



Above, Patty Maye Ohanian beats the tag in a fall ball scrimmage against Division I Hampton on Oct. 5, just one of the handful of home games during the 2019-2020 academic year. Below, Patty Maye Ohanian shouts in triumph after hitting a home run off two-time NFCA National Player of the Year Hanna Hull in a doubleheader against Virginia Wesleyan on March 24, 2019. Bottom, Ohanian makes contact with the ball in a 10-2 win against Salisbury during the 2019 Capital Athletic Conference championship tournament. PM had 12 RBIs and 3 homers in the conference postseason to help lead the Captains to a CAC title. (submitted by Ben Leistensnider)

# For the love of the sport

## *Smithfield resident perseveres in softball*

By Nate Delesline III  
Staff Writer

In less than a week, the coronavirus threw a no-hitter against Christopher Newport University softball.

The team was in Arizona in early March for a national invitational tournament when things started getting tense, said senior Patty Maye Ohanian. Games were being canceled and everything seemed up in the air.

When the team flew back to Virginia, “everything’s fine on Monday. On Tuesday, some things (were) canceled. Wednesday, I think our conference canceled but we were still going to play and by Friday we had to move out of our dorms and everything was over,” she said.

When the virus pandemic emerged, “It was weird, because when it first happened, I felt like maybe this is kind of nice. We’ll get a two-week break and then we’ll come back, because you’re exhausted in the middle of the season. But then it took about maybe a month and I was like ‘Wow, I’m really not going to have a junior season.’ It kind of was a delayed reaction for me.”

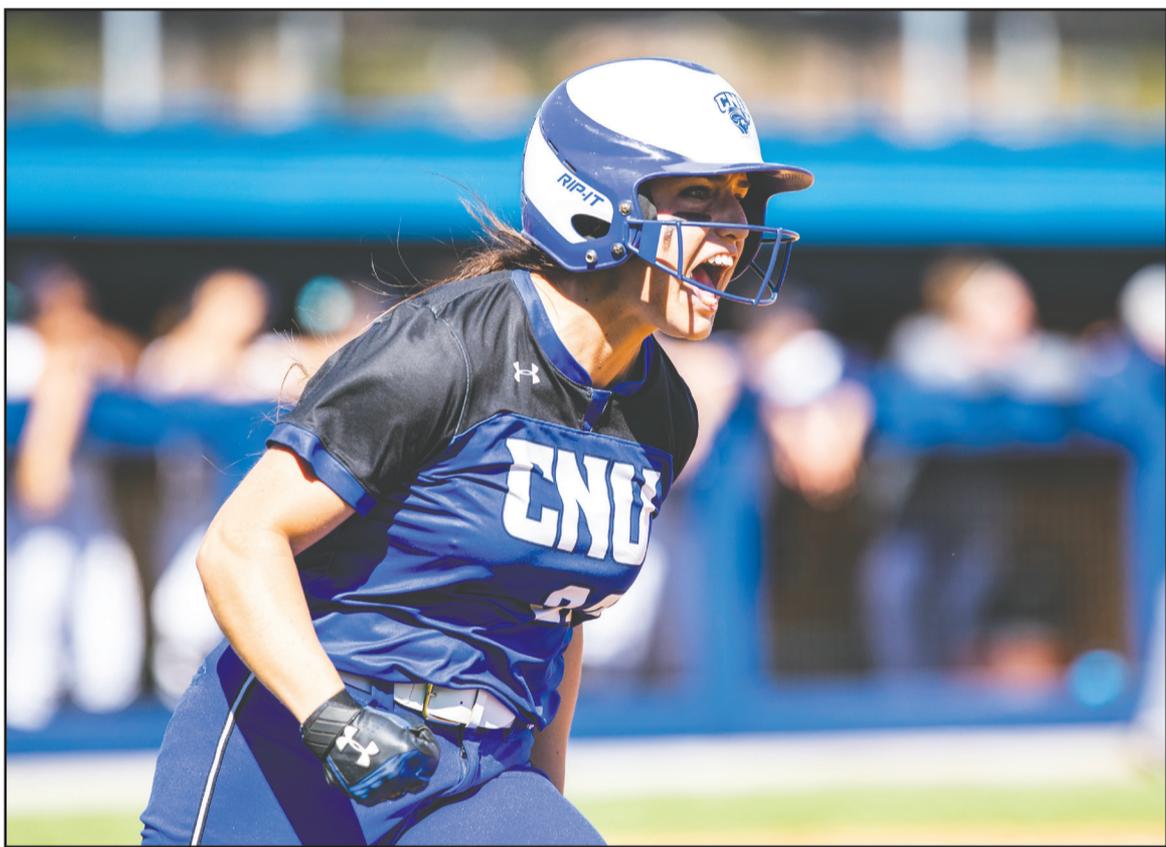
“Originally CNU told us we were going to try and come back April 12 and then that’s when everyone thought that it would be like two weeks long and it would go away,” she continued. “And then towards April, we got an email that said we’re not coming back at all for this spring. I still had my belongings in my dorm. I didn’t even pack up all my stuff.”

