

Linsell Overcomes Challenges

Written by Ryan Hemingway
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Appalachian State University women's tennis player Ellie Linsell understands adversity. Born 8.5 weeks prematurely, Linsell only weighed three pounds. Today, she has fought through life-long complications to become

Appalachian's top player and lead the team to its best record since 2006. Thanks to tireless medical professionals and organizations like the March of Dimes, the junior from Southhampton, England has overcome her setbacks and has proven to be a force to be reckoned with for the Mountaineers.

When she was born, Linsell was so small that her dad had to buy her doll clothes to dress her. "They said I was just too eager to get into the world," Linsell joked. She was kept at the hospital for two and a half months before her parents could take her home. After that, she did not suffer any further ailments and lived a normal childhood. She started playing tennis at three years old and has played ever since. She fell in love with the competitive nature of the sport and went on to win the United Kingdom national tennis tournament at Cheam High School her junior and senior seasons.

"I like standing up against someone and showing them what you have got," Linsell said. But it was not a smooth path to stardom for Linsell, who suffered a stroke at the age of fifteen. The day after a tennis match she woke up to find her entire left side paralyzed. "It was the most frightening experience of my entire life. I tried to sit up and I couldn't. I remember dragging my left leg down my bedroom trying to get dressed," Linsell said. She had a match to play that day, and she tried to fight through the pain by playing one-handed before eventually being taken to the hospital. Doctors told her that the stroke was the result of arteriovenous malformation, an abnormal vein in her head that had burst, which they attributed to her premature birth.

After spending months in the hospital recovering, Linsell was faced with a decision, either she would have to give up playing tennis or go all in. Deciding that she had played and worked for too long to give up, she refused to let the stroke set her back and enrolled at Cheam, a boarding school in Sutton, to play tennis.

She swiftly crafted her game into a dominating force, and her perseverance, toughness and resolve caught the eye of several college programs in the United States, including Appalachian State.

"You could tell she was a fighter, and she didn't like to lose," said head coach Colin Crothers. Linsell was excited to come to Boone to begin her college career, "It was like the start of my life again after being in and out of hospitals for two years," Linsell said. She immediately took over Appalachian's top singles spot, but even in the college, the English major has been unable to escape the difficulties of her premature birth.

Last year, after posting a 13-7 singles record in her sophomore season, Linsell learned that she was born with a partially fused joint in her right ankle. She had to have two large screws inserted into her foot to hold the joint in place over the summer, and had to learn to walk again for the second time in her life.

But once again she did not give up.

"I push myself harder and harder now because I feel like nothing can be as bad as what I have

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been through," Linsell said.

She started off the 2012 season slowly before picking up four-straight wins near season's end. Crothers had learned by now not to be surprised. "She has really picked it up and shown the team how to improve and what it takes to do well in the conference," he said.

Today, she has racked up a combined 68 career singles and doubles wins in three years. On April 22, ASU athletics is partnering with the High Country chapter of the March of Dimes for a fourth straight year to raise awareness and funding for research into the health problems caused by premature births. Events for all ages to participate will be held at Kidd Brewer Stadium starting with registration for the 5K run at 9 a.m.

Photo Courtesy: Ellie Linsell, by Meghan Gay, ASU Athletics