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. 1.11

MARCI JENKINS BYERS
Chicago native Marci Jenkins’ leadership potential was clear. Arriving from the Windy City and Mother McAuley Liberal Arts High School as a volleyball student-athlete at HBCU Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, Marci was a four-year starter and was team captain in her junior and senior seasons for the Panthers. Graduating with honors with a degree in secondary education in 1996, Marci would jump into coaching at Hermitage High School in Richmond. In eight seasons, the Lady Panthers would go 84-36. In 2004, Byers would move over to Mills Godwin High School also in Richmond and in two seasons she would lead the program to a 37-13 record.

In 2006, the opportunity to move to the college volleyball coaching ranks led to Marci accepting the head coach position at NCAA D-II Chowan University in Murfreesboro, North Carolina. Chowan was coming off a 6-18 season in 2005, which precipitated the coaching change. Coach Jenkins was determined to bring a new attitude and culture to Hawks volleyball. With an emphasis on defense and a focus on recruiting student-athletes from untapped regions of the country that were a fit for that style of play, Marci was certain she could turn the program in the right direction. 2006 did not result in success on the court, as the team went 4-17. However, her consistent approach of hard work, defense, and identifying the right talent paid huge dividends in season #2 as Chowan would finish the season at 26-11.

In February of 2008, Coach Jenkins Byers would head back to the familiar surroundings of the commonwealth of Virginia where she would take over the Radford University Highlanders volleyball program. RU volleyball went to the NCAA tournament in 2001, but after that endured a stretch of seven consecutive losing seasons prior to Marci’s arrival. From 2002-2007, the program had 14 conference wins including two campaigns without a conference win. It was acknowledged that before her arrival, the program had become an “afterthought”. That didn’t last long. In Marci’s first six seasons in the New River Valley – the program had 37 conference wins along with a winning season in 2011 that was it first since the ‘01 tournamentteam. That consistent approach of hard work, defense, and recruiting student-athletes that were fit for that style of play had certified Marci as a leader and coach built to turnaround programs and create of culture of consistency and competitiveness in volleyball.

In 12 seasons with Radford volleyball, Marci would win 209 matches, three Big South Conference regular season championships, two tournament championships, and made two NCAA tournament appearances. The program was recognized prominently for the success over her tenure with two conference Player of the Year awards and four Big South Coach of the Year awards. In keeping with Coach Jenkins Byers’ mantra of hard work, in 2008 and 2013, the volleyball program registered the top team GPA among other Radford athletics programs and a streak of seven consecutive AVCA Team Academic Awards (2014-20). On June 5, 2020, Coach Jenkins Byers was named the Big South Volleyball Coach of the Decade (2010-19) with 94 conference wins and 2 tournament championships. Three Radford student-athletes were named to the all-Decade team in addition to Byers’ recognition.

On January 29, 2020, Virginia Tech Director of Athletics Whit Babcock announced the hiring of Marci Jenkins Byers as the Hokies sixth head coach in the history of Tech’s volleyball program. Babcock described Marci, the first Black female head coach in Virginia Tech athletics program history, perfectly, “She’s a proven winner and recruiter whose teams have excelled in the classroom...as we narrowed our search, it became more and more apparent that the right fit for Virginia Tech was already in the New River Valley. Marci’s exemplary record and her long history of identifying talent in Virginia and across the country were two of the many factors that convinced us that she could LEAD an ACC volleyball program.”

The consistency of hard work, defense, and recruiting talented student-athletes to fit Coach Byers’ style of play has landed in Blacksburg!
AVCA DDT HISTORY COMMISSION

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