



CONSTANCE NEAL
Basketball
University of Louisville
Marketing
Nominated by: Christine Jackson

As the end of her freshman year in college drew near, Constance Neal was a young lady who found herself with few worries in life. Her primary interests were playing basketball and hanging out with her friends. Naturally, this led to a distinctly average academic performance in the classroom and a failure to define her goals for her collegiate career and beyond. In May 2003, she found herself pregnant yet three months passed before she was sure that she was indeed pregnant, and she decided to live her life as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place. Her coaches, athletic advisor, and even a professor all noticed changes in her demeanor during the spring semester, but they were unsuccessful in their efforts to identify the reason for those changes. She returned to campus in the fall and buried herself in her studies. She suddenly had goals and aspirations for herself that involved earning a college degree and being able to support not only herself, but a child as well. The fall of her sophomore year she spent more time at home and concentrated on her studies. As a result, she was rewarded with a dramatically improved grade report at the close of the semester.

Connie's grades had improved, and yet eight months went by, and, unbelievably, she had yet to share her secret with anyone. She continued to play basketball, she endured the jokes about her weight gain, and she knew that those around her were suspicious that she had become lazy when it came to workouts. After a particularly demanding workout on December 26, she found herself doubled over in pain and forced to face the reality of what was happening inside her body. She started by confiding in her best friend and later that night she finally called her mom. The next day, she went to the hospital for her first pre-natal check-up, and from there she found the strength to face her coaches and her teammates. On January 31, 2004, she gave birth to Carsynn Diana Neal, a beautiful, healthy little girl. Two weeks later, she returned to classes, and she re-joined the team in time to participate in the conference tournament in late February.

She wrote in her essay that "my goals and aspiration in life have changed dramatically in just a matter of months. Since the birth of my daughter, I *want* to do well, I *want* to succeed. I no longer just 'go through the motions'; I get the most of everything." She is currently scheduled to earn her degree in Business Marketing in May 2006, and she looks forward to her future and the life that she and Carsynn are building together.