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.
Ogonna Nnamani Silva

Born in Bloomington, Illinois, Ogonna Nneka Nnamani prepped at University High School where she excelled as a scholar and two-sport athlete in volleyball and basketball. U-High would win back-to-back Class A state girls’ volleyball championships in 1999 and 2000 compiling a record 78-6 over those two seasons. Named the Gatorade National Player of the Year as a senior, Ogonna was widely considered the top high school prospect for her class and was recruited by the top women’s volleyball programs in the country.

Ultimately, Ogonna chose to continue her academic and athletic pursuits at Stanford University playing for 2011 AVCA Hall of Fame inductee Coach John Dunning. As the top incoming freshman in women’s college volleyball, her impact on the Stanford program was immediate. The Cardinal squad would end the 2001 season with a national championship match sweep over Long Beach State and finish the year at 33-2. With 19 kills against LBSU, Nnamani would wrap up her freshman campaign as an AVCA All-American, Pac-10 and Volleyball Magazine Freshman of the Year, as well as earn a spot on the NCAA All-Tournament Team for her performance in the championship match. Her encore was just as spectacular. As a sophomore, Ogonna would be named an AVCA All-American while leading the team to another national championship match appearance against Pac-10 rival USC. After splitting with the Women of Troy in the conference slate, USC would best the Cardinal in a tight four-set rubber match to bring home the championship finishing the 2002 season at 32-5. Since when is 25-7 overall with a 14-2 2nd place Pac-10 finish considered a “down year”? Well for Stanford women’s volleyball, simply put, the bar is set at ‘national championship.’ As an AVCA All-American as a junior, the team would reach the regional round losing to another Pac-10 rival, Washington. Despite falling short of another trip to the national semifinals, Nnamani would establish herself as arguably the nation’s top women’s volleyball player heading into her senior season by setting a Stanford and Pac-10 single-season record with 627 kills. The stage was set for a storybook ending to a fantastic collegiate career. Nnamani would bookend her time in Palo Alto with her second national championship in a sweep versus the University of Minnesota. In fitting fashion, Ogonna would collect her 29th kill of the match and an NCAA Tournament record 145th kill for the Tournament to close the match and secure Stanford’s sixth national championship trophy and the Most Outstanding Player award for the tournament! The 2004 AVCA Co-National Player of the Year and Co-SIDA Academic All-American of the Year would go on to be named the winner of the Honda Sports Award for volleyball and on June 29, 2005, Ogonna was awarded the 2005 Honda Cup as the nation’s overall collegiate women’s athlete of the year.

Graduating with a degree in human biology, Nnamani would join the U.S. national team in 2002 and begin a journey that would result in being a two-time Olympian. Making her Olympic debut as the youngest player on the 2004 team in Athens, Greece, the squad would finish tied for fifth after losing to Brazil in the quarterfinals. She would follow that up in 2008 in the Beijing Games helping the U.S. bring home a silver medal highlighted by an epic 17-point, 11-kill performance against Poland. From 2002-2011, Ogonna would represent the U.S. at numerous international competitions including the Pan American Games, NORCECA Championships, the FIVB World Grand Prix, and the FIVB World Championship. In addition to her time with USA Volleyball, from 2006-10, Nnamani would have professional stops in Puerto Rico, Italy, Switzerland, Turkey, and the Czech Republic. Nnamani was inducted into the Stanford Athletics Hall of Fame in 2015.

After retirement from volleyball in 2011, Ogonna “traded in her volleyball uniforms for medical scrubs” and pursued her dream of working in the medical field. As a child, Ogonna had battled with asthma, and she was inspired by the hope the doctors had instilled in her during that experience. She wanted the opportunity to do the same for others. On May 18, 2020, Ogonna graduated with the highest honors from the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine. She is currently a plastic and reconstructive surgery resident at Harvard Medical School in Boston.

Ogonna summed up how her experiences in volleyball translated to her journey in medicine:

“At the start of my journey in medicine, I thought I had to adopt a new skill set and completely reinvent myself, but the moment I realized I did not have to change but keep using the skills I acquired as an athlete-in a different context-things really started to click...”

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