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Patrice Butler Interning with Professional Women's Basketball Organization

Taking part in three month internship with professional women's basketball team



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ST. LOUIS – While a lot of learning in college happens inside the classroom, many college students – if not most – rely on internships to give them a needed boost with hands on experience as they prepare to head out into the professional world. Georgia Southern women's basketball student-athlete [Patrice Butler](#) is doing just that this summer, and she is also getting to experience her sport in a different way while gaining valuable work experience that will help her long after she is finished playing.

For student-athletes, it can be tough to add an internship into the fold that already includes a full class schedule, workouts, practices, travel and competitions. That makes the summer a perfect time for a student-athlete like Butler to knock internship hours off of their lengthy to-do list.

Butler is interning this summer with the St. Louis Surge, a professional women's basketball team that is part of the 31-team Women's Blue Chip Basketball League (WBCBL). The Surge belong to the Midwest Region (IL, KS, MO, MN, NE) which includes the Nebraska Strikers, the Iowa Force, the Kansas City Majestic and the Missouri Arch Angels. St. Louis won the 2014 national championship and were the national runners-up to the Charlotte Invasion last season, falling 98-86. With a rich history of winning, the program offers plenty of opportunity for a young player with aspirations of becoming a coach to gain invaluable experience.

"I have two jobs with the organization: I am a sports management intern but I am also the team manager," Butler said. "On Mondays, Wednesdays and Friday, I'm in the office all day taking care of things behind the scenes to get ready for our upcoming games. I make sure the announcer's outline, broadcast outline and halftime performance scripts are all ready to go. I also email season pass holders as well as volunteers. The position covers a lot of different things, including setting up for games and organizing a community service project for the team which is coming up in July. As the team manager, I do anything from helping with drills during practices to making sure the water bottles are filled and handed out."

One of the more rewarding parts of the experience has been getting the chance to meet and work with the team's owner, Khalia Collier, who has helped Butler meet a lot of different people within a variety of sports. According to her bio on the Surge's website, Collier "is a recent recipient of 30 under 30, Glamor Missouri Woman of the year awardee and is a prestigious Jack Buck Awardee for her community impact."

"Ms. Collier is really great. She has taken me to several business events and I've learned a lot about running a sports team and business from her," Butler said. "We've taken tours of the St. Louis Blues (NHL) and the Cardinals's (MLB) business centers and it's given me a great opportunity to meet a lot of different people."

While Butler has aspirations of being a coach, the internship opening up her eyes to more possibilities from the operations side.

"I really want to get into coaching, but with everything I've done during my time in St. Louis, I kind of like the operations side as well. It's really cool to get everything set up and ready to go for games," Butler said. "That is definitely making it difficult to decide what I want to do more. I love to coach and I love basketball, but since I'm getting to see more of the operations side of things I'm starting to like it a lot. Doing sports management as my graduate program is really going to help me a lot whether I go into coaching or operations."

While the experiences have been invaluable for her long-term future, Butler realizes that she still has one season of eligibility left and business to take care of once she returns to Statesboro. The internship began in May and will continue through early August, giving her a very different view of the sport she loves. But that also means she will have very little time off between when she leaves St. Louis to when she needs to be back to start classes in Statesboro.

To make the most of her limited time at Georgia Southern, she will need to continue to work on her skill set and stay in shape. The Surge's head coach Tony Condra has helped with that as he has worked with Butler on her ball handling skills and shooting. But the best source for getting Butler ready for the 2016-17 season has been getting to know and work with the 12 players from 11 different NCAA Division I universities, including the Sun Belt Conference's own Shanity James who played for the Little Rock Trojans.

"We have players from all over," Butler said. "They've played at Georgetown, Wisconsin and UConn and a few have just returned from playing professionally overseas. I know a few girls have played in Australia, Belgium, Denmark, China and other places. It's really cool because I've gotten to talk to all of them about it and get a good feel for what playing overseas is all about and what it's like and I have gotten to play pick-up games with the team when we don't have practice so that's a lot of fun.

"Shanity James from Little Rock plays on the team which is really cool. Playing against each other for two years now, we've never really gotten the chance to talk much but we have gotten to know each other and I get to play with and against her all the time now in practices, scrimmages and pick-up games," Butler said. "She's one of the people that has helped me get better this summer. She works out four or five times a week and I am right there with her watching and learning."

The Surge are currently 7-1 on the season, including 4-1 on the road to start the season. They have two more games left, both at home, before opening play in the regional tournament on Saturday, July 23. The league's schedule started in early May and will continue through to the national championship Aug. 7-8 in San Antonio. There are eight different regions with each region champion advancing to the national championship.

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