

UC SANTA BARBARA

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The Long Walk Home

Ryan Spilborghs didn't think it would take him 18 years to finish his bachelor's degree in sociology from UC Santa Barbara. A stellar outfielder for the Gauchos who went on to spend seven years with the Colorado Rockies, he left campus a few credits shy of his graduation requirements.

It's not like he dropped the ball. His contract with the Rockies included a provision that paid for his remaining college work. He even took courses from the University of Colorado at Boulder after his first season.

"I was really close, and then I realized I was missing a prerequisite, which was a Spanish course," said Spilborghs, a Santa Barbara native.

For a guy whose mother was from Guatemala and who speaks passable Spanish, it should've been no big deal. Baseball and life had other ideas. He couldn't take classes during the season and had a hard time finding courses that fit his schedule.

"So I was kind of between a rock and a hard place trying to get it done," Spilborghs said. "It was really frustrating. And so I ended up taking a year of online Spanish — I won't give away the online school — but it didn't transfer to UCSB."

Ultimately, the Denver resident looked home, and took a year of online Spanish classes through Santa Barbara City College, which literally specializes in courses that satisfy credit requirements at UCSB.

“After 21 years I finally graduated from UC Santa Barbara — from my hometown,” he said.

Crossing the finish line at UCSB was so satisfying he enrolled in an online MBA program through the University of Denver. What he’ll do with it is an open question, Spilborghs said. He currently works in broadcasting for the Rockies and co-hosts the “Loud Outs” program on SiriusXM.

“Honestly, at this point, I’m not sure what I will use it for,” he said. “I think it’s OK to not have a plan, you know, like I don’t have to have a destination yet; I’m enjoying the journey. So I’ll figure out what that means down the road. But right now I’m totally comfortable with just taking the course and seeing where it goes.”

It’s been quite an adventure for Spilborghs since leaving UCSB. In addition to playing for the Rockies, he did multiple seasons in the minors, played in Mexican winter leagues and finished his career with the Saitama Seibu Lions of Japan’s Pacific League.

He was 33 when he walked away from the game. He had a wife and two kids, and it was time to put them first.

When you become a professional baseball player, he said, “your job is to be away from your family. It is to miss out on birthdays and anniversaries. Those are the costs of doing the job, which I love, but that takes a toll and you have to pay for it at some point.

“I noticed that my relationship with my wife and my kids towards the end of my baseball career was really starting to suffer,” Spilborghs continued. “It made a lot more sense to step away from the game and focus on being a decent husband and a decent parent. At some point you’ve got to know when to say when, and what matters most. And so I picked family over baseball.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we

draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.