



Rivals Team Up In Vietnam

Tar Heels, Blue Devils joined hands in the Coach for College program.

Last summer, 10 North Carolina student-athletes joined with 10 student-athletes from Duke to travel to Vietnam as a part of a program called Coach for College. The Tar Heels and Blue Devils spent three-week spans conducting sports clinics and educational programs with the goal of helping youngsters develop some of the academic, life and other skills needed to successfully attend a college or university.

The six UNC participants who are still undergraduates – junior rower Andi Drabot, senior rower Carly Dressler, senior wrestler Daniel Llamas, senior volleyball player Lauren Prussing, senior tennis player Austin Smith and senior fencer Jessica Wacker – were happy to take the time to share some highlights of the experience prior to today's Monogram Day.

What made you interested in participating in Coach for College?

Daniel Llamas (wrestling): A friend on mine from the wrestling team, Evan Sola, traveled around rural Asia and told us how awesome and beautiful it was. I would like to be a coach and maybe even a teacher in a few years and thought this trip was made just for me.

Lauren Prussing (volleyball): I was first drawn to the program because it seemed like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Now that it is over, I hope that it's not just a once-in-a-lifetime kind of thing, but that I get to do more things like Coach for College.

Jessica Wacker (women's fencing): I love traveling, learning about cultures and volunteer work. It also just sounded like a great idea. During season I don't have the time I would like to give back to the community.

What was the highlight of the experience for you?

Andi Drabot (rowing): The highlight of my experience was this little exercise Daniel Llamas and I led in our Leadership and Sports class where the kids got to choose a problem in their community and figure out possible solutions. For the kids in Hoa An province, living in such a rural area makes it hard to believe that one person can make a change, but the kids spent a lot of time figuring out step by step how to make the changes they wanted to see. I really think that these kids can make a difference in their communities.

Austin Smith (women's tennis): One of the best and saddest moments was the last day off camp. The final day was competition day and the kids were so excited. They competed so hard and were having so much fun. The look on their faces when they received prizes from UNC and Duke was an image I cannot describe. When the day was over we had to say goodbye and there was barely a dry eye to be seen. It was on the last day of camp that I really realized how much we had meant to the kids.

What part of the trip was the biggest surprise for you?

Carly Dressler (rowing): My biggest surprise was on our one day off. We had three free hours and decided to go up to the school just to play basketball. No one knew we were coming and it was a Sunday so it was closed anyway. However, within 10 minutes of us being there probably 50 kids had already showed up, and within an hour I bet there were at least 100 kids and/or community members there watching or playing with us.

Llamas: Coming into this trip I truly didn't know anyone that was going on a personal level, and by the time we left it was like we had



Wrestler Daniel Llamas was one of 20 student-athletes from Carolina and Duke that spent a part of last summer in Vietnam.

known each other for years. The athletes from UNC and Duke were great to be around, even 24 hours a day. Also the connection between us teachers and the students surpassed anything that I could have imagined. The language obstacle was not even a factor by the end of the camp.

Has the experience had any effect on your goals following graduation?

Drabot: I have always wanted to work for a non-profit organization, and working with Coach for College solidified my decision to be an International Studies major. No matter how much you read or study your books, it's the hands-on experience that really counts – the interaction with others is what makes your time spent in the library worthwhile.

Prussing: Our experiences in Vietnam opened my eyes to a whole new world and really inspired and touched me in so many ways. And because of the trip, I have been looking into serving kids overseas after I graduate for a year before I dive into a career.

Wacker: I know I want to travel more. I would like to get my MA/PhD in Speech Language Pathology and maybe work with an organization like Operation Smile to travel and help children with cleft lip and palates.

Is there any lesson or bit of knowledge that you took away from the program?

Drabot: It really put my life at home into perspective, and taught me to be grateful for all of the opportunities that I have had simply because I was born in the United States. Some of the kids we worked with had to help their parents in the fields or take care of their other brothers and sisters, and they have an enormous amount of pressure on them. Many kids don't get a chance to go to college, and I really hope we can make a long-term difference in the lives of these children.

Dressler: I learned not to be afraid of failure. I almost didn't fill out the application because the program was so perfect for me, and I thought there was no way I would be able to get in. Also, the whole program was put together by one person who had a vision but tremendous obstacles in her way, but she found a way to make it happen.

Smith: One thing I learned was that you don't have to speak to communicate about sports. Sports are so universal and you can get far without even talking. For example, the language barrier was a big challenge for everyone and I found myself speaking louder (almost yelling) thinking the kids would understand me better when I was teaching tennis. Soon I realized that yelling only made my voice hurt and made me frustrated. I started doing a lot of hand motion and showing them how to do things rather than speaker louder, but that didn't actually help at all.

I would really encourage students to go on this trip. It was something that I will never forget and it definitely opened my eyes. I learned a lot about myself as well as what life is like in a place where people have very little.

Wacker: Gratitude. I am thankful for all the opportunities I've had in life, especially being able to get an education and represent one of the best universities in the country."

For more information on the program, go to www.CoachforCollege.org.