

Former resident named first director of mental health at Florida Atlantic University

Former Aurora resident Tess Palmateer, Ph.D., CMPC, was announced the first Director of Athlete Mental Health and Performance at Florida Atlantic University on August 15.

The 30-year-old completed her Ph.D. in counseling psychology with an emphasis in sport psychology at the University of North Texas.

She told The Auroran this is a dream come true.

"This is kind of a dream come true. I was at a conference last month, and somebody asked me, 'What are your long-term goals?' I said, 'Well, I want to be a director and build a program,'" Palmateer explained.

"I'm going to have to re-evaluate my long-term goals because here I am, sitting as a director and given the opportunity to build something here at FAU, where I feel so supported by our staff, our coaches, our athletes, our athletic director. It's really exciting. A lot of hard work has gone into this and it's nice to be in a place I can make a big difference."

In her teens, Palmateer graduated from Cardinal Carter and chose to attend Brock University. A competitive volleyball player at the time, Palmateer went into her first year focused solely on the sport. Academically, she had no idea what it was going to be for her, but out of all the courses she enrolled in, she loved the Intro to Psychology course.

Her father, former Toronto Maple Leafs netminder and Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductee Mike Palmateer, introduced her to the sports psychologist who worked for the Maple Leafs.

Following a few sessions and collaborating with Dr. Dana Sinclair, she enrolled in the psychology program, and specifically, took all of the sport psychology courses offered.

After completing her masters in Exercise Science, with an emphasis in sport psychology at U of T, Palmateer began researching on where she could go to obtain her Ph.D. She spoke with many people in the field and discovered the relationship between sports psychology and mental health was few and far between. She wanted to go somewhere, where mental health was emphasized more and she found it.

Throughout her course, Palmateer had accomplished some excellent feats along the way. During her graduate training, she worked in a community mental health clinic, two college counselling centres, was a research assistant for the Kansas City Royals Behavioural Sciences Department, and provided mental health and sport psychology services to UNT student-athletes.

In June 2021, she became a pre-doctoral intern at Oklahoma Sport Psychology Consortium and also worked for Oklahoma City Ballet to assist dancers with any mental health and performance concerns.

That year, she was awarded the 2021 Distinguished Doctoral student Practice Award Honoree, by the association for Applied Sport Psychology. In her dissertation en-route to earning her Ph.D., she focused on draft selection and performance in professional baseball players.

Yet, throughout all of her experiences leading up to where she is today, Palmateer was taken back as to how many people have sought counselling for personal/mental health concern over pure performance psychology.

"The more I learned and the more training I had in the mental health side of things, I was struck by the amount of folks coming in for mental health or personal concerns," Palmateer said. "I think most student athletes that I have worked with have come in for counselling, though there might have been a little sprinkle of performance concerns or perhaps they were struggling with the

demands of being a student-athlete too. I don't think I could do what I do without the mental health training I've received, given the role that I am in.?

Moving forward, having worked with numerous athletes and hearing more stories about professional athletes seeking help, Palmateer believes mental health services will continue to evolve in both the professional game and even college sports.

?In sport psychology too, I think something that I try to preach is it doesn't have to be broken to use our services. If you want to better yourself and perform at a high level and you want to do so consistently, that's where I can support you,? Palmateer said.

In her seventh year living in the United States, Palmateer credits her family for being instrumental and supportive in every way, leading up to where she is right now. She would like to thank her older sister Courtney, her mother Lee and her father Mike, for all of their love and support, despite living so far away.

By Robert Belardi