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.

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KANANI DANIELSON
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Born in the great state of Hawaii, Kanani was raised in Ewa Beach, O'ahu near Honolulu. Before she even made it to kindergarten the sport of volleyball was part of her life. She would hit the ball around in the backyard with family and within a couple of years she would begin more formal participation at the Manoa Athletic Club. For the better part of her early life as a youth, it was ‘school at Lanakila Elementary – and then right to the gym and the games.’

‘Once she reached her pre-teen/early teenage years, she was playing for the prestigious Jammers Volleyball Club. Her teams would win several championships at the local and national level. In 2005 and 2006, Kanani would play for the U.S. Youth National Team helping the U.S. win the 2006 NORCECA Girls Youth Continental Championship. Competing with the Imi‘ike Volleyball Club, Kanani and her teammates would go on to qualify for the Junior Olympics Volleyball Festival in three consecutive years, winning a silver medal in 2008.

On the interscholastic volleyball scene, Kanani would become a high school volleyball phenom at Kamehameha Schools in Honolulu. As a sophomore and junior, she led the Warriors to back-to-back state championships. As the state player of the year for two years running, Kanani was well-known for taking it to another level when it mattered most. In a tight best two out of three championship match to wrap up her junior year against Punahou, the match was tied one set each. In the 25-21 decisive set, Kanani would come up with eight of her match-high 19 kills to close out the championship for her team. This same spirit that made her phenomenal on the volleyball court translated to excellence in the classroom, where she maintained a 3.8 GPA. Before wrapping up her volleyball playing days for coach Chris Blake at Kamehameha, she would lead the team to a third consecutive state championship and be named state player of the year for the third consecutive year. She was also awarded high school national Player of the Year by Volleyball Magazine.

Kanani didn’t look too far for the next chapter in her volleyball and academic career. As a top recruit before her senior year, she was fully committed to attending the University of Hawaii and competing with the women’s volleyball program and playing for legendary AVCA Hall of Fame coach Dave Shoji. Arriving on campus in the fall of 2008, Kanani started 34 matches at outside hitter for the Rainbow Wahine in her freshman campaign. Danielson wasted no time establishing herself as a named to be reckoned with in the women’s college volleyball universe. She was named an AVCA third-team All-American, the Western Athletic Conference (WAC) Freshman of the Year, and a first-team all-WAC selection while leading the team to a 31-4 overall record and a 15-1 conference record. They would be denied a trip to the national semifinals by the Stanford Cardinal, who swept them in the Fort Collins Regional finals.

‘Taking it up a notch’ in year #2, Kanani would lead the program to an undefeated 16-0 WAC conference record in the 2009 season. After being named third-team AVCA All-America as a freshman, she would garner first-team AVCA All-America as a sophomore along with being named the WAC Player of the Year. After earning academic all-WAC as a freshman, year #2 saw Kanani’s continued excellence in the classroom as she would earn CoSIDA Academic All-District honors. Named Most Outstanding Player at the Stanford Regional, the RW would topple Michigan Wolverines 3-0 to earn a trip to the national semifinals in Tampa, Florida. Despite Danielson’s game-high 14 kills, Hawaii would lose in four to eventual national champion Penn State to finish the season at 32-3.

The best goes on for Kanani and the program in the 2010 season with another undefeated 16-0 WAC conference record and another conference title. For Kanani, another first-team AVCA All-America, another WAC Player of the Year, another all-WAC first team nod, and all-academic WAC honors as a junior. Starting all 32 matches at outside for the 29-3 Wahine, Danielson would rank 10th in the country with 4.64 kills/set including four 20-kill matches and 11 double-doubles for the season. An unseeded University of Washington team on magical run in their hometown for the NCAA tournament Seattle Regional would upset Hawaii in a second-round sweep to end their season.

Kanani would end her Hawaii career as a four-time first team all-WAC selection, a three-time first team AVCA All-America, and three-time WAC Player of the Year. Despite an NCAA region semifinal loss to USC, the Wahine would finish the season at 31-2 and 18-0 record in the WAC last season in the WAC. In her four seasons, Hawaii would continue their reign at the top of women’s college volleyball with a combined 123-12 overall record and a 63-1 conference record including a 57-regualr season match conference win streak that started during her freshman season. Kanani’s love of volleyball continued in the pro ranks in Japan and Europe from 2012-16 and in 2018 she was inducted into UH Circle of Honor.

Awesome. Mindbloggling. Breathtaking. These are words that come to mind when describing Kanani and her incredible athletic gifts. What can be overlooked is coaches, teammates, and family saying what an outstanding role model she is. How graceful, thoughtful, and respectful she is. Quick to give the credit to her teammates.

The BEST word to describe all that Kanani is….is "KANANI"! Why? It means, "Beautiful One"!
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