

SIUE softball hall of famer Esker Evans recalls time as a Cougar

Madelaine Deardeuff, For the Intelligencer

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*Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
Director of Athletics Brad Hewitt, PhD,
(left) and Jenny Esker Evans pose at the
SIUE Athletics Hall of Fame Induction
Ceremony on Oct. 13.*

In October, seven individuals and three teams were inducted into the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Athletics Hall of Fame. Of those seven individual inductees, Jenny Esker Evans is one of the University's most celebrated softball players for her efforts on and off the field.

On this week's episode of Segue, SIUE's premier radio show, Chancellor Randy Pembroke, PhD, interviews Esker Evans about her softball career, her work as an environmental engineer and her induction into the Athletics Hall of Fame.

This week's episode of Segue will air at 9 a.m. this Sunday, Nov. 10, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound.

While pursuing her bachelor's degree in physics, Esker Evans helped the Cougar softball team advance to four consecutive NCAA Tournaments. She was a three-time All-Great Lakes Valley Conference (GLVC), All-Region and CoSIDA Academic All-American selection. The Academic All-American of the Year capped her senior season by earning an NCAA postgraduate scholarship. She was named the 2002 GLVC Player of the Year after guiding the Cougars to the University's first GLVC softball championship.

Esker Evans graduated in 2004 and went on to earn a master's in meteorology in 2007 from the University of Utah. She currently resides in Salt Lake City with her family and works as an environmental engineer for Rio Tinto Kennecott.

"Welcome to Segue and congratulations on being named to the SIUE Athletics Hall of Fame!" Pembroke says. "How long had it been since you were on campus?"

"It had been a while!" Esker Evans recalls. "I came back to campus in 2012 for the grand opening of the new indoor hitting facility and softball field. On a different visit, I came with my brother, who is also an alum, and we visited all our favorite spots, like the Science Building and the Fuller Dome. It was so great to see how much the campus has grown."

Esker Evans began playing softball as a pitcher at a very young age, and her father coached her outside of team practices. "I had a lot of great coaches growing up, but my dad pushed me to improve my skills outside of the team setting," she says. "He always made sure that I was pitching every day."

Having pitched nearly every single game played by her small-town high school team, Esker Evans wasn't sure if she wanted to continue at the college level. When she was accepted to SIUE, she settled in with new friends and joined the campus ministry.

"I went to tryouts to see if I could keep playing, because I missed it and enjoyed playing," she says. "Coach (Sandy) Montgomery invited me to stay and be a part-time outfielder. Even though I had always been a pitcher, it turns out I should have been in the outfield the entire time!"

"You were certainly an amazing player during your time as a Cougar," Pembroke recalls.

Esker Evans holds school records for career batting average (.395) and runs scored (166), as well as the single-season record for runs scored (56).

"Have you been able to continue playing softball or have you dabbled in coaching?" Pembroke asks.

"I still play, but I play slow-pitch now," she says. "When I moved to Utah for graduate school, I tried my hand at the winter sports. I like to call myself an ambassador for softball, because I organized a Catholic church young adult team. We have a great time!"

Esker Evans became fascinated with meteorology while pursuing her physics degree. She received a National Science Foundation undergraduate research fellowship to study meteorology in Norman, Okla. During that time, she discovered her passion for researching air quality, which led to pursuing a master's in meteorology. From there, she landed a job as an environmental engineer.

"What does your typical day as an environmental engineer look like?" Pembroke inquires.

"I conduct air quality research at an open pit copper mine. Workers mine the copper, concentrate it and send it to a smelter. It can also be used to produce gold, silver and lead," she says. "I help industries solve problems with air quality at their mine by measuring emissions that leave the facility."

"I'm sure your research will help keep the state of Utah and its environment beautiful hundreds of years from now!" Pembroke exclaims. "How do you think your skills and habits gained at SIUE have translated to help you in your career?"

"It has certainly helped with time management and communication," she replies. "Those athletics schedules can be tight. Working with members in a team, I also learned how to communicate with different people to accomplish the same goal for a long period of time. These two lessons, how to manage my time and how to communicate, will stick with me forever."

To hear the entire conversation between Esker Evans and Pembroke, tune into Segue at 9 a.m. on Nov. 10 on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound.