

4-1-2020

She Loves the Battle

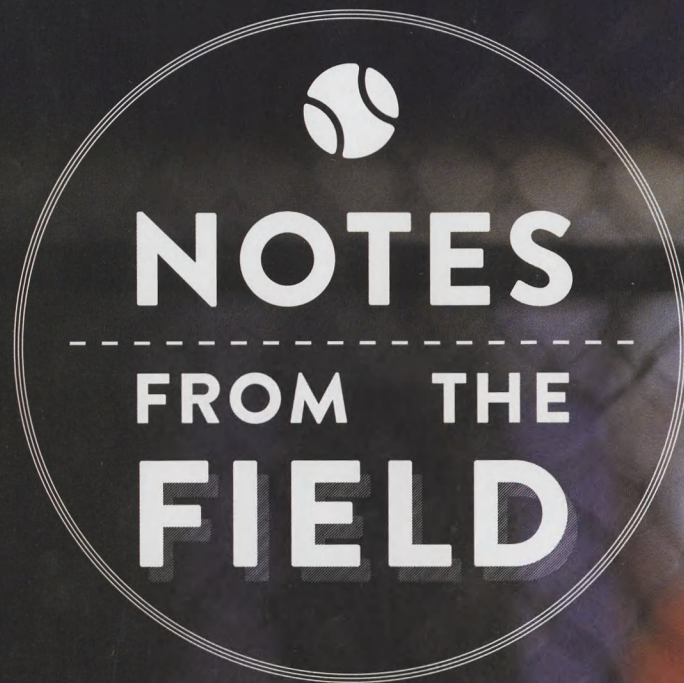
Vince Moore
Furman University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine>

Recommended Citation

Moore, Vince (2020) "She Loves the Battle," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 63 : Iss. 1 , Article 16.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol63/iss1/16>


This Regular Feature is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in Furman Magazine by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the [FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines](#). For more information, please contact scholarexchange@furman.edu.



‘SHE LOVES THE BATTLE’

**KATARINA KOZAROV’S STORY BEGAN
IN SERBIA AND HAS TAKEN HER TO THE
HIGHEST LEVELS OF COLLEGE TENNIS.**

BY VINCE MOORE



Katarina Kozarov '20
practices at Furman's
Minor Herndon Mickel
Tennis Center.

AT THE AGE OF 8, KATARINA KOZAROV '20 WAS SERBIA'S TOP-RANKED TENNIS PLAYER IN THE 10-AND-UNDER DIVISION. THE COUNTRY TAKES ITS TENNIS SERIOUSLY – SERBIANS NOVAK DJOKOVIC, ANA IVANOVIC AND JELENA JANKOVIC HAVE ALL BEEN RANKED NO. 1 IN THE WORLD IN RECENT YEARS – SO BEING THE BEST PLAYER IN THE NATION AT ANY AGE IS NO SMALL ACHIEVEMENT.

Up until that time, Kozarov had been coached by a neighbor and good friend who simply made tennis fun. But he advised her parents that it was time to provide young Katarina with more focused training so they could discover just how good she could become.

So at age 14, Kozarov and her father, Milos, moved to Bradenton, Florida, to attend the IMG Tennis Academy, where Kozarov spent four years working on her game and attending high school. Milos was able to conduct his business dealings online in the U.S., while her mother, Gordana, remained in Serbia with her medical practice and visited Florida several times a year.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Kozarov, an only child, enjoyed the academy experience, and her tennis improved. She jokes that the most challenging aspect of her move to the U.S. was the amount of time it took for her father to learn how to cook.

But when she suffered a shoulder injury between her junior and senior seasons, she didn't get the same attention from college recruiters as her fellow IMG classmates; they were landing scholarships at the nation's premier tennis programs.

Enter Adam Herendeen, who was named head coach of the Furman women's tennis program in 2015. He had heard from friends about this player at the IMG Academy who had been overlooked because of an injury, but who was a great talent and a superb student.

"I had recruited at IMG before, but I hadn't seen many players that would be a good fit for Furman," says Herendeen, who was head coach of the men's tennis program at Presbyterian College before coming to Furman. "But after learning more about Katarina, I knew she was someone we had to have in our program."

Why she chose Furman

Kozarov says academics were among her top priorities in a college, so when Herendeen asked her to make an official visit to campus, she agreed to take a look.

"Right away, I said this really feels like home," she says. "I liked the players and the coaches. I could tell they were good people, which is important because you are going to be with them 24/7 for four years. I canceled all my other visits and committed to Furman. It's been a perfect fit ever since."

It has indeed been a good partnership. Kozarov, now in her senior season, played in the No. 4 position her freshman year but moved to No. 1 the following season and has remained there ever since. She was the Southern Conference Player of the Year her sophomore and junior seasons and helped the team win league titles and qualify for the NCAA Championships the last three years.

At the completion of the fall season, Kozarov was the 13th ranked player in

the nation, having posted singles wins over ranked players from Central Florida, Illinois, Oklahoma, Pepperdine, Duke and Tennessee. She even took the University of Miami's Estela Perez-Somarriba, the defending NCAA champion, to the brink before losing in three sets.

Herendeen says he is not surprised that Kozarov has become such a good player. Her ground strokes are "world-class," and she is an aggressive player who attacks her opponents from both sides. It is her mental approach, however, that makes her special.

"She loves to compete; she loves the battle," Herendeen says. "That's not something you can teach."

Kozarov agrees with that assessment. She says the mental side is huge in tennis, and a player needs a certain toughness and competitiveness to win matches when everything else on the court is pretty much even. She says she was fortunate to be born with a strong desire to give it her all in every situation.

"Coach Adam has helped me see that in myself and use it for my benefit," she says. "He knows exactly how to push me. Confidence is so important. Because you can lose it very quickly and it can take forever to rebuild."

That mental toughness has also helped Kozarov take full advantage of the student experience at Furman. She is double majoring in business and Spanish and had an internship this past summer at a United Nations-recognized foundation in New York City.

Embracing the challenge

She lived in the Spanish Language House her sophomore and junior years and joined the Alpha

Delta Pi sorority. She's also a member of the Spanish Honor Society and has been named to the Southern Conference Academic Honor Roll, the SoCon Academic All-Conference Team and the Intercollegiate Tennis Association All-Academic Team.

Spring is the primary season for tennis, and the Paladins are hoping to make the most of Kozarov's final year. Furman returns all but one player from last year's team, which posted a 26-2 record, a perfect 7-0 mark in conference play and a 23-match winning streak, the longest in school history.

Because he wanted to give the team a chance to test itself against the best competition, Herendeen toughened the 2020 spring schedule with matches against North Carolina State, Georgia Tech, Notre Dame, Michigan State, Louisville and San Jose State.

Even though Kozarov will be facing the top player at all those schools, she is embracing the challenge. And since her parents make it to campus at least once a semester to watch her play, there's even more to look forward to.

"I have really enjoyed my time at Furman," she says. ♦

