

2015 Graduate Profile: St. Mary's scholar-athlete looks to a rigorous future



By Erik Zygmunt

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ANNAPOLIS – After completing five Advanced Placement courses, being named a 2015 Archdiocese of Baltimore Distinctive Scholar, captaining the track team and graduating as valedictorian of St. Mary's High School, Patrick Pryal has no plans to take it easy when he enters the University of Maryland in the fall.

Pryal's plan for College Park: study biochemistry, attend medical school with a military scholarship, and be commissioned a lieutenant in the Navy.

He says his naval ambitions are a product of his environment.

"I grew up here in Annapolis, and the Navy was always around," Pryal said, though he discloses his favorite movie without hesitation: "Top Gun."

Once commissioned, Pryal hopes to deploy with the Marines and care for them in the field as a trauma surgeon.

"I like how it's a form of medicine where you can see the effects immediately," Pryal said. "People come to you when they need you the most, and you're able to use your expertise in a way that's very visible."

"It would be really exciting," he adds, not sounding particularly excited at all, but more calm and assured, as if he were discussing a research project.

He enjoys those, too. As a participant in the Charles Carroll Scholars Program – the most rigorous course of study available at the Annapolis high school – Pryal delved into green chemistry, which advocates for studying and experimenting in a manner that minimizes excess harmful chemicals and adverse environmental effects.

“It’s not so much its own field as much as some guiding principles some scientists came up with in the 1980s,” Pryal said.

One of those principles is “atom economy,” which Pryal explained as “having all the reactants (in an experiment) involved and used up,” so nothing is wasted or remaining to hurt the environment.

“It’s very interesting for me because it’s kind of a new field,” Pryal added. “I looked at the environmental problems that occurred in the past versus what they’re doing now.”

Although Pryal has always enjoyed the challenges of science and math, St. Mary’s didn’t have him conducting independent research at the outset.

“They sort of build you up to taking higher-level science and math classes here, rather than throwing them at you from the beginning,” he said. “But once they get there, they’re more challenging here than at other schools, so I like that.”

The 6-foot-2-inch Pryal might be at home in the environs of the laboratory, but he doesn’t live there. Captain of the track team, he excelled in the high jump and ran the 400- and 800-meter relays, he said. He also participated in student government as a homeroom representative, was inducted into the National Honor Society and served as president of the Spanish National Honor Society.

“They keep you busy here at St. Mary’s,” he said.

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