Ohanian, who grew up in Northern Virginia but now resides in Smithfield, said the shutdown experience has been traumatic and frustrating for many college student athletes. As president of the school’s Student Athlete Advisory Committee, she plays a leading role in advocating for student athletes and shaping their experience at CNU.

“I’m not around my friends, I’m not around my coaches, I’m not at my school. And I’m super involved in CNU,” she said. “I love our administration and staff and my teammates and friends and it was like everything was taken away from me all at once — not even just softball; school, friends, coaches, where I lived — everything was taken away. It was hard.”

Teammate and friend Bailey Roberts agreed. Over the summer, she and Ohanian sometimes got together as a duo to practice on-the-field skills. “It has definitely taken a different road for us, as far as athletics, not being able to practice as a team for a little while,” said Roberts, who is a CNU junior from Chesapeake.

In the early weeks of the pandemic, Roberts said she and Oha-



nian tried to mentally prepare the team for what they saw on the horizon. “We were trying to let everybody else on the team (know), get them in the mindset that our season will be canceled, there’s nothing we can do about it because this clearly isn’t going away.”

CNU has a plan to get athletes back in action.

“Our athletic department has done a really good job of trying to put us through a system where we can ease our way back into it but unfortunately that does take a few months, and then by the time we are able to practice as a team, we go on winter break, so that part kind of stinks,” Roberts said. “But I do think the precautions they’re taking and the way they have us set up into groups, we can still practice and be somewhat of a team.”

Ohanian explained how it’s supposed to work: By late September, physicals and health screenings are planned. By early October, small group strength and conditioning — outdoors and two days a week — is supposed to begin. After that, they’ll move to small group softball practices outside, also twice a week, then finally, full team practice. Everything will be done with health and social distancing protocols in place to every extent possible.

CNU, Ohanian said, has been clear that not following the rules could mean “the end of our entire fall.” Still, the opportunity to inch back toward a new normal is positive.

As an economics major, the economics of sports is often on Ohanian’s mind. As leagues, associations and conferences from little leagues to the pros scrambled to start playing again,

she acknowledged it’s frustrating that sometimes all but the big three sports — football, baseball and basketball — get left out of the conversation.

“I love all sports and I’m a big football fan, but I did think it was funny how no one ever talked about playing spring sports in the fall,” she said. “And I think a lot of that is because football is in the fall, and everyone cares about college football, and so everyone

wanted to find a way to play football in the spring. ... So that’s something that’s really stuck out to me, a little bit of a source of frustration.”

“I think our problem now is, as far as the student athletes, it’s how do we make athletes still feel like they’re part of a community, because we’re not being paid to play here,” Ohanian said. “We don’t get scholarships. We do this because we love our sports.”



# Smithfield senior will play Navy football

By Nate Delesline III  
Staff Writer

Smithfield High School senior Chris Gundy will be a Naval Academy Midshipman this fall.

Gundy's athletic talent and academic achievement have earned him a football scholarship to Annapolis. A small group of family and friends joined him in the school's auditorium and by video online on Dec. 16 — early signing day — to celebrate his accomplishment.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity that I have knowing that COVID could have easily stopped what I had planned," Chris said.

Due to seasons being curtailed or canceled due to COVID-19, many college seniors are being offered an additional season of athletic eligibility, "so scholarships are even harder to come by," said Matthew Moore, Smithfield's director of student activities, who served as the host of the brief ceremony.

"The Naval Academy is one of the hardest institutions in the country to get into," Moore said. "Chris is a culmination of an outstanding student. He's good in the classroom, his leadership abilities are unmatched, and yes he's got a lot of natural athletic ability but his workmanship is one of the best we've seen here as a while."

"When COVID hit in March, undeterred by an international pandemic, Chris continued to work, and work and work," Moore said. "And all of his efforts culminated to where we are today, which is the securing of an athletic scholarship in the sport he loves — football."

DeVondre Bazemore is in his first season as Smithfield's head coach — he was previously assistant.

"When I first got here a couple



Smithfield High student Chris Gundy, right, and his mom, Tynesia Gundy, listen to remarks during a Dec. 16 ceremony where he signed on to play football at the Naval Academy. (Nate Delesline III/The Smithfield Times)

of years ago, from the day that I stepped in here, Chris was always an easy kid to coach," Bazemore said. "He covered every base in the classroom. Everything you wanted on the field. Crazy athleticism."

The 5-foot-9-inch standout's on-field talent is so stellar, Bazemore said he is capable of playing nearly any position on the squad. "You'll see him mostly in the back field — running back and slot receiver and he's a return specialist."

"Early on," Moore said, "people said he was undersized. They said he wasn't tall enough, he wasn't big enough. And he basically was like 'Watch.'" And despite the pandemic, Bazemore said, "you'd still see Chris outside everyday" practicing and running drills.

In addition to taking care of

academics, maintaining a 3.6 GPA and maintaining his athleticism, Bazemore said he was touched that Chris would also check up on his teammates and coaches. It's evident, Bazemore said, that Chris cares all around about the people in his life. "That stood out to me so much more than anything else because it shows who Chris is as a person," Bazemore said.

