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Schutz beats law of averages, lands job in NFL

FOR THE BETTER PART of her four years at Furman, Kelly Schutz prepared for her job in the National Football League by studying mathematical concepts like the cosine rule, which can be used to find the third side of a triangle when any two sides and the angle between them are known.

While Schutz, who graduated in 2010 with a degree in mathematics, has yet to use the law of cosines in her job as a public relations assistant for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, she is a good example of how a liberal arts education can push students along an entirely unexpected career path and prepare them for something they hadn't quite imagined.

"When I came to Furman, I knew I wanted to major in math and become a teacher," Schutz says. "So that's the path I took."

And that was the plan right up until she began looking for internship opportunities in the summer before her senior year. But what was a math major to do? Well, it might seem unconventional, but if you were born and had lived until age 6 near Green Bay, Wis., and your family members were huge Packer fans who returned to Lambeau Field at least once every season, why not take a shot at interning for a National Football League team?

Even though she knew she would be vying against public relations and sports management majors for an internship, Schutz sent résumés to 30 of the 32 NFL teams. To gain experience, she got a job working in the press box with Furman's sports information office during the Paladins' 2009 football season.

"We had Kelly for only one season, but I knew right away she had more than a passing interest in learning about what happens in the press box," says Hunter Reid, assistant athletics director for sports information at Furman. "She was extremely bright and articulate, and she was one of the best student assistants we've ever had."

Schutz actually was called to New York for an interview with the Jets and was "heartbroken" when it didn't work out. But not long after, she heard from the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. They interviewed her over the phone, then invited her to come for a second interview in Charlotte, N.C., where the Bucs were playing the Carolina Panthers. Shortly thereafter, the Bucs offered her the internship.

"I didn't get too many résumés from math majors, but that didn't bother me at all," says Jeffrey Kamis, former director of public relations for the Bucs who now serves as executive vice president of business development for the FC Tampa Bay Rowdies soccer team. "I liked that Kelly had experience in the SID office at Furman, and I was impressed that she was willing to drive to Charlotte for an interview. That told me she was serious about the internship."



Kelly Schutz says she is "partial" to such "gentle giants" as Bucs' linemen Davin Joseph (75) and Keydrick Vincent.

So Schutz headed to Tampa in the spring of 2010 to fulfill her dream of working for an NFL team. She wrote press releases, proofed copy, helped produce the media guide — whatever needed to be done.

"We were wrapping up things at the end of the season and getting prepared for the next one, and we were a position down at the time," Kamis says. "Kelly stepped into her role so well and did such a great job that she was much more than an intern. She was like a full-time member of the staff. When I left, I told them they would be making a big mistake not to hire her full time."

After the internship ended, Schutz applied for the club's open position, then packed up and headed back to Furman. Two days before graduation on May 8, she learned she had the job.

"When I began applying for internships, I never thought it could possibly lead to a career," says Schutz. "But I loved working in the press box at Furman and in the Buccaneers' public relations office, and it didn't take long to know it was something I wanted to pursue seriously."

So it's public relations in the NFL for now, although Schutz won't rule out working with the law of cosines again someday. "I might go back and teach math at some point," she says. "I know it's something I would love to do. And it's comforting to know that possibility still exists for me."

— VINCE MOORE

The author is director of news and media relations at Furman. Photo courtesy Kelly Schutz.