

Mountaineer Freshman Brings Home Gold

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While the world's focus has been on London and the 2012 Summer Olympics in recent days, one Appalachian State women's soccer player found her own international success last week by helping the United States bring home a gold medal at the World Deaf Football Championships in Ankara, Turkey. Kate Ward, who will join the Mountaineers on the

pitch as a freshman this season, and her teammates overcame several obstacles on their way to the podium. The team not only had to get past its opponents on the field, but also had to cope with what some might call a difficult challenge; a significant loss of hearing, which would typically be considered vital for success in a team sport.

"Since every player has to take their hearing devices out when they compete, communication obviously becomes a bit more difficult," Ward said. "We can't hear one another so we often have to rely on lip reading and signing when we are playing. However, I quickly adjusted and realized that although it can be tough to get someone's attention on the field, we are all in the same position and no one has a special advantage."

But that didn't stop Ward and her American teammates as she started every game for the national squad, netting a goal and adding four assists to help lead the team to a perfect 5-0 record, capped off by 1-0 victory over Russia to claim the championship. The US outscored its opponents by a combined score of 17-3 in its five matches. The championship victory over Russia gained national attention as US National Team stars Jozy Altidore, Herculez Gomez and Alex Morgan, along with US Women's National Team legends Julie Foudy and Brandi Chastain all showed their appreciation through Twitter.

"The support from back home was amazing and somewhat overwhelming," Ward said. "Over the years, we have slowly been getting more attention and support, but this year it definitely peaked."

With this championship, Ward holds a World Deaf Football Championship and a gold medal from the 2009 Deaflympics, making the Atlanta, Ga. native one of the most decorated deaf women's soccer player in US history. During the tournament, Ward, along with teammate Maddie Taylor, compiled a blog that can be read [HERE](#). The duo shared pictures and experiences with fans throughout the tournament and interviewed each player through video clips. From pictures of museums and even a note from Foudy, the team made it easy for fans to support them.

"The entire experience was incredible," Ward said. "We were driven by a common goal, but the real reward was the friendships made that will last a lifetime."

Every player on the team has a hearing loss of 55 decibels or more in their best ear. The US roster has professional players, mixed with college and elite club players. Even though some deaf teams are funded by their respective national soccer associations, the USDWNT is not. The team raised \$5,000 and received donations from sponsors such as Chastain and Foudy just for travel expenses.

Ward will now shift her focus to her first year as a student-athlete at App State, where she will bring her international experience to the field this season. Head coach Sarah Strickland is proud to have Ward on the team for this season.

"We are very fortunate at Appalachian State to have Kate join our program. Her International

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playing experience will definitely help our team and really gives her that extra edge over most players," Strickland said. "I am so proud of her and Team USA for their gold medal and can't wait to hear the stories she has to tell."

"I've been lucky because playing on this team has given me the opportunity to compete with elite soccer players on a daily basis," Ward said. "Hopefully my experience with these players has prepared me to make a good transition into a student-athlete."

The Appalachian women's soccer team opens the 2012 season with a home exhibition against Campbell on Aug. 9 at 4 p.m. The Mountaineers open their regular season at Clemson on Aug. 17 and will return home on Aug. 31 against High Point.

Photo Courtesy: Kate Ward (left) and her teammates, ASU Athletics

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