

Sports Profile

Soccer midfielder makes plays for UNCA

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Similar to what Kobe Bryant is to the Lakers, **Leilani Halkiotis** is an important component to UNC Asheville's women's soccer team when it comes to making key plays.

"She is a great player, an excellent player," said best friend and teammate **Carolyn O'Brien**. "She has improved consistently since freshman year. She is probably one of our best center mids."

Bearing number 12 on her back, Halkiotis is in her third year as a midfielder for the Bulldogs.

"I literally play in the center of the field. A lot of the balls come through me, so I'm kind of like the playmaker," she said.

Born in the small town of Brookeville, Md., Halkiotis' soccer career started at the young age of 8.

"The feeling I get playing games, before, during and after is what I love about soccer. You win some, you lose some, but it definitely has its rewards. I am very competitive, so losing is tough for me, but when you play your heart out, and you know you play your heart out, you feel good even if you lose," she said.

She said her older sister was her inspiration to enter into the game.

"To be honest, I wanted to be just like my sister," she said. "Besides soccer, I was really serious about gymnastics. I also played coed volleyball in high school. That was really fun. I just knew soccer was the sport I wanted to play in college, and that's what I focused on."

While a student at Sherwood High School, Halkiotis scored five goals during her senior year. She also played for the Bethesda Rapids and helped them reach the 2007 Maryland State Cup Championship and Jefferson Cup Finals.

Halkiotis is at UNCA on an athletic scholarship, but she said her goals after graduation may not include soccer.

"I plan on going to physician assistant school, and hopefully that will be a good move. If there is an opportunity for soccer, I will definitely consider it, but I am trying to focus on my studies."

Last season for the Bulldogs, Halkiotis started in 15 matches and played in 16 games. She kicked 22 shots, which was the fourth most on the team.

"I'm not sure what the records stand as, but I would love to break one. That would be awesome," she said.

In 2008, her freshman year, she started in 18 of the 19 matches. She was also the fifth-leading scorer, with two goals and five points.

It was also the same year she had her



Photo courtesy of UNCA Athletics

Leilani Halkiotis holds off a rival player from East Tennessee State University last month.

"The feeling I get playing a game is what I love about soccer."

— Leilani Halkiotis, junior soccer player

most memorable experience, she said.

"My first freshman goal versus Furman was unforgettable. There was six minutes

left, and my goal tied the game and led us to overtime. I was one-on-one with the keeper, and she knocked the wind out of me. I couldn't even celebrate, but it was really exciting," Halkiotis said.

According to **Head Coach Michelle Demko**, it does not take long to notice Halkiotis' potential. Demko said she has realized her talent and knows there is more to it.

"I think she is dynamic and strong to watch," Demko said. "She is a big piece of the puzzle that is strong, technical, and smart."

Demko said she is also impressed with Halkiotis' work ethic.

"She is one of the hardest working players on the team," Demko said. "She is the reason why we can be successful on the field and has a ton of potential that we can tap into."

Bulldog Scorecard

Men's soccer

Wednesday

vs. USC Upstate

0-1 (L)

Saturday

vs. ETSU

1-2 (L)

Women's soccer

Sunday

vs. S.C. State

CANCELLED

Volleyball

Saturday

vs. Coastal Carolina

3-2 (W)

Tuesday

vs. Mercer

3-0 (W)



Cindi Miller

Junior Cindi Miller recorded a career-high 24 kills against Conference rivals Coastal Carolina, earning her Big South player of the week.