

Sarah Fahey

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## Personality Story

On the day of this year's Women's Atlantic Coast Conference Fencing Championship, UNC Foil Squad Captain Sydney Persing looked at the awards her underdog team would be competing for and thought, "if only we were good enough to win that trophy, to wear those hats and t-shirts, and to get those rings."

A month after making history as Carolina's first women's fencing team to win the ACC Championship in the program's history on February 25, Persing said that the "moral of the story is to believe that anything is possible because evidently it was."

Persing has a history of overcoming an underdog status. Raised in Livingston, New Jersey, she said she was already 14 years old when she picked up fencing at her prep school, Newark Academy, in the ninth grade. It was a late start for most competitive athletes, but many of the kids on the team had never fenced before.

"Everyone at my school was required to play a sport their first year," she said. "I decided to try fencing."

Persing said that her high school coach's husband was a "big-time international coach."

Marcos Lucchetti, now a coach at Ohio State, had owned a fencing club called Lucchetti Fencing USA that was based out of Princeton, New Jersey. The club competed at national and international levels.

Persing said that after seeing her fence at practice one day, Marcos approached her and said, “I know you are already 14 but if you give me the next four years I can get you recruited to any school you want.”

Persing fenced all four years for Lucchetti’s club, as well as for her high school team, where she became the captain her senior year.

“It was a leap of faith to trust him,” Persing said. “I didn’t even understand the sport. But Carolina was my top choice and here I am.”

She said that competing at the collegiate level has strengthened her competitive drive and leadership skills and she refers to her UNC teammates as her family.

“The issue is that some of the girls on the team are like my sisters, but as captain you have to tell them that they’ve messed up and you have to enforce what the coaches want as a punishment,” she said. “Striking that balance between friend and captain is a role that all college captains have to figure out.”

When it comes to major tournaments such as the ACC Championship, Persing said, “the pressure of fencing for a team has motivated me.”

She said she had felt as if she were only fencing for herself in high school, but now when faced against the competitive schools of the ACC, hers and every performance on the team counts.

The ACC Championship was originally only offered for men’s fencing teams from 1971 to 1980. Sponsorships and team participation dwindled after this year and there were no championships held from 1981 until the tournament was reinstated in 2015 for both sexes.

UNC fencing coach Ron Miller has been with the program since its installment in 1967 and had won eight ACC Championships, but only with men's teams. This winter was his fifty-first and last season with Carolina Fencing, so it was the last chance for the women's team to earn a title for their coach.

The meet took place at Carmichael Arena in Chapel Hill on February 25.

"Now there are four schools in the ACC for fencing," Persing said. "Carolina, Duke, Notre Dame, and Boston College. Notre Dame is far and beyond the most competitive of those four schools."

Notre Dame had won the ACC Championship for men and women every year since the tournament was re-established in 2015.

"No one on the team had ever even beaten Duke so that was our big goal of the day," Persing said.

Little did the team expect to come out on top in a fence-off after a three-way tie between UNC, Duke and Notre Dame at the end of the day.

"I thought I was going to faint," Persing recalled. "There are no words to describe it."

According to the athletic department she was extremely excited for her coach as well. "To see Coach Miller with tears in his eyes, it's the most grateful I've been for anything in my life besides my family," she said. "There is no better gift we could have given this man."

Persing said that this historic win has led to increased exposure for the women's fencing team. She said that the university has "made a real effort to showcase" what they accomplished by posting on social media and honoring them at a men's basketball game.

Additionally, she said she hopes that their success will lead to increased resources for the team. “I know we don’t generate money for the school,” Persing said. “I don’t believe we deserve basketball-team-quality locker rooms... but we have grown a lot and we work really hard.”

She said that the fencing team does not have air conditioning installed in their gym and that they have to drive instead of fly to most of their meets. “It would be nice to see some of those things addressed because they would help performance,” she said.

Outside of the gym, Persing is fascinated by the news. She is double majoring in political science and media and journalism with a concentration in broadcast journalism.

She is currently an editor for the Carolina Political Review, a non-partisan political journal on campus, through which she got to interview former North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory. She also worked the past two summers as an intern for Fox News Channel and enjoys writing in her free time.

“I’m a big talker- a pretty open book,” Persing said, “but one of the few things people don’t know about me is that I also have a passion for the elderly.” She volunteers at the Charles House Eldercare Center in Chapel Hill in remembrance of her late grandmother.

She anticipates eventually leaving the sport of fencing, but hopes to channel her love of competition towards the “uphill battle” of becoming an on-air reporter in New York City after graduating from UNC.

“Very little of any kind of success I have is based on talent,” Persing said. “It’s drive.”

Sources:

Sydney Persing Fencing Bio ([http://goheels.com/roster.aspx?rp\\_id=13816](http://goheels.com/roster.aspx?rp_id=13816))

“Carolina Claims First ACC Women’s Fencing Championship”

(<http://goheels.com/news/2018/2/25/carolina-claims-first-acc-womens-fencing-championship.aspx>)

“Miller a Constant for Carolina Fencing” (<http://goheels.com/news/2018/2/23/miller-a-constant-for-carolina-fencing.aspx>)