If at First You Don’t Succeed: 
Hollywood Lessons Learned as a Sea Gull

Just ask Alexis Morrell about her time playing women’s lacrosse at Salisbury University and it doesn’t take long for her love of film and television to come through.

After being cut in her first attempt at trying out, after coming to Salisbury following a stint at a Division I school, Morrell buckled down to battle for a spot during the next tryouts, 364 days away, as she references the movie Happy Gilmore and the title character’s battle to make a team beginning the day of the failed tryout.

A year of hard work on her own and with the help of strength and conditioning coordinator Matt Nein later, Morrell made the team and helped the Sea Gulls to the national championship game in 2007, where she was able to score a goal and bring her team to the brink of a title. Enter the next movie reference: “It was kind of like Rudy, from nothing to being in the big game!” she said.

“We didn’t make it all the way that year, which was disappointing, but at the same time, I owe so much to Coach [Jim] Nestor and that whole experience. Yeah, those days were rough when I didn’t make the team, but it made making it so much more important, and I have so many stories from it now.”

Morrell didn’t get that national championship in two years of playing and one year of coaching with the Sea Gulls, but her obsession with film and movies (she was in charge of picking the movies for the team’s road trips) landed her among a group of “hall of fame” filmmakers. Morrell is entering her third and final year at the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts in the graduate program, following in the footsteps of the likes of Frank Capra, Robert Zemeckis and George Lucas.

While the USC film school does not currently have a comedy program, it is in at home that Morrell has her career sites set, having just recently begun an internship with Chelsea Lately on the E! television network.

It all began when she was young and would rush through her homework while still at school and finish as fast as she could when she got home so she could watch Bewitched on Nick at Nite and dreamed of some day being part of that world.

With a supportive family who never told Morrell that she couldn’t do something, she worked hard, participated in theatre as well as lacrosse, and was encouraged to go for it all in the film industry. Knowing she wanted to be in or near Los Angeles to get her foot in the door, Morrell visited Loyola Marymount and was thinking about film school there when one of her professors, Dr. Jay Carlander, explained: “If you’re going to do this, you need to apply to the best. The worst thing that’s going to happen is they’re going to say no. You’re already prepared for that, so just do it.”

“I thought, that’s really good advice,” Morrell said. Now one year from completing her studies, the future is bright for Morrell. While the economy has not been friendly to the job market, television is an area that is usually hiring, as pilots are being shot all the time.

Morrell hopes to work behind the camera as she focused on the production side of filmmaking, directing a multi-camera sitcom and some shorts at USC. She recently began a project for Subway restaurants, which is still in production, not allowing her to discuss the details.

Just a few short years removed from missing out on her first attempt to make the lacrosse team, Morrell is on the brink of a career in one of the hardest industries to break into and looks toward the lessons learned through sports that have helped her in the ever-critical world of filmmaking.

“I learned how to get yelled at sometimes and also to be relied on sometimes, and that’s essentially how working your way up out here is,” Morrell said. “Sometimes people are going to tell you that you’re not great, and sometimes they’re going to want to tell you that you’re amazing, and you’re going to have to negotiate through what’s real and what’s not. I think sports definitely help do that: you know some stuff is fluff and you know there’s always something to work on.”

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