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Not Just A Pretty Face...

By Sam Finley, EDN

Amanda Pflugrad had a unique presence during her days on the cheer squad at Oregon. The 5'4, blonde with the energetic smile was at, one time, of the most downloaded cheerleaders on the internet. In fact, an argument could be made that she was more popular than some of the Duck football players.



Don't be fooled. There's more to Amanda Pflugrad than a beautiful face. (Photo Courtesy: Amanda)

Pflugrad)

“I don’t know about that,” said Pflugrad with a modest laugh.

In all seriousness, Amanda’s interest in sports started at a very young age.

“My Dad (Robin Pflugrad) has been a football coach since I was a little kid,” she explained. “So ever since I can remember, I was always going to his football games. That was the case whether it when he was an assistant coach at Montana, Arizona State, Washington State, or Oregon.”

Yes, Pflugrad moved around a lot as a kid. The move to Eugene came three days after graduating high school in Pullman, Washington in 2006. Amanda and her mother drove to Eugene to join her father, who had become the receivers coach at the U of O.

“That’s how I became a cheerleader,” she said. “My Dad had been talking to the cheer coach, and I had done a lot of cheerleading in high school. After she had mentioned that they were having tryouts and if I’d be interested in doing it. But I ended up trying out, and ended up becoming a cheerleader there.”

Little did she know the impact cheering at Oregon would have on her.



Amanda was a 2008 Sports Illustrated Cheerleader Of The Week. (Photo Courtesy: Amanda Pflugrad)

“It was probably one of the most amazing experiences of my life,” Pflugrad claimed. “Just being part of that nationally-recognized organization and all the hard work we put in, I feel like that was the best place for me to be. Some of my best friends were on that team, and I loved every second of getting to cheer for the Ducks.”

What did Pflugrad love most about cheering?

“Mainly, the atmosphere at Autzen,” she said. “It’s so amazing and it is unlike any other college stadium in the country. It holds 60,000 fans, and everybody in Eugene wants to go. So I feel very

spoiled to have that opportunity and that experience.”

Of course, Amanda Pflugrad wasn't simply a cheerleader at Oregon (which is an accomplishment in its own right). As a 2008 Sports Illustrated Cheerleader of the Week, Pflugrad might've been in the public spotlight almost as much as guys like Jeremiah Johnson, LeGarrette Blount, and Ed Dickson. That being said, she never felt like she was living in a fish bowl.

“I never looked at it that way,” Pflugrad stated. “I think when I started to get recognized, our coach reminded us that we represent the program and you always want to showcase yourself in the best light. I always made sure I was courteous and respectful to the community and the Oregon fans. So, I think when that started happening, I tried to showcase myself in the best light.”



Pflugrad encouraging Duck fans to cheer. (Photo Courtesy: Amanda Pflugrad)

The only down moments for Amanda during her college days came towards the end of her junior year. First, after Chip Kelly became head football coach, her father was let go as receivers' coach. Then her brother Aaron, who had been a projected starting receiver for the Ducks, decided to transfer to Arizona State.

“It was a tough situation,” she said about her family members leaving. “Being born around football, you kind of know that is part of the business. Coaches get let go, and there are changes with athletic directors. But being able to cheer for my Dad and brother was kind of special to me.”

Still, Amanda is glad that her father and brother are happy in new situations.

“Everything happens for a reason,” Pflugrad stated. “I was sad at first, but I still wanted to cheer for the U of O. Aaron is doing great with ASU, and my Dad is the head coach at Montana. They're in better places now, and that's all you can ask for.”

But maybe Amanda Pflugrad didn't have a lot of time to be sad about what happened to her father and brother in her last two years at Oregon. In addition to the demands involved with cheerleading, she also majored in journalism with an emphasis in broadcasting. For those who don't know, getting through the J-school is a very tough grind.



Amanda caught up with former NFL quarterback Kurt Warner at a celebrity softball game. ((Photo Courtesy: Amanda Pflugrad)

“I had to work really hard,” Amanda explained. “But I’ve always really enjoyed giving it 110 percent. In this case, I had two passions. I absolutely loved cheerleading and I became very passionate about broadcasting. So it really became about finding time for both.”

That meant very little sleep for Pflugrad, as she prepared to cheer at Autzen and get a Friday newscast together for a campus TV network simultaneously.

“I would go into the J-school a lot, particularly during my senior year when I was part of the ‘Oregon News’ show,” she said. “I’d be at cheer practice until about seven in the evening and would have to get interviews for my video packages during the day. But sometimes I’d arrive at the J-school at seven at night and wouldn’t leave until three in the morning.”

The many extra hours invested by Pflugrad did not go unnoticed by at least one of her instructors, who would concur that Amanda was, and still is, more than just a pretty face.

“Amanda has a remarkably strong work ethic,” said Rebecca Force, an adjunct professor at the University of Oregon School of Journalism. “She identified her goals early and diligently worked to acquire the education and experience needed to get her where she wanted to go. As student, she worked hard, gracefully accepted feedback, and simply kept getting better and better.”

As she got better, the more satisfied she felt at the end of every week.

“It was lots of coffee,” Pflugrad claimed about the workload. “But it was very rewarding, because I’d get the package done on Friday and then I got to cheer on Saturday. I really enjoyed that part of it.”



