

Senior leads Rutgers after long adjustment

By [Mike O'Sullivan](#) | 09/21/15 7:54pm



Photo by [Shirley Yu](#) |

Senior midfielder Samantha Valliant scored the only goal in Rutgers one-nil, conference opening win over Maryland Sept. 18.

Coming to college is a big enough adjustment in itself, but the shift is even more substantial for those who go to school far from home.

While many students in the United States go to colleges outside of their home state, there are some who go to school outside of their own home country.

Rutgers women's soccer midfielder Samantha Valliant falls into that category.

The senior Scarlet Knight hails from Markham, Ontario, Canada. When she came to Rutgers as a freshman in 2012, she also came as a newcomer to the United States.

Among Samantha Valliant's close friends is teammate Brianne Reed. The two seniors have become close after four years. The two look to finish their journey on the Banks with a Big Ten Championship.

After missing her freshman season due to injuries, Valliant got her start as a key player for the Knights in her sophomore season.

She said it took her time to adjust to her new home, but is happy with how everything turned out during her career as a student-athlete at Rutgers.

"It was definitely a bit of adjustment coming here from Canada," Valliant said. "I came in my freshman year and was injured so I didn't really get the normal freshman experience. I think I've grown every single year that I've been here in every aspect of my life. I've gotten better at soccer and academically, and it's just been a really good experience."

Valliant really came into her own as a top contributor to her team during her junior campaign last year, where she started 18 matches and scored the first goal of her career against Michigan State.

After logging more minutes throughout her junior season, the midfielder carried her momentum over into her senior season where she has been a major piece in the Knights' school record-setting 8-0 start.

Along with clearing balls out of the midfield on defense and helping to control the ball for the offense, she also has two goals and an assist on the season.

In their most recent contest and Big Ten opener at Maryland, Valliant scored the lone goal of the game in the second minute to lead the Knights to a 1-0 victory.

In addition to her improvement as a player, she grew as a leader. And that character development is something that head coach Mike O'Neill said he is most proud of.

"When Sam, or anyone comes into our program, we make it known that we expect them to grow as people and as players, and she has done both," O'Neill said. "To watch Sam from the first day she came to Rutgers to where she is today, and to see her development as a person (and) as a player has been so rewarding. It's been special to watch."

Like many of the Knights have said, Valliant agrees that this year's squad is a tight-knit group that is meshing extremely well together.

She is close with many of her teammates, particularly senior defender and All-American Brianne Reed.

The pair have been teammates for four years and part of many successful seasons at Rutgers.

Reed enjoyed her time spent with Valliant and is glad to see her get off to a quick, productive start to her last season on the Banks.

“Being her teammate and living with her, I’ve gotten to know Sam very well,” Reed said. “The amount she’s grown since she’s been here, overcoming injuries and getting better as a player and showing what she is really capable of — her success is really well-deserved at this point.”

Valliant helped Rutgers become a winning team throughout her career, but is looking to achieve more in her final season.

With the Knights having one Big Ten win under their belt and more conference games on the way, she is looking to close out her career with a conference crown.

“I’d love to win a Big Ten Championship,” she said. “I think this is the team that can do it and we have definitely set ourselves up to have a shot at it, so now we just have to keep going.”

For updates on the Rutgers women’s soccer team, follow @TargumSports on Twitter.