Moore shouted out Chris's parents, who in turn praised his teachers and mentors in and out of school.

Chris's mom, Tynesia Gundy, quipped that her son "has so many last names" because so many members of the community have served as mentors and extensions of the family. "We're extremely proud of you. We thank God for you, we thank God for giving you this opportunity,"

she said at the podium with her husband Christopher.

The Midshipmen are part of the NCAA Division I FBS, which is composed of top tier college teams, including Notre Dame, the Clemson Tigers, Duke, the Air Force Academy and the Army's Black Knights at West Point, the Midshipmen's regular rivals in the well known and long standing Army-Navy game.

Bazemore acknowledged working through COVID-19 has made for a challenging season.

"It's easy to complain but we won't," Bazemore said. "We're doing everything we can — Zoom meetings, coaches' meetings. I know our athletes have stayed engaged in working out alone or with other guys. So we're going to trust that those guys are going to get better and we'll return when it's time."



Josh Condit connects with the ball during a Smithfield High football game last season. The senior athlete's performance at a recent camp in Charlotte earned him an award and an invitation to an upcoming event in Texas where coaches and recruiters will likely be watching. (Submitted photos)

# Condit kicks it at camp

By Nate Delesline III  
Staff Writer

Josh Condit's powerful, precise kicks have captured the attention of local and national football coaches.

The Smithfield High School senior's performance at a recent kicking camp in Charlotte earned him the event's Golden Boot award and an invitation to the 2020 Kicking World Showcase in Austin, Texas, on Dec. 5-6. He'll be showing off his skills with some of the country's best athletes.

Josh first joined the Smithfield High Packers last year. This year, he's likely to be the varsity team's only kicker. His performance on the soccer field at Smithfield caught the attention of the football team.

"I was practicing soccer, at high school practicing, and we were just practicing free kicks. I was kicking from half field toward the goal. And the football team was conditioning and the coach talked to me after that and said I should try out and see what happens."

"They didn't have a kicker at that time," Josh continued. "I think that's how a lot of soccer players get into football — I think like 90% of football kickers have a history in soccer, they're soccer players."

Josh grew up on soccer fields, literally and figuratively. He's now 6 feet, 4 inches tall, and athletics is part of his DNA. Sports are an important element of his family's life, too. "We're a big soccer family," he said. I think our

whole family has played it, other than my mom," he said.

"I played it one semester, one time," Elly said. In addition to being her son's biggest cheerleader, his mom also offers an analytical take on Josh's athletic talent, focus and opportunities.

"Football has helped his soccer just like soccer has helped his football, because he's really good at placing the ball to somebody, finding somebody in the field," she said. "It's really fun to watch him play because his ball will curve to the person and it's right where it needs to be. So it's really neat to see the accuracy of his kicks. It's really neat to see him play both sports, because they piggyback on each other."

Josh is also further diversifying his sports skills by playing basketball. "I definitely like playing basketball. It's one of my favorite sports, but I started late," he said. "I'm tall, that helped, but I play because the environment is a lot of fun for me and I like playing in front of people — that definitely adds something to it."

Everyone in the family has been or is currently involved in sports — soccer, swimming, tennis or something else. So the past year, when the COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed athletic activities at all levels from pre-school to pro, has been hard.

Josh also plays soccer at Smithfield, and "my high school season actually got cut short — the whole season. We had two scrimmages. And so 'corona' has kind of condensed everything and so we

ended up making up by having one tournament this summer," he said. "Practicing was really hard, and there were all sorts of regulations about how many people could do it."

A few months ago, Josh started practicing with Colin Gary, a former Smithfield High football standout.

"With him, he kind of taught me the fundamentals of technique and everything," Josh said. "I definitely had no idea what going to that first day was going to be like. I was just kicking the ball as hard as I could."

Although connecting your foot with the ball is a fundamental element of both sports, Josh said a key difference between soccer and football is that in soccer, arm motions are more conscious and part of your body movements.

Elly said college coaches are aware of Kicking World and said the program has a good reputation and visibility. Josh is interested in pursuing a college soccer career, possibly at James Madison University. He'd like to go to a Division I or Division II school for soccer "but it's so hard with the coronavirus and visibility," for athletes, he said. Scholarship opportunities will also be a deciding factor.

For people who aren't connected to the sports world, Elly explained that competition for college football opportunities is so fierce at top tier schools that in most cases, coaches and recruiters approach students. For soccer though, it's often the other way



Condit

around.

From an academic perspective, Josh said he's interested in education or teaching as career possibilities.

But getting the attention of athletic recruiters or even finding a spot on a team roster may be further complicated by COVID-19. In response to curtailed or canceled seasons, many college student-athletes were awarded an additional year of eligibility, so "it's really hard" to get a spot on rosters at Division I schools, Josh said.

Kicking World helps players refine their skills and approach. The organization bills itself as providing "the best football kicking instruction in the world" and says it coaches and trains more than 1,500 students annually from age 9 through professional athletes in 50 camps in 30 cities in 20 states.