Amanda Pflugrad interviewing rock star Bret Michaels at a celebrity boxing event. (Photo Courtesy: Amanda Pflugrad)

What Amanda really enjoys is her current position. She graduated from the U of O in 2010, and after completing a sports internship at KVAL-TV, relocated to Phoenix, Ariz. While sending out numerous demo reels to small broadcasting markets, Pflugrad got a job reporting for Fox Sports Arizona.

“A lot of the stories I’m involved with are charity events that pro athletes and celebrities put on in the Valley,” Amanda explained. “For example, we just did one for (Arizona Cardinals’ wide receiver) Larry Fitzgerald, who had a celebrity sponsored event. Guys like Kurt Warner were there, and they were raising funds for breast cancer (which Fitzgerald’s mother died from). Muhammad Ali even showed up. It was a great event to cover.”

Pflugrad especially likes displaying sides of sports figures that some might not see.

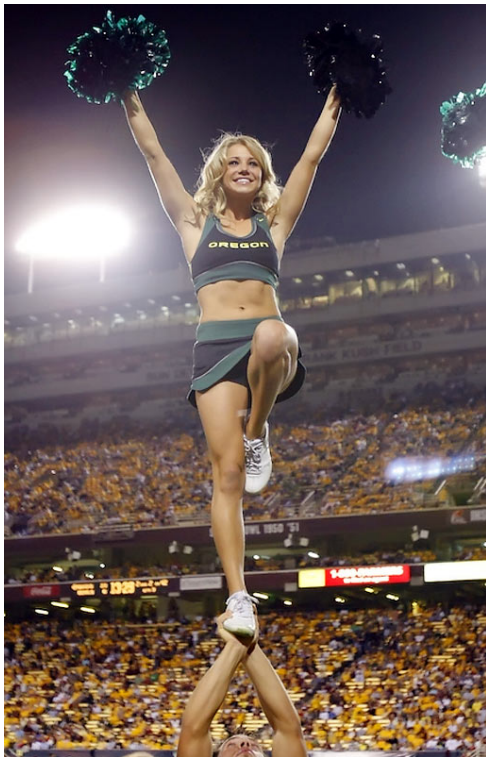
“It’s very rewarding to show what the athletes do off the field,” she continued. “I like showing them in a different light (giving back in the community) and there is so much that they do. It’s a great opportunity, and I’m glad to be a part of it.”

As wonderful as her gig might seem, do not think for a minute that Pflugrad simply has to stand in front of the camera and look cute. She’ll be the first to tell you there’s more to it than meets the eye.

“I’ve had to work very hard just to get in the door,” Amanda explained. “I’ve been a production assistant for ESPN 3D. I’m always making sure that I’m writing and I can edit video. So, I’m not just doing the reporting side of things. I’m able to do it all, and I’ve also been able to show that I can do it all. It’s not just about looks, and I hope that comes out in my work.”

So what would Pflugrad like to achieve in the near future?

“I’d love to be a sideline reporter,” she said. “I also love doing stuff on the entertainment side, like I do at some of these events. But what I really like doing is being able to tell people stories, and sticking to sports or entertainment reporting is my end goal.”



Amanda will be cheering again at Autzen this coming Saturday. (Photo Courtesy: Amanda Pflugrad)

Whatever happens down the line, there is one small drawback to where she is now. One of the

teams Pflugrad has to cover is the Arizona State Sun Devils, the team her brother currently plays for. Though she missed the Ducks' 41-27 victory over ASU, she admits that games like that are painful to watch.

"I feel torn," Pflugrad admitted. "you have family on one side and the alma mater you cheered for on the other. It's definitely kind of a tough game."

Having said that, Amanda will be back in Eugene next Saturday when Oregon plays the WSU Cougars. She'll be part of an alumni cheer squad, and that means doing something she loved again for the first time in awhile.

"I am looking forward to cheering again at the Washington State game," said Pflugrad enthusiastically. "I think it'll be a lot of fun, because I've missed cheering quite a bit, and I've missed being in that atmosphere."

By the same token, she admits she's probably a little bit out of practice.

"I don't know if I'm going to be as good as I was," chuckled Amanda. "It's been two years since I've been done a stunt or anything like that. But my fingers are crossed. There's a lot of girls coming back that I've cheered with in the past, so it will be a great group."

She also believes that, despite all the perks that come with living in a big city, there are some things that simply can't match up to the Willamette Valley.

"Phoenix is obviously a lot bigger and the temperature is warmer," Pflugrad explained. "There's also a lot more sports going on with all the pro teams. But it doesn't compare to a game at Autzen Stadium."

Moreover, citing many relatives that live here, Amanda Pflugrad considers Eugene her second home and tries to get back every chance she gets.

"Eugene is a place that is not too big or too small," she said. "I try to visit as often as I can, and I love staying at my Grandma's house. So to be able to get our family together after a game like this upcoming Saturday will be great."

Sam Finley has been the EDN sports editor since June 2011. Send him your feedback or story ideas to sam.finley@eugenedailynews.com

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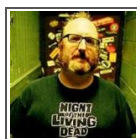
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