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. 1.27

LEAH EDMOND
While growing up, Leah and her family moved around quite a bit. 'Some of the places she lived were Arizona, Tennessee, and Oklahoma.' She was very athletic as a youth, focusing on gymnastics, and even 'had her own workout regimen to stay in shape'. Her family ultimately settled in Lexington, Kentucky. A growth spurt turned her away from her gymnastics dreams and toward volleyball, where it did not take long to see the potential based on her focus and athleticism.

Leah would hone her volleyball skills starting with her sophomore year at Lexington's Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School and with the Lexington United Volleyball Club. Before graduating in 2016, Edmond would earn second-team AVCA High School All-American as well as be a two-time first-team All-State selection and the 2015 Region 11 Player of the Year. She would also be ranked #7 in PrepVolleyball.com's Senior Aces and earn Fab 50 distinction from Volleyball Magazine. Leah would also shine in club ball by earning AAU All-America and leading her Lexington United club team to an upset of the top-ranked Mizuno Sports Performance 18 Elite team at the 2015 AAU Nationals.

Edmonds was recruited by numerous NCAA D-I women’s volleyball programs, but she chose to stay local and attend the University of Kentucky. She knew UK was the right choice for her. ‘She loved the coaches. She loved the school. She loved being in Lexington. She just couldn’t picture herself being any where else.’

2016 Southeastern Conference (SEC) Freshman of the Year, AVCA third-team All-American, AVCA all-region Freshman of the Year, started every match and played in all 106 sets for the Wildcats, won finished 23-8 overall and 15-3 in the SEC. Clearly, Leah got off to an amazing start in her freshman year! She would wrap up the season second in the SEC in kills per set at 4.25 and would record a team-high eight double-doubles. In addition to her on-court accolades, Leah would earn her first Academic All-SEC selection. After her freshman season, Leah would be named to the training team for the 2017 FIVB Volleyball Women’s U20 World Championship.

Entering her sophomore campaign, Leah and the Wildcats were poised to take a giant leap. Leah would become the first Wildcat since 1983 to earn AVCA first-team All-American. She would earn her second Academic All-SEC nod as well as AVCA all-Southeast Region, Southeast Region Player of the Year, and first-team All-SEC leading the Wildcats to a stellar 17-1 conference record earning a share of the SEC title. Edmond set the 25-point rally-scoring era record for kills in a season with 539. She broke the 25-point rally-scoring record for points with 614.5, and registered double-digit kills in 20 matches and had 20 or more kills in 11 matches. Serving as NCAA tournament regional hosts, the Cats would fall to mighty Nebraska in the region semifinals to end the year at 29-4.

2017 season would be hard to top, but Leah and Wildcats women’s volleyball did just that. In a year where she would be named the SEC Player of the Year and lead the program to an undefeated 18-0 conference record and back-to-back SEC championships, Leah would also earn AVCA second-team All-American. She became the fastest player in program history to amass 1,000 career kills and she ranked second in the conference and 13th nationally with 4.57 kills per set. Playing in the region semifinals in consecutive years, the women’s volleyball Cats ran into the Cornhuskers again in 2018. They would fall in a sweep to end the 2018 season at 26-5.

Looking to close out her career at UK as arguably the greatest volleyball student-athlete in program history, Leah would earn the 2019 SEC Player of the Year and regain first-team status as an AVCA All-American. Entering her senior season needing 251 kills to become the program’s all-time leader, Leah would record her 1,738th kill on October 20, 2019 at the University of Alabama to break the school record for all-time career kills in both scoring eras. About a month later on November 17th against Florida, Edmond would record 30 kills to set a new career SEC-high. With another dominant conference run of 16-2, the team would reach the region semifinals against the University of Washington losing in four sets closing out the Edmond era with a 25-7 overall record. 103 wins against 24 losses in four seasons playing for Big Blue.

Edmond would graduate from UK with a degree in elementary education with the dream of pursuing a career as an elementary school teacher. With the focus and drive expected from Leah Edmond, she not only began her teaching career in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic, she also was able to live out her dream of becoming a professional volleyball player joining the new U.S.-based Athletes Unlimited volleyball league in 2021.
AVCA DDT HISTORY COMMISSION

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