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Student credits Brooks for achievement

Super Bowl champion supports FSU med student's dream of becoming a doctor

By Jordan Culver • Democrat writer •

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Ahead of Natasha Spencer is a residency at the University of Alabama-Birmingham. She will spend the next four years as an ob/gyn, studying and learning, preparing for the day she can take her talents to underserved communities.

Behind Spencer is a rough childhood in a Tampa community where high school students were as likely to drop out as they were to graduate.

Luckily, Spencer, a 26-year-old who graduated from FSU's College of Medicine three weeks ago, has an extremely supportive family and a network of influential friends who are as impressed with her as she is with them.

And of course, having Super Bowl XXXVII champion Derrick Brooks in your corner doesn't hurt.

"I met him when I was 12 after I went to the Boys and Girls Club," Spencer said. "He would spend his Tuesday afternoons there. He would come and play video games with us and would just talk to us about life in general."

Meeting the 11-time Pro Bowler — an FSU graduate who was a two-time All American with the Seminoles — changed Spencer's world almost instantly. As a member of the Brooks Bunch, Spencer traveled to places like Atlanta and Africa. Brooks became one of Spencer's primary benefactors at FSU, along with fellow alum Stuart Lasher.

"Any time a child has a vision, I do what I can to support it," Brooks said in an interview with "FSU Headlines." "All the work really goes to Natasha. And I just thank God that I was allowed to be part of the support system in establishing dreams."

Brooks gave Spencer a scholarship, paid for her housing while she was in school, attended her graduation and embraced her after she received her diploma.

"He's been everything to me," Spencer said. "A father, an older brother, a confidante and an adviser."

Hard knock life

Spencer grew up in a low-income neighborhood in Tampa. Raised in a single-parent home by her mother, a certified nursing assistant, Spencer watched as her friends fell by the wayside. Either through pregnancy, criminal activity or lack of desire, Spencer's peers didn't keep up with her goal of attending college.

"I grew up in housing projects," Spencer said. "Not to exaggerate, but every day was a fight to survive. There have been times where I dodged cars. I watched my mom try and save the life of a man who was shot in the face.

"What hit home for me was my teenage years where some girls start to grow up faster and lose their innocence."

Dreams of becoming a physician started when Spencer was 5, after an accident shattered her thumb. She said the comfort her doctor offered her inspired her to be a similar source of comfort to others.

"I was unsure about where I was when I woke up from surgery," Spencer said. "The only person that could talk me down was the doctor. He made me feel like everything was going to be OK. I want to be to other people what he was to me."

Although Spencer didn't meet Brooks until she was 12, her mother, Letitia Mosley, said she always saw an uncanny drive in her daughter.

"She's a very hard worker," Mosley said. "She always has been, even when she was a little girl. She was a kid who was always into her school. She never really played around a lot."

Spencer's relationship with her mother helped put her on the path to a career in medicine.

"My mom is a wonderful person," she said. "She's always taught me to shoot for the stars."

"I talked to her about being a CNA like her. She told me, 'Go straight to the top. You don't have to fight your way there.' My mom has been a best friend and a mom to me."

With Spencer's departure closing in, her mother remains her No. 1 fan.

"She's still my little girl," she said with a laugh

With her residency at UAB starting on Friday, Spencer is eager to start the next chapter in her life. After completing the program, she hopes to become a specialist in urogynecology, helping underserved neighborhoods like the one she came from.

"I always knew I wanted more for myself," she said. "I was looking for a way out and my involvement with Derrick helped me realize that if I work hard and I want something bad enough, I could achieve it."

While she is one of many graduates helped along by the "Brooks Bunch," she is a unique case. Brooks said she is the only one to go on to become a doctor.

"Obviously this is a special moment and I thank God I was able to be a part of it," he said.



Natasha Spencer graduated from FSU's College of Medicine on May 21, 2011.(Photo courtesy Colin Hackley/FSU)