spring, doing a small internship at the beginning of this summer, and taking an online class in Chapel Hill over the second half of the summer. I've been part of the Women's National Team since I was in high school, and

it's very normal for veterans to take some time off, and looking at the bigger picture, it was the perfect opportunity for me to solely focus on my academics. That does not mean that it has been easy being apart from the team by any means, nor does it mean that I am not eager to join them, compete internationally, and represent my country again!"

What are your short-term USAFH personal goals?

E: "With the Olympics being postponed and us not sure about how that will affect the scheduling of other events, I am not really sure what is in store for me short-term-wise. It is still a dream of mine to play in the Olympics and bring home a medal for my country, but before that comes Pro Leagues and World Cups. I look forward to playing with the girls again on any stage that international hockey brings us to while wearing the red, white, and blue."

What are you up to during this social isolation?

"I'm back home in PA spending lots of time with my family! I love to cook, so I've been cooking up a lot of healthy, tasty meals and snacks that we all can enjoy. School being online has been a little different, but I don't mind it. That takes up most of my day followed by a good workout and/or yoga session! It's also important to me to keep my stick skills up, so I spend some nights playing downstairs like I used to back in high school. I also have tried to pass some time with charcoal drawing, some t-shirt printing, crossword puzzles and Netflix!" *(Note: Check out @erinmatsonn on twitter for Erin's awesome field hockey video tutorials!)*

Has it been tough? Both physically in terms of practicing and emotionally?

E: "I wouldn't say it has been tough only because I have a gym at home and a room to do my field hockey. It's definitely different since it is all individual work, but I spent a lot of extra time practicing and working out at home during my high school days, so it's just like back then! Our UNC strength coach has been great with sending strength and conditioning workouts to make sure we are staying in shape during this, and I really enjoy them. The hardest part is definitely not being at school with the girls. Spring is always fun, and we look forward to making a lot of memories together in the off-season, so it is hard not being with them right now. However, once we are all back together it will be that much more special!"

Rapid Fire questions for Matson:

Skill you're working to master: Any! I love to learn anything and everything, and once I've learned it, I love to practice it until it's second nature.

Best UNC on-campus food: Lucha Tigre, the Purple Bowl, Bartaco, the Pizza Press, CAVA, or just plain Whole Foods!

Favorite class right now: Digital Filmmaking

Cat or dog: DOG! We have two corgis at home, and they have my heart.

The thing that makes you most happy: A relaxing, warm day at the beach after a good workout.

Top on your playlist now: New Music Friday on Spotify is something I always look forward to!

Favorite sweet: Ice cream, ice cream, ice cream.

Top Netflix series ever: Oh boy...I love a good Netflix series. Gossip Girl, Stranger Things, and All-American are the first ones that come to mind!

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