

Bulldog to Owl: One Athlete's Transition from Life Down South

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Temple's lacrosse team is comprised of athletes from eight different states, and the majority of the team didn't have to travel far to find their place at Temple. Fourteen members of the team are from Pennsylvania alone.

For sophomore defender Kessina Heyn, or "Nina" as the team calls her, it was a different story. This meant traveling 749 miles just to find her niche. Seven hundred forty-nine miles is the distance between Heyn's hometown of Suwanee, Georgia and Philadelphia.

"Home is warmer, for starters," Heyn said with a chuckle. "It was hard to adjust to the temperature change, because I didn't have any cold gear. There's a lot of differences, especially in the food, the way people talk and how people walk."

Cultural differences aren't the only things that separate the southern lifestyle to the urban energy of Philadelphia. At first, it would seem Heyn, a four-time all-county selection for Collins Hill High School, had an easy recruitment process, but lacrosse isn't as popular down south.

"I had to play on a travel team in Georgia," said Heyn. "Every weekend we would have to go to a tournament up north in Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Philly, and Hershey, Pennsylvania. Playing lacrosse here is so much better than playing in the south. The competition is so much more elevated. I would never get that opportunity in Georgia."

After a short stint playing basketball, Heyn fell in love with lacrosse when she started playing in 7th grade. Temple Head Coach Bonnie Rosen has high praise for Heyn, calling her a driven, intelligent athlete.

"Nina was one of those wonderful finds. I was at a tournament where she was representing the Georgia area, and I happened to go check out the game," said Rosen. "I just immediately noticed her speed and her ability as a defender to read for interceptions. When I met her and her family, it got stronger and stronger that she was someone I wanted to come here."

Joining Temple for the 2018-2019 season, Heyn contributed to the team's 9-8 season record by making 16 starts on defense. Playing in all 17 games, she recorded five turnovers and enjoyed the thrill of playing powerhouses James Madison University and Princeton University.

“I think the biggest thing that we found out about Nina last year that I had no idea [about] is that she loves the challenge of having a big markup in a game,” Rosen said. “She’s just stepped up to this level, and we have to keep pushing her to get better.”

Heyn is known by her coaches and teammates to be goofy and lighthearted, and also has a strong and assertive side that comes out when talking about something passionate for southerners: football.

“Nina is an opinionated person. She loves to debate,” said Rosen with a smile. “When South Carolina was playing Georgia, that was a big moment of who they [Heyn and Kelsie Osato, an assistant athletic trainer] were battling over. She is a loyal sports fan for sure.”

“A lot of my family went to the University of Georgia,” Heyn recalled. “It’s a lot of fun to have rivalries. My neighbors are Ohio State fans, and we are always talking smack. There are a lot of block parties and watch parties. Everyone up here just loves the NFL.”

Even with support from Rosen and her teammates, who believe she could become “one of the best defenders in the country,” it’s often hard for Heyn to be away from her family and Georgia roots.

“I want to make my parents proud,” Heyn said. “I know it’s hard for them not being able to come to every single one of my games. Even if they can’t see me, they know I’m out here doing big things. I just want to do big things.”