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Office of University
Communications

November 23, 2015

Kristen Hurley ('14) Researched Bobsledding and Trained to Make National Team

As an undergraduate and graduate student at Gardner-Webb University, Kristen Hurley ('14) — a new member of the U.S. National Bobsled Team — thrived on accepting academic and athletic challenges.

Her determination paid off on the track and field team, where she was a seven-time all-conference performer, and in a class taught by Dr. Ken Baker, chair of the GWU Department of Health, Sport and Physical Education. She convinced Baker to let her do a research project on the selection process for the U.S. National Bobsled Team.

Although Baker thought it was an “off-the-wall” topic for the two-time Big South Indoor Pentathlon Champion, he gave her the green light to pursue the subject. When he found out Hurley, a native of Columbia, Conn., was on the National Bobsled Team, Baker realized the depth of her interest in the Olympic sport.

“I now understand her rationale for choosing this topic,” observed Baker. “This research project turned out to be not just another academic exercise on some abstract topic. Rather, this coursework had a direct connection to a student’s desire to reach a personal, real-life destination.”

After completing her bachelor’s in health and physical education and beginning her graduate studies in sports science and pedagogy, Hurley lived and worked on the GWU campus. She turned to her former Track and Field Coaches Evan Brusich and Robert Golabek to help her train. Although she was no longer a member of the University’s track and field team, the coaches agreed to design a training plan to build her strength and speed. As one of five brakemen on the National Bobsled Team, her job is to push and accelerate the sled with explosive force.

Feeling physically prepared with the help of her coaches, Hurley headed for tryouts in Lake Placid, N.Y. At each point in the process, she had to either score enough points or place in order to move to the next level. Her hard work in training helped her advance from learning the basics of bobsled to competing alongside new and returning participants at the Olympic Training Center.

“Competing against athletes like Olympic Hurdler Lolo Jones, who had been one of the athletes that inspired me to compete in the sport, I got seventh place,” Hurley explained. “I know that God has helped me in many ways and given me the strength to persevere through trials during this selection process for the bobsled team.”

As the fifth brakeman named to the national team in fall 2015, Hurley worked to prove herself. In her first race in November 2015, Hurley pushed pilot Nicole Vogt to a bronze medal win in the North American Cup in Calgary, Canada. At the World Cup in Lake Placid, N.Y., Hurley and Vogt placed eighth. In the European Cup, Hurley and pilot Katie Eberling placed seventh in Igls, Austria, and eighth in St. Moritz, Switzerland.

In one season in the sport, Hurley has decided that she is better suited for the driver’s seat. She is willing to spend the extra time it takes to study the tracks and work on her driving skills. Hurley’s positive outlook is one that she has always had—especially during the time she competed as a heptathlete for Track and Field at Gardner-Webb.

“Her diligence and never-say-die attitude got her through many, many rough competitions and practices,” Brusich affirmed. “She simply will not allow herself to quit until she makes the breakthrough or achieves the task we determined beforehand. I believe this element of Kristen is what led to her committing so hard to bobsled.”

Hurley describes how competing in heptathlons builds an athlete’s stamina and perseverance.

“Heptathletes must learn how to move on when they have a bad event and push through adversity. If you do poorly in one event, you cannot get down on yourself for long or it will negatively affect the rest of your events,” she explained. “I believe that running college track and competing in the heptathlon helped train me both mentally and physically to participate in bobsled.”

Hurley tackled her academics with the same determination. Her professors and coaches helped her follow her dreams, recognizing her drive to succeed.

“Kristen consistently performed well in the classroom. She was an ambitious student. She responded well to challenges, and she never sought the easy path,” Baker praised. “Now, at the elite level of Team USA, Kristen shows how our graduates can utilize the Gardner-Webb experience as a springboard, or should I say bobsled, to success.”

Mariana Mellado, Gardner-Webb Intern for University Communications, contributed to this story.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University's purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).