

Fred Russell-Grantland Rice Scholarship in Sports Journalism, 2023–2024



Lucas Frederick Rollfinke
College of Arts and Science, Class of 2025
Economics, Mathematics
Timonium, MD

"Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to attend the school of my dreams. I have learned and grown so much through the courses I have attended, the people I have met, and the experiences I have undertaken since I first arrived at Vanderbilt. I know that at the end of my four years here, I will feel prepared for anything life can throw at me"

How does Vanderbilt's motto, "Dare to Grow," resonate with your educational journey?

I try to embody the mindset of "Dare to Grow" in every endeavor I undertake at Vanderbilt. In both my classes and extracurricular activities, I work to push myself out of my comfort zone and take on new experiences that help me grow not just as a student, but also as a person. For example, while I am more comfortable taking courses in STEM, I have enrolled in courses outside of my majors in a wide array of disciplines including communications, classics, and Jewish studies in order to broaden my understanding of different cultures and expose myself to varying ideas and perspectives. In addition, I have joined clubs like the *Vanderbilt Hustler* and the club baseball team to help meet and learn from new people from varying backgrounds who share a common interest with me. In high school, I was sometimes complacent in staying within my bubble, but at Vanderbilt, I have had the chance to push myself out of my comfort zone and "Dare to Grow" each and every day.

What is your major (and minor, if applicable), and what led you to that choice?

I am double-majoring in mathematics and economics because of my passion for numbers and problem-solving. When I was growing up, my father was a math teacher and he inspired me to play around with numbers from a very young age. In middle school, my love for math took the form of my participation in state-wide MathCounts competitions and in high school, it evolved into a fascination with sports statistics and analytics. When I arrived at Vanderbilt, I wanted to continue cultivating my passion, and I quickly realized that combining the theoretical aspects of a math major with the analytical aspects of an economics major was the perfect way to do so. Through courses like "Mathematical Data Science" and "Sports Economics," I have been able to build upon my analytical skills and expand my understanding of how numbers and statistics can describe, model, and predict many aspects of the world around me.

Tell us about an experience that stands out to you as one of your favorite examples of what Vanderbilt means to you.

I think that one of the experiences that I will always remember from my time at Vanderbilt was interviewing Enrique Bradfield Jr. after he was drafted by the Baltimore Orioles. I have lived in Baltimore my entire life and have always been a devoted Orioles fan, so when I found out that my favorite team drafted my favorite Vanderbilt Commodore, Bradfield Jr., in the first round of the draft, I was overjoyed. My excitement grew even further when the editor of the sports section of the *Vanderbilt Hustler* reached out to me and asked if I would like to attend Bradfield's introductory press conference the next morning. I accepted the opportunity and was able to ask him directly how playing SEC sports would prepare him for professional baseball in what I consider to be one of the most special experiences of my life. That moment was representative of the incredible opportunities that have been afforded to me through my Vanderbilt education and illustrates why Vanderbilt means so much to me.

What career path do you want to pursue, and how has your Vanderbilt education prepared you for your future?

I am still somewhat undecided on what career I want to pursue, but one path that I am considering is actuarial science. It combines the passion for numbers and data analysis that I have cultivated at Vanderbilt with the communication and presentation skills that I have developed through my sports writing for the *Vanderbilt Hustler*. I was recently able to secure an actuarial internship with the insurance company CNA for summer 2024, relying on the statistics and probability courses I have taken at Vanderbilt to impress my interviewers. Furthermore, I was able to stand out as a candidate by explaining how my communication and leadership skills have flourished in my extracurricular activities over the past three years. My dream would be to spend some time growing and improving upon my analytical skills as an actuary before transitioning into the field of sports as a data analyst later in my career.

What has this scholarship support empowered you to do that you otherwise wouldn't have been able to do?

This scholarship has enabled me to continue pursuing sports journalism while also learning about a great diversity of disciplines from some of the best professors in the world. When I first began the college application process, I didn't know if I would be able to find a school where I could pursue all of my interests and prepare myself for my career without placing a significant financial burden upon my family. Vanderbilt seemed like the perfect place to do it, but until I found out that I had received this scholarship, I didn't know if it would be possible for me to enroll. I truly believe that my first steps on campus were my first steps towards achieving a happy and successful future, and without this education, I would not have grown into the person I am today. Furthermore, the financial burden it has lifted has helped to relieve the stress present throughout our household and bring my family closer together in what has been a difficult few years.