

## Athletic Endeavors and Life Lessons in Vietnam

Text and photos by PETER LEMIEUX

*Coach for College, a new program created by an enterprising young alumna, aims to teach youngsters in the developing world about teamwork, sacrifice, hard work, creativity, determination, and the value of higher education.*

It is another typically steamy July morning in Vietnam's Mekong Delta. Water levels are low. Temperatures are high. The local youngsters from the village of Hoa An roll off their thin straw mats and ready themselves for another day of summer break. In Delta-speak, this usually means sliding into flip-flops, grabbing a bicycle, and getting an early start in the family rice paddies.

But this morning, the bike racks at Hoa An Secondary School, normally empty this time of year, are jam-packed. The large cement courtyard buzzes with activity. Badminton birdies whir left. Tennis balls zip right. Volleyballs fly skyward. Ten American student-athletes, five each from Duke

and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, punctuate the din of excitement with shouted instructions. "Follow through!" "Watch the ball!" "Open your forearms!"

As folks throughout Southeast Asia like to say, "same same, but different."

For months, the local Vietnamese youth have been anticipating this day. No—not the day when longtime geopolitical (Americans and Vietnamese) and intercollegiate (Blue Devils and Tar Heels) rivals reach détente and start working together. That historical stuff has zero relevance to these youngsters. No, today is day one of the Coach for College sports summer camp. And that is something very, very different. "Mom and

Courtyard convergence: Students break into groups at Hoa An Secondary School.



# Sports

Let's get physical:  
After warm-up stretches,  
participants practice  
new volleyball skills.



dad aren't dropping their kids off in the minivan and saying, 'Hey, give it your best shot,' " says Casey Hales '08, who was a four-year starter for the Duke football team.

Coach for College is an initiative spearheaded by Parker Goyer '07, a former member of the Duke women's tennis team, that aims to teach youngsters in the developing world important life lessons—teamwork, sacrifice, hard work, creativity, determination, and the value of higher education—through success in sports. At the same time, it benefits student-athletes, says Goyer, "who, because of their obligations to their sports, miss out on study abroad or civic-engagement programs."

The pilot program, held this summer in Vietnam, consisted of two three-week sessions. Participating Duke student-athletes represented a variety of sports including

football, lacrosse, soccer, tennis, and track and field.

From UNC came golfers, gymnasts, rowers, runners, wrestlers, and tennis and volleyball players. Physical-education majors from nearby Can Tho University served as the Americans' go-betweens with the 200 Vietnamese middle-school-age campers, who received training in badminton, basketball, soccer, tennis, and volleyball, as well as a range of academic subjects.

Goyer, a Robertson Scholar, came up with the idea of Coach for College following trips to Belize and Vietnam in the summer of 2007, where she saw a lack of sports role models and education infrastructure. The Robertson Scholars program, which each year provides full tuition and other benefits, including summer opportunities, for about thirty-six students from Duke and

UNC, not only recognizes merit but also aims to promote a sense of community between traditional campus rivals and instill a spirit of community service.

Over the past year, Goyer nurtured Coach for College to maturity. And in the process, she tested those same life skills within herself that she hopes her program will instill in the world's youth.

Goyer brought her idea to Duke administrators and received strong encouragement—and monetary support—from Provost Peter Lange. At Duke, she raised a total of \$130,000 from the provost's office, the office of the dean of undergraduate education, and the athletics department. Various offices at UNC contributed another \$68,000, and the NCAA, \$10,000 more. Nike kicked in 100 pairs of sneakers.

"One of the things you learn through sports is perseverance," Goyer says. "I believed in the power of the idea to have Duke and UNC student-athletes pilot this program."

For Goyer, the challenges keep coming. Harvard University's postgraduate education program beckons this fall. With a just-approved international sports programming grant from the U.S. State Department, Goyer will try to expand Coach for College to other intercollegiate rivals, such as Texas and Oklahoma.

Back at the camp, Coach for College has found its rhythm. Enrollment is full. The sports equipment has fresh scuff marks. The Vietnamese children have learned some new moves, and the Duke and UNC athletes have learned a new life lesson. "Here we are trying to teach them how to work through struggles, and they're the ones playing soccer in their bare feet, wearing the same clothes every day and smiling about it," observes Ned Crotty '09, a Duke lacrosse midfielder.

For the athletes as well as their young students, the camp holds out the promise of an experience that is, as the Vietnamese say, "same same, but different."

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