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Speaks, Freely

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COURTING EXCELLENCE

"Ansley is an extremely hard worker, and she is self-motivated," says Furman tennis coach Debbie Southern. "We've had a handful of players at Furman as highly ranked as Ansley, but she is the whole package."

It took a while for young **Ansley Speaks '17** to find her sport. She enjoyed gymnastics, swimming, and basketball well enough, and she tolerated soccer to the extent she could avoid the tightly packed, ball-kicking scrums that are the hallmark of youth leagues. Because even at a young age, Speaks understood her personal space was more important than victory at any cost.

"It would drive my Dad crazy, but I would just hang

Speaks, Freely

Ansley Speaks '17 was invited to a tennis birthday party at age eight. She hasn't stopped since.

BY VINCE MOORE

around outside the area where all the kids were trying to kick the ball," she says. "I didn't like the contact. I didn't want to be in that mess."

But at the age of eight, Speaks was invited to a tennis birthday party. "From the beginning, I loved everything about [it]," she says. Tennis was fun, challenging; it required a lot of running. And playing on a surface where the boundary lines are clearly marked and opponents stayed on their side of the net gave

Speaks, who grew up in Simpsonville, South Carolina, was playing in tournaments by the time she was 10, and she was among the best female players in the state when she reached high school.

her all the personal space she needed.

Speaks, who grew up in Simpsonville, was playing in tournaments by the time she was 10, and she was among the best female players in South Carolina when she reached Mauldin High School. In addition to being a high school All-American and leading her Mauldin team to three state championships, she won four state single championships and was named South Carolina High School Player of the Year four times.

If being a five-star recruit ranked as high as number 19 in the country wasn't incentive enough for college coaches to come calling, her academic pedigree was equally impressive. She was a national AP scholar and National Honor Society member who ranked third in her graduating class at Mauldin.

"We've had a handful of players at Furman as highly ranked as Ansley, but she was the whole package," says Furman women's tennis coach Debbie Southern.

Speaks played the number one position for the Paladins her freshman year, leading the team to a 9-0 league record and the program to its first Southern Conference regular season title since 2009. She was named both the league's 2014 Freshman of the Year and Player of the Year, and she received Furman's Edna Hartness Female Athlete of the Year award. She excelled

on the academic side, too. A health sciences major, Speaks posted a 4.0 grade point average both semesters of her freshman year.

How did Furman win the recruiting battle for Speaks over schools like Florida State, Alabama, Oklahoma State, Wake Forest, and William & Mary? It turns out coach Southern and Furman held a card the others couldn't play. Both of Speaks's parents are Furman graduates. **Chris '88** played quarterback for the football team and **Jan '89** was a member of the swim team.

"I didn't want to attend a big school, so it came down to choosing between Furman and William & Mary," Speaks says. "In the end, I just felt more at home at Furman, and I knew what a great academic program the school had."

The Paladins opened their 2015 spring season in late January, and Speaks says she would like to break into the ITA national rankings (which feature the top 125 players in the country), reach the NCAA tournament (both individually and as a team), and become an All-American. Southern, for one, wouldn't bet against that happening.

"Ansley is an extremely hard worker and she is self-motivated," she says. "She's a solid player who rarely misses and that is how she beats people. If she continues at the rate she is going, she'll be among the very best we've had." **F**



NOW

Reflection on the Importance of Furman as It Is Now

I came into Furman with a chip on my shoulder. I think it was because some people may view a place like Furman as less than an Ivy League school. But that chip on my shoulder motivated me, in my classes and when playing baseball against Clemson or the University of South Carolina—schools where some people don't expect us to do well.

Furman is an environment where anything is possible, but that also means the experience here comes with an always present notion to improve. People demand the best from one another here.

Take the Business Block course, which I enrolled in this past fall. It's a semester-long experience that consists of two classes of two hours each—8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.—every day. You get into groups of four or five and study marketing, accounting, finance, and operations management. You write a 75-page analysis of the company you're given (ours was CVS), and recommend what they might consider doing in the future.

That course not only strengthened my abilities to work as a part of a team, but I think we were also exposed to the next level of our potential

as aspiring business leaders. For me, I realized how afraid people my age can be to network, to ask for help from people who know more.

Maybe this is that chip on my shoulder again, but I feel like now I can approach anyone—a potential employer, a mentor, whomever—and say, I'm just as competitive and motivated as the next guy. More so.

What I've realized is that, at Furman, growing as a whole person is not only expected, it's inevitable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jake Kinsley '15 is a double major in Chinese and business administration. Last summer, he interned in the International Department at Major League Baseball working on various projects in finance, licensing, and broadcasting. The internship was divided between New York and Beijing. Kinsley is also a catcher on the Paladins baseball team and serves as the team captain. In May, he will become a first-year analyst with Croft & Bender, an investment banking/private equity firm in Atlanta.