

## INDUCTEE PROFILE

# Dedicated to a higher level

## Work ethic helped drive Futrell to Duquesne, WNBA

By Buck Frank

Altoona Mirror

**C**andace Futrell made a pact with herself during her freshman basketball season at Duquesne University.

The 2000 Altoona Area High School graduate, who led the Lady Lions to an 18-9 record her senior season while earning Altoona Mirror player of the year honors, didn't enjoy sitting on the bench watching her Duquesne teammates play.

She decided to make changes in her offseason workouts to raise her level of play and gain more minutes.

"The best thing that ever happened was sitting on the bench my freshman year," Futrell said. "That kick-started my work ethic. Every summer after that, I lived in the gym. Each year I'd do more. I knew I had to get better, and it was like a chain reaction."

Futrell's hard work paid off with a record-setting career at Duquesne and a one-year stint in the Women's National Basketball Association. Eight years after becoming the first woman in Blair County history to play professional basketball, Futrell will be inducted into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame.

She joins Pam Webber and Lisa Fibio as women's basketball players to be honored by the local Hall.

"This was a good surprise," said Futrell, now a 29-year-old police officer in Gainesville, Fla. "It wasn't something I was expecting. I packed up my basketball career. I'm in a completely different place in life now and have been focusing my time on that."

When Futrell focused on her basketball career, she didn't have much time for anything else, according to those who were close to her at that time. She spent her college summers either at Duquesne or back in Altoona working on her game.

Futrell said she would lift weights



Candace Futrell, with the Connecticut Sun, became Altoona's first WNBA player in 2004.

and do individual workouts at the Building II Rec Hall and other Altoona area basketball courts. She also would play against men as much as she could.

"When I talk with people about Candace, her summer workouts at Mansion Park inevitably come up in the conversation," Mark Sapita, her high school coach, said. "It is well known, or should be, that her achievements are a direct result of the intense effort that she put into improving her game year after year."

The results were clearly evident.

After averaging 4.1 points per game as a freshman at Duquesne, she boosted her average to 17.9 as a sophomore, was named an Atlantic-10 Conference all-star and earned the league's most improved player award.

Futrell averaged 19.5 points per game as a junior and was named an Atlantic-10 all-star again. As a senior in 2003-04, she led the league in scoring and was sixth in the nation among Division I programs with a 21.4 average and was named A-10 co-player of the year.

"It was just a steady incline," said Dan Durkin, who recruited and coached Futrell at Duquesne. "She literally got better every year."

Futrell finished her collegiate career ranked second among the top scorers in Duquesne history with 1,668 points and first with 183 3-pointers. She was inducted into the school's Hall of Fame in 2009.

"When I first saw her play in high school, she was a diamond in the rough," Durkin, the former head coach at Duquesne who is now an assistant coach at Providence, said. "I could tell right away she had natural talent with a very good mid-range game. The 3-ball wasn't there yet, but she could handle the ball left and right and had a pretty good temperament. I knew she could play at the D-I level."

Following her career at Duquesne, she was drafted in the third round of the WNBA draft by the Connecticut Sun. She spent the 2004 season with the Sun and averaged 2.1 points per game in 20 games.

"The WNBA was very, very competitive," Futrell said. "That summer, I



Candace finished a stellar college career as the second-leading scorer in Duquesne history.

learned more about the game of basketball than I did in my 21 years of life at the time. You go to practice every day and fight every day for your job. If the team doesn't do well, they'll start looking for the next best player.

"Midway through the season I worked my way into a sixth-man role. It was more than what was expected. I think I was physically at my best that year, but after that injuries took their toll."

After her year with the Sun, Futrell played professionally in Israel in the offseason

and injured her ankle. After getting released by the Sun, she played in Turkey in 2005 and tried out with the Sun again in 2006 before getting released.

Futrell then played professionally in France and Iceland before finishing out her pro career in Israel in 2008.



## Futrell bio

**Sport:** Basketball

**High school:** Altoona

**College:** Duquesne

**Hall of Fame achievement:** Second-leading scorer in Duquesne women's basketball history played one year in WNBA.

**Current residence:** Gainesville, Fla.

"It was an amazing experience to travel and live in different countries and experience the different cultures and meet different people," she said.

"As far as the athletic side, I experienced the typical athlete's story. You're on top one minute, you get injured, and it's all gone the next minute. I think it was a humbling experience, but I feel blessed that I got to live it."

Futrell pursued her career in criminal justice after putting away her basketball. Although she's now out of sports and nearly 1,000 miles from Blair County, she still recalls vividly how her basketball career began.

"Playing in the Altoona High program, it was one of structure and discipline," said Futrell, the daughter of Kenneth Futrell and Robin McClain and the niece of Al Futrell, who played football at Texas Christian. "That helped me out in college and the rest of my career. At the time, you can't appreciate that structure and discipline, but looking back now, I'm thankful for it."

Futrell, though, took the structure and discipline to a level that few in the



Candace (back row, second from right) was the Altoona Mirror player of the year in 2000.

Blair County area have ever reached.

"Candace was blessed with great natural talent, but what made her the great player that she became was her tremendous work ethic," Sapita said.

"She is a great example for the female athletes in our area of what can be accomplished when you combine your talents with even greater desire and dedication."

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