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.
The ‘WEAVER’ name rings loud on the Washington D.C area sports scene. For Cheryl Weaver it all began along the Beltway, as the daughter of Sheila Weaver, a pioneering athletic administrator, women’s sports advocate, P.E. teacher, and coach. Ironically, Sheila didn’t have many opportunities growing up Des Moines, Iowa in the pre-Title IX era, but Cheryl was exposed to sports basically from day one. Following Mom and her older sister to the gym and playing “pepper” with the team started early. Sheila had relocated to D.C. from New York to be a teacher and the head volleyball coach at the renowned Sidwell Friends School in the city. While coaching at Sidwell and with the lingering memories of the lack of sports opportunities afforded to her as a youth, Sheila founded the D.C. Juniors Volleyball Club, which would be primarily for African-American girls throughout the DMV. ‘It was very unusual in those days to see a team of African-American girls all six feet tall from the East Coast playing club volleyball.’ Sheila didn’t pressure Cheryl. Being afforded the opportunity to play club and with role models like her older sister and Paula McNamee (volleyball/basketball at Stanford), it allowed Cheryl’s confidence, athleticism, and sports acumen to blossom.

Cheryl entered Sidwell Friends and not only starred for Mom/Coach Sheila on the volleyball court but would also be a leading athlete for the Quakers’ basketball and track & field programs. She helped lead the volleyball team to the Independent School League (ISL) championship as a sophomore in 1995 and was named first-team All-ISL. Cheryl would earn All-ISL selections as a senior and, be named the 1998 All-Met Player of the Year, and would culminate her high school volleyball career as the back-to-back-to-back D.C. Gatorade Player of the Year for 1996, 1997, and 1998. In addition to being arguably the greatest high school volleyball player in D.C. history, Weaver would also set the school record in the 100M hurdles in 1996 and would graduate from Sidwell having blocked 323 shots, scored 1,017 points, and be the all-time leading rebounder with 1,407 for the basketball.

Moving to the opposite end of the country, Cheryl entered Long Beach State University as one of the top recruits in the nation. The women’s volleyball program was a powerhouse under the leadership of AVCA Hall of Fame coach Brian Gimmillaro. With stars like Tara Cross, Danielle Scott, Sheri Sanders, Nichelle Burton, Joy McKenzie (current LBSU head coach) and many others having graced the rosters for the Niners, the arrival of Cheryl at ‘the Beach’ in 1998 would only add to the storied legacy of LBSU women’s volleyball. With a loaded roster including 1997 & 1998 AVCA D-I Player of the Year Misty May, Jessica Alvarado, and Benishe Dillard, Cheryl would be steady contributor to the undefeated squad that would wrap up that ‘98 season at 36-0 defeating the Penn State Nittany Lions in a five-set slugfest in Madison, Wisconsin to claim the program’s third NCAA D-I women’s volleyball national championship. Primed to position herself as an all-time great, Cheryl would garner her first AVCA first-team All-America nod in 1999 while leading the program back to the national semifinals where they would lose to Stanford in three and finish the season at 34-1. The start of a new decade, the year 2000, the team would make it back to another NCAA tournament losing to Hawaii on their home floor in the Pacific Regional semifinals. Cheryl was now a two-time first-team AVCA All-American and the newly minted 2000 Big West Conference Player of the Year. What many programs would consider a great year, 24-8 and a trip to the 2000 NCAA Regional semifinals was simply not the case for the ‘Beach’. Now regarded as one of the top women’s volleyball players in the nation, Cheryl was determined to make her senior year one for the ages. And that is what happened for Cheryl and the Niners. Teaming with Tayibba Haneef, the squad would sweep 27 opponents and with an 18-0 conference record only lost three games in Big West competition. At the 2001 D-I women’s volleyball ‘final four’ just down the road in San Diego, the black and gold would sweep Arizona setting up a championship match against Stanford who LBSU had beaten in four sets back in the September pre-conference schedule and was one of Stanford’s two losses on the season entering the finals match. In an extremely tight first game, LBSU had a game point at 29-27, but a costly hitting error would tip the game in the Cardinal’s favor, 31-29. This was the first time all season that the Niners had lost the first game of a match. Cheryl and her teammates kept it close, but would lose in three to the Cardinal as they avenged the early season defeat and claimed the national championship. The finish would not end in storybook fashion but would go down as one of the greatest and most dominant women’s college volleyball seasons ever. Cheryl would be named AVCA first-team All-America for the third time and earn another Big West Player of the Year Award joining Tara Cross, Danielle Scott, and Misty May as the program’s multiyear winners. Cheryl would end her career with 1,589 kills and a hitting percentage of .386.

Cheryl would immediately join the U.S. Women’s National Team’s 2002 Japan Tour along with playing professionally in Puerto Rico, Switzerland, Spain, and Azerbaijan through 2010. Weaver rejoined the national team from 2009-11 competing internationally. In 2011, Cheryl was inducted into the Long Beach State Athletics Hall of Fame and in 2018, the 1998 national championship team was inducted as well.

Taking a page from Mom, Sheila, Cheryl is now the head volleyball coach and a school administrator for the Bullis School in Bethesda, Maryland, where she coaches her daughter Alexis, a freshman middle blocker. THE NAME STILL RINGS LOUD!
AVCA DDT HISTORY COMMISSION

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