The AVCA History Commission was formed as a subgroup to the AVCA Diversity Development Team on December 1, 2020. The History Commission’s purpose is to recognize, amplify, and celebrate the rich and diverse history of the sport of volleyball. The first phase of the Commission’s work will explore the contributions of Black Americans to the sport of volleyball. Phase 1 is timed to coincide with the 40th Anniversary of the founding of the American Volleyball Coaches Association.

PHASE 1 | VOL. 1.05

RUTH LAWANSON
Born in Ibadan, Oyo, Nigeria, Ruth Lawanson would begin her volleyball journey at the urging of her high school track coach at Clovis West High School in Fresno, California who kept imploring her to consider trying out for the volleyball team. As a multi-sport athlete in track and basketball, Ruth insisted that she didn't have time. However, in order to appease the persistent coach she and her mom Caroline decided to give it a shot and pay to attend a volleyball camp. Ruth’s stellar play at Clovis West would lead to her being inducted into the Clovis West High School Wall of Fame and the Clovis Unified Hall of Fame.

Graduating from Clovis West in 1981, Ruth would move on to Fresno State University, where she would go down as arguably the greatest volleyball student-athlete in Fresno State history. Ruth would be the first volleyball player to earn first-team NCAA DI All-America honors in 1984. She would also be named NorPac Co-Player of the Year and first-team All-NorPac while leading the Bulldogs to a 26-13 record and a trip to the NCAA tournament. Earning a degree in business administration from Fresno State, Ruth would be the first female student-athlete to have her jersey retired at the school and her name still appears at the top of multiple categories in the school’s volleyball record book.

Ruth would move on to play professionally for the Major Volleyball League, in Italy, and in France, and from 1989-1992 would be a member of the U.S. Women’s National Team as a setter and hitter. Her time with the national team was highlighted by a bronze medal finish in the 1990 World Championships, a bronze medal finish in the 1991 World Cup, and, of course, the bronze medal winning team at the 1992 Barcelona Summer Olympic Games.

Ruth’s 20-years in women’s college volleyball coaching would begin at Purdue University as an assistant coach from 1995-98. She would return to her alma mater as an assistant with the Bulldogs from 1999-2005 before landing her first head coaching assignment at Angelo State University in 2005. In 2008-09, she would team up with Penny Lucas-White at the Air Force Academy before moving on to be the head coach at the University of Nevada-Reno through 2014. As a coach, Ruth has helped train 25 all-conference players, one all-region selection, and an AVCA honorable mention All-American. She has also helped mentor 90 academic all-conference student-athletes as an assistant and head coach.

In addition to a highly decorated playing and a coaching career spanning 40 years, Ruth is one of Fresno State’s and Central Valley’s Top 25 Greatest Athletes of the 20th Century, she served the AVCA Board of Directors as both the Assistant Coaches Rep. and Minority Coaches Rep, she conducts volleyball camps and clinics around the country, and continues to train volleyball athletes as a private trainer and club coach.

*Ruth Lawanson is a GAME CHANGER (2:10)!

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