

Q and A with *Chinyelu Asher*

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Chinyelu Asher, is a Silver Spring, Maryland native and now professional baller. From a young age, Asher was inspired by the beautiful game of soccer by her father. Now she is playing in the National Womens Soccer League (NWSL) for the Washington Spirit. Prior to the Spirit, Asher played for Stabæk of the Toppserien in Norway. Asher also is a midfielder for the Jamaican National Team where she represented Jamaica at the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. Asher is now back in her home town wearing #24 for the Washington Spirit.

#24

Q: How was the level of competition in Maryland as a youth soccer player? What Club teams in Maryland/ DC did you play for?

"The level competition in the DMV was competitive. I'm not the best grader of that though haha, I wasn't as consistent in travel club soccer from when I started at 9 years old up until I graduated in high school. This region has definitely had its fair share of ballers. I spent the bulk of my club years with Bethesda FC (U13--U15), and Freestate United now called Maryland United, from U15-U18."

Q: What is the best piece of coaching advice you ever received?

"Fortune favors the bold". This is something my dad has always and still always has said to me. As a reminder that as a player, you find your greatest successes by not being afraid to take risks and being "bold" on the pitch."



Q: What advice would you give to young players?

I would tell young players that you are worthy of any dream and aspiration you want to have. Every single player that you see or look up to has started just about right where you are. Think about where you want the game to take you, and try to do something (even if it's 10 minutes) every day that adds to that journey. I would also remind players to never lose sight of whatever brings you fun and enjoyment in this game."

"Yes, it's important to take our passions seriously, but a huge part of passion is joy. So don't forget to have fun!"

Q: Who were you inspired by as a young player?

"Originally, I got into the sport simply from watching my older brother and dad play. So, we could argue they were my very first inspirations (*don't tell them that though*). What kept my interest burning was being able to play with my dad (who is Jamaican) and other Jamaican men in the area. It became a second home for me, and a space where I could connect and learn from my culture in a way I never would have experienced if not for soccer. I have to admit that I didn't really start watching soccer until I was around 14 years old. When I did however, I remember these two players Sean Wright-Phillips and Robinho from Manchester City being the first players I would follow and drool over how they would dribble on the pitch."



Q: What is your favorite soccer memory at the University of Louisville?

"This is hard, I think my favorite soccer memory at University of Louisville is when I scored a game winning header my senior year. If you know me, you know that I rarely ever head the ball. You should also believe me when I say that moment was the only time I've ever, in all my years of playing this sport I love, that I've ever scored a goal with my head! Definitely tops my list of memorable moments haha."

Q: What advice would you give a youth soccer player about college athletics?

"Be proactive in your college research, and if you can, try to talk to current college student-athletes to get different perspectives on what to expect for yourself. I'd also add-- don't just settle for the name a school has. Take time to think about what sort of college experience and program would be best for you! Every player's journey is different and therefore looks different. Whether that's community college, junior college, or D1/2/3 athletics. Don't be afraid to ask questions, and choose what aligns with your needs as a student-athlete."



Q: What was your favorite part about playing in Norway?

"I love exposing myself to different styles of the game, so I definitely enjoyed experiencing the football culture in that league which was more aggressive and direct than I was used to. The country itself was great to explore, the nature scene is breathtaking."



Leidy Andrade

Q: Who is the best player you have ever played with and against?

"This is again very hard! Answering both off the top of my head, I think the best player I have ever played was Leidy Andrade with Independiente Santa Fe FC (Bogota, Colombia). Her ball control in 1v1 spaces is absolutely INSANE. The best player I have played against was probably Cristiane when she was playing with PSG. Baller."

Q: What does it mean to you to represent Jamaica on their national team?

"It has meant so much to play for my national team and represent my country over these years. This team in particular is pioneering and reconstructing what it means to be a women's footballer from Jamaica. **It's both empowering and ground-breaking for our region.** Although we've faced a lot of challenges, it's something that motivates me to keep playing and keep improving my game. Looking back to when I was younger I realize that I never had access to role models at this level of the women's game that I could see myself in or relate to in terms of where they came from, what they looked like, and/or their cultural background. One of the most amazing parts about growing with my national team, (especially now as we're gaining more respect on the international stage) is **being able to diversify what women's soccer can look like and hopefully give younger players around the world an opportunity to see a bit of themselves in each of us. How do you expect to achieve greatness if you cannot visualize yourself standing in it?"**

Q: What was the experience like playing for Jamaica in the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup?

"It honestly seems like a dream now. I mean, we were the very first Jamaican AND Caribbean team to ever make it to a Women's World Cup. That alone still gives me chills. Playing in the World Cup, the pinnacle of this sport, was such an incredible experience. The atmosphere was amazing, the pitches were beautiful, and being able to play against the world's best in front of my family was absolutely priceless."



Q: What is the best part about playing for the Washington Spirit?

"The best part about playing for the Washington Spirit is being able to be a pro and also be in my hometown. After so much overseas travel with my last clubs, it's been such a blessing having my community of family and friends here to balance out my experience, a treat that's a true rarity as a pro athlete. Another part that I love is the great group of girls we have on the team, every single player brings good vibes which helps keep the environment fun each day."