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Two UNF Women's Basketball Players Receive Congressional Award

University of North Florida women's basketball players, Jadhon and Jadhken Kerr, received the Congressional Award Gold Medal from Congress for dedicating hundreds of hours to voluntary public service, personal development, physical fitness and expedition/exploration.

The Congressional Award Gold Medal is the highest award bestowed by the United States Congress to civilian youth under the age of 23. The Kerr sisters attended an awards ceremony on June 25 in Washington, D.C.

"Both Jadhon and Jadhken are not only excellent student-athletes but well-rounded young women who have incorporated voluntary public service into both of their lives," said UNF President John A. Delaney. "They serve as an inspiration to the University community and we're honored to have them as part of the student body and UNF Athletics."

The Kerr sisters began their work toward the Gold Medal while in junior high school. Jadhon, a UNF junior, and Jadhken, a freshman, logged their hours under the supervision of an advisor, who ensured their hours were being completed. The two wrote essays chronicling their experiences. The hours, along with the essays, were sent along to Congress for approval.

"We are extremely proud of the accomplishments of these two young women and are honored to have them represent the University of North Florida and our women's

basketball program,” said UNF Director of Athletics Lee Moon. “These are the type of student-athletes that make North Florida special.”

The pair traveled to Mexico, where they constructed homes for needy families, during their high school spring breaks in 2006 and 2007.

Sleeping under the stars and showering in a river were part of Jadhken’s experiences in Mexico. Her personal development goal was to get a job in the health science field. Through a career academy, she did an internship with a pharmacy, which led to being employed for three years, from her junior year of high school through her freshman year of college. Jadhken later became a certified pharmacy technician and completed an internship with PPS World Medical this past summer.

For volunteer service, she taught girls basketball skills through high school. As part of a French club, she went to Quebec, Canada, during her sophomore year of high school, assisting students in learning English. Increasing her power and strength through basketball was part of her physical fitness goals.

“Working on the Gold Medal prepared me beyond the classroom by working in diverse cultures and gave me hands-on leadership opportunities,” said Jadhken. “Perhaps the greatest benefit for me from the Congressional Award program was volunteering. Incorporating service into my life was very satisfying and has inspired me to continue.”

Jadhon traveled to Kiev, Ukraine, prior to entering her freshman year of college, where she coached, taught and chaperoned children ages 6 to 16 from the city. She became a volunteer with At Heart to Heart International as a freshman in high school and continues to volunteer there today. With this organization, Jadhon sorted donations for humanitarian projects and gave tours of a mobile medical clinic.

Her personal goal was to learn more about God and her religious faith through Bible quizzing, attending church services and religious studies. By joining a local health club with specialized equipment and attending basketball training camps, she was able to become more physically fit. During Jadhon’s trip to Mexico, she mixed concrete by hand, made walls and roofs, with no electricity and all while working in 100-degree temperatures.

“Implementing my Congressional Award goals gave me the chance to cope with various surroundings,” said Jadhon. “It allowed me to respond in pressure situations and share connections through friendship.”

Jadhon is a transfer student from Wichita State. She will sit out this season due to NCAA transfer rules. Jadhken is a redshirt freshman after sitting out last season.

“This is a real testament to Jadhon’s and Jadhken’s characters. They exemplify the type of student-athlete that we strive to bring into our program,” said UNF Head Women’s Basketball Coach Mary Tappmeyer.

With an emphasis on benefiting the community-at-large, Congressional Award guidelines require that all Gold Medalists dedicate 400 hours to voluntary service. Medalists attending this event had the foresight and initiative to seek opportunities for service, finding a variety of unmet needs in their communities, ranging from environmental sustainability to mentoring youth to providing hands-on service in Third World countries.

The Congressional Award program emphasizes the need for America’s youth to grow into well-rounded, active adults. The Gold Medalists also dedicated hours each to personal development and physical fitness, focusing their energies on improving skills they already had or expanding their knowledge. Completing the requirements for the Gold Medal, all medalists completed an expedition/exploration, traveling around the world or learning from different cultures within their communities.

The UNF women’s basketball team begins the 2009-10 season on October 31 with a home exhibition game against Brewton-Parker at the UNF Arena. The Ospreys will open the regular season on the road at Florida State on November 13. North Florida will play its home opener November 24 against Bethune-Cookman. The full schedule can be found at www.UNFOspreys.com.

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