

Catching up with the Carrolls

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LOGAN, Utah - For Jaycee and Baylee Carroll, life at their new home is a world away from what they were used to as students at Utah State University in Logan, Utah. Literally.

The family recently moved to Teramo, Italy, where Jaycee is playing basketball in the Italian "Serie A" league, Italy's highest professional league. As a starter on the Teramo Basket club, Carroll is leading his team in scoring at 18.5 points per game, while pulling down 5.6 rebounds and dishing out 1.7 assists. He is also shooting 51.1 percent from the floor, including over 50 percent from behind the three-point line (through Dec. 14). Meanwhile, Baylee, who was a cheerleader for four years at Utah State, is adjusting to the language and culture found in Italy and is enjoying her new role as a full-time mom.

Last week, the Carrolls took some time out of their busy schedule to talk about life in Italy.

How have you adjusted to living in Italy?

Jaycee: We really enjoy living in Italy; there's a lot of really cool and unique experiences we've had here that we could never have if we didn't leave the country. But at the same time, there are days when we're homesick; we miss being around our family; we miss our friends; we miss our restaurants; the food and things like that. But on the flip side, we've had some cool experiences. To go to the Coliseum in Rome, the Adriatic Sea, the Fountain of Trevi; everything we've done is just a bonus for us.

Baylee: The food, the language, and the culture (are so different). The people here are totally fine with pizza and pasta. They don't want to try anything else. Their dreams are to eat pizza for breakfast, lunch and dinner. They love their food. I've always liked Italian, but I'd like a hamburger every once in a while, or some Mexican. The (women) walk everywhere in high heels, and the guys wear nice church clothes walking around. Every day they wear church clothes and dresses. It's pretty crazy. They have little cars and little streets. Their streets are so tiny, they're like one lane in the United States. They park wherever they want; they stop in the middle of the road, and as long as their flashers are on they think it's ok. It's crazy.

How has becoming parents changed your lives?

Jaycee: It's been the biggest growing experience of my life, and it all happened in a four-month span. I graduated from college, got my first job, moved out of the country and had a baby, so it's definitely been a big change for us.

Baylee: I tell Jaycee every morning, "This is the coolest thing ever." Our baby is so good, and she's been so much fun. I can't even explain it, it's been such a cool experience, and I love it every day when she wakes up and just smiles. It's the most amazing thing. To be in another country with her, and when she gets older and sees all the places she's been before she even knew how to say "boo," it's just crazy.

What was your reaction when Jaycee told you he had an offer to play in Italy?

Baylee: This summer, we were just open minded with him going with NBA teams and trying to get an offer there. When an offer came from France, we thought about it and we prayed about it, and we decided we'd wait to see what else came. We were still waiting on the New Jersey Nets to see if they were going to take him, and more offers came in, but nothing really felt right. So when this offer to go to Italy came, we just prayed about it and thought about it and it seemed like a good idea. We both decided, "Hey, we're going to Italy," we were just positive and open minded about it.

What are the main differences between European basketball and American basketball that you've seen?

Jaycee: It seems like in European basketball, there's a lot more emphasis on team and what we have to do to stop a team from beating us. In the States, it seems like there's a lot of emphasis on individual players and what it would take to stop an individual player in order to beat a team. I played at Utah State, where team was emphasized a ton, but there are some different rules and different ways they call things that I've had to adjust to. They call traveling a little differently over here than in the States. It took me all of preseason to kind of figure out that I can't do some of the things I was able to do at Utah State because of the way they call traveling. Goaltending's a little bit different, too, so there's a few different rules that take some adjusting to.

How have the Italian fans reacted to your success?

Jaycee: The fans have been great, they've really welcomed us in to Teramo. When Bella was born, they had a huge banner up in the stands that said, "Welcome Baby Bella," and things like that, which makes us feel really good. I'm leading my team in scoring right now, and the fans and my teammates just think it's a great thing. It's just been great, we've met new friends and we continue to build those relationships.

What's been your favorite part about playing in Italy?

Jaycee: My favorite part has been the basketball. It's a new challenge, a new team, new people, new style and a new, fun way to play basketball. The biggest thing we've enjoyed is we live about an hour and a half, two hours from Rome, and we've taken three different trips to Rome just to sightsee. That's something we enjoy a ton. We've been to Vatican City, the Coliseum, the Pantheon, the Fountain of Trevi. We're planning on going to the Sistine Chapel, so we really enjoy that part of the experience.

What lessons did you learn from Coach Morrill and his staff that have helped you?

Jaycee: I learned how to work as a team to get a high percentage shot. At Utah State, I think we led the nation in field goal shooting last year, and I think we led the nation in two out of the four years. I know they're leading the nation in field goal shooting this year, which means that guys aren't taking a lot of bad shots. It means good, open, high-percentage shots, and that's the biggest thing I've learned that's helped me over here.

What do you miss the most about playing at Utah State?

Jaycee: I got so comfortable at Utah State and Logan, it really felt like home. I miss playing in front of the Spectrum crowd, that was a ton of fun. And friends and family coming to all my games, I definitely miss that. I really enjoyed playing for Coach Morrill. I have a good coach here, and all that's going just fine, but I really like the way Coach Morrill did things. I miss his style and his rules, and things like that a little bit.

What are your future plans?

Jaycee: Our goal is to continue working to get into the NBA next season. That was part of the reason for coming here, to be a stepping-stone to get back to the NBA.