

Brittany Gwyn fights injuries, finds acceptance as gay athlete

Like the No. 1 WNBA pick, Gwyn focuses on game

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UNC Asheville women's basketball player **Brittany Gwyn** broke her jaw and tore both ACLs as a gay college athlete.

Gwyn, a sociology student and 5-foot-7-inch guard, from Raleigh who moved to High Point, found a passion for basketball when she was nine years old in a recreational league as a way to kill time. It was not until eighth grade when she found a passion for playing and seriously considered the thought of playing for the rest of her life, or until she could no longer play she said.

However, bigger problems arose.

"I had problems at home with my parents and then, getting in trouble at school with my teacher, not going to class and skipping school," Gwyn said.

Gwyn considered the military as a serious option for her future and even spoke to a recruiter. But decided in the end, the military was not for her, mainly because she was ineligible due to poor grades in school. Gwyn had to sit out her junior year, and played about 10 or 12 games her senior year.

"Then, by the grace of God, UNCA looked at me and gave me a scholarship," Gwyn said. "And that's really the journey of it."

But obstacles followed Gwyn to UNCA.

During her freshman year, Gwyn missed the first six games of the season after a teammate elbowed her in the mouth during a regular practice. She played for 10 games and started nine of them, but then tore her ACL in her left knee in a game against Winthrop.

After recovering from two

major injuries, Gwyn tore her ACL in her right knee. She points to the scar showing how fresh the injury still looks.

The sophomore in college, who has already suffered three major injuries is also in a four year relationship with another woman, and does not really care whether or not anyone has a problem with it.

"Injury is a more difficult obstacle to get over than people accepting my sexuality," Gwyn said. "Having two repaired knees in less than a year really gets to me mentally and physically and just has a toll on me emotionally that's harder for me to get over."

Gwyn's casual demeanor about her sexuality may seem odd, especially when the average person might think coming out, not only to parents and friends, but an entire team, may take a huge emotional toll on a person.

But Gwyn's sexuality has no influence on her game. Being gay did not influence whether or not she averaged 8.5 points and 3.5 rebounds per game, and overall, will likely not effect whether or not Gwyn decides to continue a future in basketball beyond college or take up a career working for a homicide department, similar to CSI or SVU.

If being gay does not faze WNBA No. 1 draft pick Brittney Griner, then why should it faze Gwyn?

In an interview with Sports Illustrated, Griner casually mentioned her sexuality when the interviewer questioned her about how much someone in the lime-light should pay attention to negative comments on social media or message boards.

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Photo by Dustin Stuart- Contributing Photographer

Brittany Gwyn goes up for a shot against Charelston Southern on Jan. 9, 2012.