

DREAMS TO REALITY

Senior Ryan Avallone takes talents to the next level

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Photo by Raheel Patel

As S.S.C. Napoli took the field for the 2012 Coppa Italia final, 8-year-old Ryan Avallone eagerly cheered on from over 5,000 miles away. Despite being so far from Naples, he felt a close connection to Italian football, something he inherited from his dad who was born in Italy. As Avallone watched Napoli capture its fourth Coppa Italia title, he dreamt of one day playing on a similar stage. Ten years later, Avallone finds himself one step closer to his goal after committing to play division I soccer at the College of Charleston.

Avallone began playing soccer at the age of 3 and immediately fell in love with the competitiveness and complexity of the sport. Inspired by his dad, who's also a coach, Avallone grew up with a ball at his foot. Now a senior in high school, he has grown to understand and appreciate what the game has to offer.

"I just love competing," Avallone said. "I feel like the freedom you have differs from other sports in a way. In a lot of other sports, there are set plays and 'you do this' or 'you do that,' but soccer is so creative and free minded. It's so creative and almost like a form of art in that sense."

Avallone has played soccer at Trinity since coming to the school in sixth grade and has been on the varsity team since eighth grade. During that time, the team has found much success, including a state semi-final appearance two years ago. Outside of school, Avallone plays club soccer with the 2004 Florida Kraze Krush team (FKK), coached by Ray Sandidge. Avallone has played for Sandidge since he was 6-years-old and has built a close connection with him. Not only does Avallone view Sandidge as a mentor, but also a friend he can count on.

"I mean, he's been my coach for forever, but we've grown to be friends," Avallone said. "He'll call me, and we'll talk about games or even talk about something outside of games. We've grown closer over the years, and as I mature, I become more of a friend to him."

In 2019, Sandidge was hired by Trinity as the varsity head coach. Coming to the school, he hoped to bring a hard-working, family-first mentality. The players embraced this attitude, resulting in three winning seasons. For Sandidge, having a specifically close relationship with Avallone and his family automatically makes him a little tougher on Avallone than other players, but that never ruins their relationship.

"I've known Ryan

for his whole life," Sandidge said. "Obviously I've known him for a long, long time and it makes a difference, being family friends also, but we have a very good, open relationship. So sometimes I'm harder on him than others, but that's just the way it goes."

Over the past few years, Sandidge has seen Avallone take major strides on the field, specifically citing his growth in physicality from the weight room. Avallone's vision has always been one of his best attributes, yet as he matures, his growing frame has helped him get to the next level. Sandidge credits Avallone's work ethic for his improvement into a top player in the area.

"I think he's probably one of the best passers of the ball in all of Central Florida," Sandidge said. "As he's grown and matured, we've set out to work on his physicality and heading the ball, and he's really improved in those areas, as well as taking a leadership role now as a senior."

Avallone plays at the center mid position, which is in between the forward and defensive side. According to Sandidge, the position allows for Avallone to showcase his passing ability and leadership. Growing up, Avallone played many positions, but he has found the most success at center mid.

"I like being able to control everything," Avallone said. "Being in the middle, you see the field in a different way than in other positions, and you can also communicate with both the backs and forwards, kind of commanding the team in that sense."

Avallone began talking to colleges late in his sophomore year. At the time, he was deciding between two schools when the College of Charleston reached out to set up a call. Shortly after, Avallone went on a visit to tour the campus and the school's facilities, and fell in love with the culture of the program. Avallone and his family also met with the team's coaches, who had come down to Florida earlier in the year to watch him play. Head Coach Keith Wiggins expects big things from Avallone in his freshman year, and believes he will be a key player in the team's future.

"I am very excited to add Ryan to our team," Wiggins said. "He is committed to growing his game and has a work ethic that is unmatched. He will immediately strengthen our midfield and compete for minutes from his first day on campus. Spending time with him and his family has made me appreciate him even more as a person. I think he will fit into our group very well."

