

Purdue is home base for Spack

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Alicia Spack knew she loved Purdue, but it took playing softball for a year at Florida to learn just how much.

The West Lafayette High School graduate, who transferred to Purdue after one season with the Gators, will play her final two home games for the Boilermakers in a doubleheader today.

"I bleed black and gold, and I was always meant to be here," said Spack, who's parents are Purdue alumni. "Purdue is part of who I am as a person."

Spack's father, Brock, worked as a Purdue assistant football coach at three different times, including 1997 until his recent hiring as the head coach at Illinois State.

Selling Alicia Spack to be a Purdue fan wasn't a challenge.

"She always felt she was a Boil-

Today's games

Illinois (26-14, 9-6)

at

Purdue (26-17, 9-7)

At the Varsity Softball Complex

Time: 3 p.m.

Radio: WSHY 1410

Tickets: \$5 adults, \$2 students

ermaker inside and out," coach Kim Maher said. "If she can't get it done for the coaching staff, she is going to get it done for the university because she has a tremendous amount of pride in the school."

It wasn't as though Spack failed at Florida.

As a freshman, the former Red Devil batted .444, scored 20 runs and was 4-for-4 on stolen base attempts.



Courtesy of Purdue Sports Information

Senior catcher Alicia Spack had to go to the University of Florida for a year to appreciate how much Purdue meant to her.

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But something wasn't right about the Gainesville campus.

"The most weird part about it was the football aspect," Spack said. "I was used to going to my dad's games, and I would have to go watch them on TV whenever I could or call my mom for updates.

"It's strange to go to someone else's football games other than my dad's."

Though Brock Spack was involved with Purdue's football program, the two shared a special moment earlier this season on the softball diamond.

After Spack was hired at ISU, he returned to West Lafayette to throw out the first pitch of a March 22 game against Wisconsin. Alicia was on the receiving end of the pitch.

"That was special," said Alicia, a reserve catcher. "I actually asked my coach, 'Please let me catch it.' I wanted to catch it no matter what. It meant a lot to me."

Spack has never been a full-time starter since joining the Boilermakers. Her 37 starts in 2007 are a career high.

This season, she's started 14 games, crushing two home runs and driving in eight runs.

But her spot on the roster is not something she takes lightly. Often given a chance to pinch hit when she isn't in the field, Spack continuously comes through in the clutch.

"Spack was our No. 1 go-to pinch hitter (during last year's run to Purdue's first

NCAA tournament appearance)," said Katie Mitchell, a senior who will graduate as Purdue's career home run leader.

"She came up big in so many games and got a lot of clutch hits. It's like having a sixth man on your bench in basketball."

Senior Ashley DiDomenico met Spack while pitching at Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville as a freshman. The following year, DiDomenico accompanied Spack as a transfer to the Boilermaker softball team.

There was an instant connection between the pitcher and catcher on the diamond.

"She knows how to talk to me," DiDomenico said. "She knows how to relax me if I am struggling, and if I am having a good game, she knows how to keep me

pumped up and focused.

That's simply part of Spack's personality. She takes pride in putting on a Boilermaker jersey and helping those around her achieve success for Purdue.

"She is the type of athlete who is a people pleaser, she wants to do it for everyone," Maher said. "She wants to do it for her coaches, her teammates, the fans, her family. I want her to do it for herself."

Spack can't help it.

Helping Purdue athletics achieve success is as common to her as calling pitches from behind the plate.

"I came back here (from Florida) and I know this is where I belong," Spack said. "I've always been a Purdue fan. Being a part of Purdue just makes me ecstatic. Representing a school I've grown up around is a wonderful feeling."