

Emily Fulton

The tried-and-true profile of a sports person is often a “where are they now” piece. For Emily Fulton, the better question is “Where is she going?”

Fulton was an intern for Virginia Amateur sports in the summers of 2015, '16 and '18, following her first, second and fourth years at VMI, working in operations under Charity Waldron. The work agreed with her and Fulton decided to make it a career. Fast forward two years and the Roanoke native and Cave Spring grad is a graduate assistant in operations for the swimming and diving team at Texas Christian University.

Halfway through that two-year program, Fulton is a year away from the next step, whatever that may be. Given the uncertainty that surrounds nearly everything in the country, especially sports, Fulton says she’s happy to have another year at TCU before plunging into the job market.

“Having a master’s is important for working in college athletics. Hopefully, I’ll be able to find something in Division I. My goal is to go into football operations,” Fulton said.

She was raised in a football household; father Tim is the head football coach at Cave Spring.

“I wouldn’t want to be a coach,” Emily says. “My dad is a coach and my mom works in HR at Medeco. I always tell people I want to combine those two worlds. I think that’s what I’m doing.”

Operations can be the overlooked aspect of athletics, from organizing games and events to making sure everything runs smoothly when under way. Sports fans watch the athletes and the action of players and coaches. Fulton has developed the habit of watching the operations, even when she is not involved.

“It’s hard not to look at it from a work perspective, even when I’m not working, just attending a game,” Fulton says.

The love of sports came naturally. Learning how to make it a career was a process that was honed during those three summers working for VAS.

“It was great interning at VAS. It was a start and gave me a background in the administrative side and what you can do to work in sports.”

For an event as large as the Commonwealth Games, everyone on staff is part of operations in some way. Fulton said her duties were “A little bit of everything. I helped with social media, helped people enter or get registered through the website. I worked with the all-star baseball program. I also helped with operations with the games themselves and opening ceremonies. The VIP reception, RSVPs and invitations. One year it was so hot I basically worked to make sure everyone had enough water to stay hydrated.”

Basically, whatever needed to be done.

“Games week is crazy, but the week before, getting everything set up is a lot of work, too,” she says. “We wanted to make sure the athletes had a great week.”

Fulton was recruited to VMI to be on the track team. She competed in pole vault, javelin, and the heptathlon for the Keydets.

After graduating from VMI, Fulton worked for the Southern Conference as an intern for a year. That experience cemented her desire to go into operations.

“I saw a GA position open for operations of the swimming and diving teams at TCU so I applied. I didn’t think I stood a chance because I have no experience in swimming at all, but I got it and moved to Fort Worth last June,” Fulton says.

When TCU suspended its sports, closed campus and went to online learning – like every other school in the country – Fulton headed back to Roanoke to wait out the stay-at-home orders. She plans to return to Texas next month.

The pandemic has the future more unsettled than ever, but Fulton has a good start. She was invited to a NCAA conference for 200 interns and graduate assistance who have been specially identified as showing promise in the field or athletic administration.

Fulton recounts: “The speaker said, ‘Congratulations, you’re in a field a lot of people would do for free. But the problem is you’re not getting paid much right now because a lot of people would do it for free.’”

Fulton won’t have to worry about doing the work for free anymore. Given the start she got at VAS, she’s on her way to success. Where that will be is unknown, but the journey should be exciting.