Nothing is impossible, if you want it bad enough.

Just ask the Samford University women's basketball team. The Bulldogs captured their first Southern Conference championship and their first trip the NCAA tournament Monday afternoon in Chattanooga at the expense of Appalachian State. The Bullodgs (25-7), who lost to Chattanooga in the finals last year, rallied and defeated ASU 57-54 at McKenzie Arena. Trailing 54-52, the Bulldogs, who trailed for the majority of the game, finally grabbed the lead on Paige Anderson's three ball with 18 seconds to go. That shot stabbed ASU right in the heart.
"We live and die with the three," said Samford coach Mike Morris. "Paige hit the biggest shot of the year. I am so happy for the 13 players on this team. For our program to be only 14-years-old (the women's basketball program began in 1997), and to make it to the NCAA tournament is such a great acievement for our program. I can't describe it in words, but it feels great."
Ashlen Dewart had a chance to win the game with four seconds left after she was fouled by Savannah Hill, the tournament's Most Outstanding Player, on a putback try. But Dewart, one of Appalachian's most reliable players, missed both free throws. Sam Ramirez, the SoCon Player of the Year, was late moments later on her three-point attempt as the clock struck midnight on Appalachian's dream season. It was, without question, a frustrating loss. And one that will stay with the Moutaineers (25-6) for quite a while.
"This was an ugly game offensively, especially for two teams that have such a potential to score," said ASU coach Darcie Vincent. "But we had our chances. Dewart did not lose this game with those missed free throws. We didn't win it. We had numerous chances to win this game down the stretch, but we didn't make our shots and they did."
Despite the loss, ASU has received an automatic bid to the Women's National Invitational Tournament. That 32-team field will be announced Monday, March 14. But the sting of missing the "Big Dance", and the disappointment of losing their first SoCon title game in seven tries will linger like a ugly scare.
"We have no one to blame for this, but ourselves, said sophomore Anna Freeman, who had eight points and ten rebounds. "We knew the game plan and, at times we executed it, and at times we didn't. We had a chance to send Sam (Ramirez, the only senior on the team) off right. I spoke with her before the game, and she never dreamed of being in this position. And we didn't do it."
The Mountaineers dominated every facet of the game. They outrebounded Samford 44-26 (15-7 on the offensive boards). And the Mountaineers shot 43% from the floor. But in the end, the Mountaineers wilted like a flower lacking nourishment from the sun.
"It all came down to execution at the end," Vincent said. "In games like this, you have a tendency to play tight. Samford had a lot riding on this game as well. They had two seniors (Hill and Emily London) that have never tasted the NCAA tournament. At times, they looked great, and at times, they looked tight. It just happens."

Dewart led ASU with 13 points in the loss; Kelsey Sharkey turned in another brilliant game with ten points and nine rebounds. Ramirez, playing her final game as a Mountaineer, finished with only five points. But she had ten rebounds and five assists. Courtney Freeman finished with 12 points.

Dewart, Anna Freeman and Sharkey were named first team on the all-tournament squad; Courtney Freeman was a second-team selection.

"It's frustrating, we just lost a championship," Dewart said. "Obviously, it's not a feeling you want to experience. But it's very disappointing, especially after we worked so hard this year."