

HOMEGROWN TALENT

By Asyia Mitchell '16

Photos by Dyann Busse, Richard Shumaker and Savannah Wood



From left to right, Hannah Duff, Lexi Denny, Jessi Wollmann and Jane Everett are all smiles as they pose for a picture inside their locker room.

RADFORD UNIVERSITY Women's Soccer draws talent from across the nation. It also features some of the best players in the New River Valley.

Meet Jessi Wollmann, Jane Everett, Hannah Duff and Lexi Denny — the “locals” of Radford University’s women’s soccer team. Common to all four growing up were neighboring hometowns – Radford (Denny), Christiansburg (Duff) and Blacksburg (Wollmann and Everett) – and their determination to play Division I soccer, a goal they knew would be difficult to score.

“We knew the amount of hard work and dedication it would take to stand out in our small area,” explained Duff.

But these four young women were ready for the challenge.

Growing up in the New River Valley, they played both with and against one another, taking inspiration from each other’s determination and talent. When they got to Radford, each one saw what the other three would bring to the team.

This familiarity didn’t just pay off on the soccer field — it also helped them transition into other aspects of college life. Both Wollmann and Everett say they felt a sense of “relief” seeing the familiar faces of Denny and Duff on the same side of the playing field upon entering Radford University as freshmen.

These fortunate circumstances aren’t the mere by-product of a lucky bounce. Myriad reasons informed the decisions of these four young women to attend Radford University.

“I actually chose Radford, initially, because of the academic aspect ... Soccer was just an added bonus for me,” explained Wollmann, who also cited free laundry at her parents’ house as part of Radford’s allure.

Maintaining close ties to family and friends in the area is, of course, another benefit of staying local.

As a self-declared homebody, Everett says Radford University has been a wonderful fit. And, according to

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Jessi Wollmann

Denny – who “always thought I was going to go [to college] away from home” – being able to grab a home-cooked meal between classes is a huge plus.

Duff echoes her teammates’ appreciation of Radford University, and has a positive view of going to college in the next town over, saying she has access to “a great support system that just adds to the happiness Radford University has provided me.”

This homegrown subdivision of Radford University Women’s Soccer adds something few Division I teams at mid-size universities can offer.

Happy to share their insider’s perspective on Radford with their teammates – some of whom are decidedly less

local with hometowns in Florida, California and Canada – Wollmann, Everett, Duff and Denny make Radford University and the surrounding region a place cherished by both those who’ve arrived from faraway places and those who’ve come from right down the road. ■

MEN'S SOCCER HIGHLIGHTS



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1. Unbeaten at home in 2015 (8-0-1)
2. Secured program's sixth Big South regular-season championship
3. Head Coach Marc Reeves guided the Highlanders to the third-most single-season wins (14) in program history
4. Sivert Daehlie led RU in goals scored (13) en route to being named Big South Freshman of the Year
5. Radford climbed to as high as No. 20 in the national RPI—a program record

6. Daniel O'Keefe became the first Highlander to earn Big South Defensive Player of the Year
7. Twenty-eight of Radford's Big South-best 44 goals were scored by underclassmen
8. Aitor Pouseu Blanco and the Highlanders combined for nine shutouts in 2015, which ranked second in the Big South
9. Fraser Colmer became the second straight Radford men's soccer player to be named an Academic All-American
10. Radford qualified for its third NCAA postseason appearance in program history