

Academics, Athletics in Balance

for Bioengineering Student



Photos by Marco Nicotich

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LAUREN BEATTY

By Bonnie Coblentz

When Lauren Beatty decided to go to a football game rather than visit the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, she worried she made the wrong choice.

Then Mississippi State University beat the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa 24-16. Beatty was on the sidelines as a Bulldog cheerleader in that November 2006 game.

"The moment was priceless," she said. "The Alabama fans left the stadium early because they knew they had lost."

While sports won out over academics that time, that is not the norm for Beatty.

Filip To, associate professor and Beatty's academic adviser in MSU's Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, said she is an excellent, straight-A student.

"It is amazing how she can manage her time because she does everything very well," To said. "She is very disciplined, and she is on time."

Beatty, 21, is a senior studying biological engineering, with a biomedical emphasis and a math minor. She maintains a 4.0 grade-point average in this challenging field, and she is a coed cheerleader for the football and men's basketball teams. She lives in Starkville but is originally from Newton. Her parents are Hamp and Kim Beatty of Starkville.

This is Beatty's second year as a member of MSU's biological engineering team competing in the International Genetically Engineered Machine (iGEM) competition at MIT. The team is working in the field of synthetic biology and competing with some of the most prestigious universities in the world.

Beatty documented the team's work last year for the iGEM competition, and this year, again as an undergraduate, she is documenting and doing much of the lab work. The team is composed of both undergraduate and graduate students.

"She is very well-respected by her peers because she pulls her own weight and has a good work ethic," To said. "She's not a slacker."

Beatty is in class 15 to 18 hours a week, and during the summer, she works in the Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering.

She has cheerleading practice 3 days a week for 2 hours during semesters. When national cheerleading competition nears, that practice time jumps to 10 hours or more a week. She cheers at all the football games each semester, and that often involves overnight travel to away games. During basketball season, she cheers at every men's home game and postseason tournaments.

Cheering has almost always been part of Beatty's life.

"From kindergarten to fourth grade, I was in the Newton Tiger Cubs, and we cheered at halftime of the high school football games," Beatty said.

She cheered through junior high and high school, and all 4 years at MSU.

"Ms. Mabel Miller, my gymnastics coach since I was 4 years old, had the biggest role in preparing me to become a State cheerleader," Beatty said. "She helped me maintain tumbling skills and exposed me to coed stunting, both necessary skills for being a college cheerleader."

Beatty, who has attended MSU football games since she was 2, said the jumbo television screens in the stadium help her keep up with the on-field action while cheering.

After college, Beatty wants to pursue a doctoral degree in genetic research and one day become a professor. Fields within biomedical engineering include tissue engineering, molecular and cell biology, imaging and biomechanics.

"I would like for my work to have direct application in human health. I am interested in studying the detection and prevention of cancer and other diseases," Beatty said.

Her academic adviser, speaking from 25 years of experience working with college students, said her options are limitless.

"She has an extremely bright future," To said. "With her positive attitude, she has very good potential to be anything she wants to be."

This year, she intends to go with her MSU lab team to the iGEM competition at MIT, even if it falls on an important football game weekend.

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