

## Balancing Academics and Athletics

Accounting major named to prestigious All-American volleyball team

By Aaron Ragan-Fore



Paige Benjamin knows a thing or two about balance. In addition to maintaining a cumulative GPA of 3.83, the senior accounting major has been a valued member of the Husky volleyball team since her freshman year.

Benjamin maintains that balance on the court, too. The American Volleyball Coaches' Association recently named her All-American first team; she is one of 13 players invited to train with the United States National Volleyball team; and one of just 58 collegiate athletes to receive a NCAA post-graduate scholarship award. Currently Benjamin is training with prospective U.S. National teammates in Colorado, and where it's clear that she is thriving. "Here, all the girls are All-American," she says. "They're more efficient."

The balance between school and sports has been a hallmark of Benjamin's life. She played three sports in high school, but relied on her grades to set her apart on college applications. It came as a surprise to her when she was recruited by the Huskies for volleyball. Now, Benjamin believes the discipline that arises from her sports training enhances her academic performance. "I'm a procrastinator," she laughs, and notes that budgeting time for practice helps her schedule her academic load. Without time to procrastinate, studying becomes a priority.

Benjamin's balancing act and hectic lifestyle are not without sacrifice. Making time for the court keeps her away from faculty office hours, and conflicting game schedules have at times forced her to miss cheering on her younger brother, Husky football player Evan Benjamin.

But Benjamin's challenges are just beginning. Never having lived away from the Puget Sound region, the Redmond native misses Seattle and has faced a period of adjustment after her move. Her standard day consists of nearly seven hours of intense training, a marked change from the daily two and a half hour regimen at the UW. Between the grueling schedule and a February knee injury, she sometimes can't help but think, "Oh, I could just be at school!" If Benjamin follows her plan to play overseas after graduation before returning to school for an MBA or law degree, the sacrifices will no doubt continue.

Benjamin notes several parallels between business and volleyball. "The motivations are the same," she says. Both disciplines emphasize, "how well you [and your colleagues] can work together as a team." It's a lesson that will serve Benjamin well in the coming months when she will be vying for a roster position on the U.S. women's national team, which will compete at several venues this year including the NORCECA Continental Championships. The championship is a qualifier for the World Cup, which in turn is a qualifier for the 2004 Olympic Games.

Whether or not Benjamin will make the team remains to be seen, but Husky volleyball head coach Jim McLaughlin seems confident of his star player. "In 19 years of coaching, she has improved more than any player I've ever coached," he says. "If she approaches this thing the same way, she can make the team." McLaughlin undoubtedly knows what it takes; he is a former head coach of the U.S. national men's volleyball team and has served as a consultant to the U.S. Olympic men's volleyball team. He, however, is remaining grounded. "Will it be hard?" he asks. "Yes. It's going to be really hard."

Despite the accolades, the travel, and the attention, Benjamin is also staying grounded. "I chose the University of Washington for the Business School first, and volleyball second." Sounds like a world-class balancing act.

