



Berry Battles Obstacles at National ODP Camp

Ankle Injury Didn't Slow Berry Down at Super Y-League Event

By Dave Utnik/New & Messenger

Autumn Berry tried to get back on her feet. Only her ankle kept protesting.

And it was telling her something she didn't want to hear.

All Berry wanted to do was keep playing. The soccer field is her truest source of happiness and no amount of pain could change that.

So the Northern Virginia Majestics midfielder defiantly resisted having to leave the all-star game that highlighted what had been a terrific week at the Super Y League Olympic Development Program National Select Camp.



"I went down and I tried to get back up, but I kept falling," Berry said. "I had to sit down. I couldn't run on it. That kind of brought me down a little bit, but I think it helped me grow because I've never had an injury before.

"When you get injured you have to take time off and that was hard for me to do. I didn't want to, so I kept pressuring it and it took a little bit longer for me to heal. I learned that patience is key and I learned that I love soccer," she said. "It helped me want to push on and do the best I could. I wanted to be back on the field and when I finally got back out there I was like, 'Yes, this is where I need to be.' Watching my teammates play and not being a part of it is not something I ever want to do again."

A high ankle sprain kept Berry off the field for a couple of weeks, but it did nothing to diminish her obvious soccer skills. Despite missing the final 15 minutes of the all-star competition, the Forest Park High School sophomore displayed enough talent to be named to the ODP National Select Team for the third time in her career.

"It worried me," she said. "I thought, 'Am I going to get selected? Did I show enough when I was on the field?' Lucky enough, I did."

Luck, actually, had very little to do with it.

Berry has excelled on the soccer field from a very young age. She's won a pair of national championships with the Junior Majestics, two Virginia State Cup titles with the VSA Heat and been named to the Super Y League North American Finals All-Tournament Team.

Last spring, as a freshman, Berry also helped the Bruins varsity squad advance to the Group AAA state quarterfinals. But her performance at the past three ODP National Select Camps is perhaps the most significant indicator of her ability.

"National camp was great. I was so excited to be there again," Berry said. "The pressure builds because you want to make it again [to the National Select Team]. But I'm just glad I was able to do my best."

"It's you bringing the best out in yourself during Super Y," she said. "The coaches recognize who brings their full potential every game and I think that's something I definitely strive for – to do it for my teammates as well as my career."

Berry puts herself out there regardless of the endeavor. She won Forest Park's Physical Education Student of the Year Award in 2010 and she carries a 3.74 GPA.

So when she found herself on the same soccer complex with 200 of the best soccer players in the country, she wanted to do more than blend in.

"I'm competitive," she said. "I definitely strive to do everything I can to get ahead – not in a bad way. I try to put my best out there every time."

Berry is a natural left-footed player who can pass and kick just as effortlessly with her right foot. She also plays multiple positions on the field, including defender. And that versatility is one reason she joined fellow Majestics players Madison Smith, Thyla Peterson, Maggie Chapman, Nikanya Clark, Annah Lindberg and Jewel Christian on the National Select Team.

"We were lucky this year to have quite a few Majestics make it," Berry said. "It was great that our team was recognized in that way."

Berry is the only three-time honoree and the only one in that group who has participated in the state tournament with the Bruins' girls' soccer and girls' basketball teams.

"All the girls on the basketball team know what they want and they work together to get it. I think that's amazing. I loved that experience," she said. "Basketball is so different. I'm definitely trying to get some kind of skill going, but I think I like keeping the ball at my feet a little more."

The soccer team will appreciate that.

After winning the Northwest Region championship last spring, the Bruins expect to be on the field competing for a state title at Westfield just over two months from now.

Berry is one reason to believe that is possible. But she won't be pursuing the dream alone. Forest Park has one the region's deepest and most versatile teams with star players at every position such as goalie Emma Kruse, freshman Annah Lindberg, seniors Kara Nay and Nicole Blixt as well as sophomore midfielder Vanessa Kovar, who played for the U.S. Youth Soccer Olympic Development Program's Region I Team in Brazil and has been named by Top Drawer Soccer as one of the top 100 players from the class of 2013.

"There are expectations within each of us for our team," Berry said. "I think we're going to get far this year."