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CHAPEL HILL - After enjoying a very successful softball season at Marshall University, her name dotted all across the Thundering Herd record book for single-game and single-season accomplishments, Alex Coleman made a change.

With Marshall head coach Megan Smith Lyon and a couple of other members of that coaching staff headed to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, Coleman, a 2021 Southwestern Randolph High School graduate, decided that the best option for her would be to follow her coach and become a Tar Heel.

The success she had enjoyed at Marshall University has translated quite well as, with her junior season winding down, Coleman's name will soon dot the record book for one of the highest batting averages for a season in UNC history.

In her first year for the ACC team, the junior outfielder has

started all 49 games and leads the team in hitting with a .441 batting average. That represents the third highest single-season mark in Tar Heels history. Only Christine Kubin,

who hit .497 in 1986, and Theresa Buscemi, who had a .447 average in 1992, have higher single-season batting averages.

Coleman has recorded 71 hits in 161 official plate appearances and she is second in the ACC and the 11th top hitter in all of Division I softball. She is 20 of 21 in the stolen bases department, has knocked in 20 runs and has committed just one error for a .988 fielding percentage.

"I could never imagine having a year like this," Coleman said as the Tar Heels prepared for the ACC Tournament, which begins Wednesday at the Duke Softball Stadium. "I work hard, but some things are from the good Lord above. There had to be adjustments that were made, but once the spring rolled around, the easiest part was just playing ball."

Coleman decided on Marshall during her junior year at SWR. Lyon had seen her play in Rock Hill, S.C., while Coleman was



Alex Coleman. Photo provided.



The SWRHS graduate is one of the best hitters in NCAA Division I softball. Photo provided.

a member of the Carolina Cardinals travel ball organization. She invited Coleman to a softball camp at Marshall and Coleman went to that camp, was invited for an official visit and then signed with the Thundering Herd.

"There were a million things I loved about Huntington," Coleman said. "I moved five hours away and never went home. I knew Coach had all our best interests at heart."

Coleman was off to a great start at Marshall her freshman season before she was injured in late April. Lyon continued to help Coleman rehab and in January, she was cleared to compete.

While at Marshall, she made 72 starts and appeared in 85 games in her two seasons. She finished with a .411 batting average, recording 90 hits, 75 runs, 46 stolen bases and 20 RBIs. She led the Sun Belt with 79 hits her sophomore season, which was good enough for fifth place nationally in the regular season. She was named to the NFCA Central All-Region First Team and was a member of the Sun Belt All-Conference First Team.

Then Lyon, who played at UNC from 1996-99, was hired as UNC's new head coach.

"Coach got her dream job at UNC and when she got that job, what was going to happen had been written," Coleman said.



Coleman leaping for a catch in the UNC outfield. Photo provided.



Alex Coleman. Photo provided.

Coleman entered the transfer portal, flirted with a number of teams, but ultimately ended up where she always knew she would, with Lyon at UNC.

Of course, there were adjustments.

"You hear a lot of noise like, 'Can she really do this?' Coleman said. 'She did it at Marshall, but can she do it here?' It's really the same. You see the ball and you trust yourself. I wanted to help stick it in the ground and help turn the UNC softball program around."

The seventh-seeded Tar Heels are 30-19 heading into Wednesday's first-round ACC

Tournament game against 10th-seeded Notre Dame. The slap-style hitter has guided UNC to the highest team batting average in the ACC at .349.

Coleman, whose father Rusty played baseball at High Point University, has always looked comfortable on the softball field.

"It makes you feel you have a purpose, it makes you feel free," Coleman said. "It gives you the opportunity to grow, compete and learn and always bet on yourself."

She honed her skills at Carolina Acceleration in Greensboro.

"Those guys made me the athlete I am today," she said. "I've been training there since my freshman year in high school."

Now comes her first ACC Tournament, which she said she is very much looking forward to.

"This is the best time of the year," Coleman said. "You stick it in the ground with the best of the best and show what you can do."

She certainly has shown plenty throughout her entire softball career.



UNC leads the ACC and Alex Coleman leads UNC in batting average. Photo provided.