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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KIM ODEN
The question can be asked, “Did Kim Oden find volleyball or did volleyball find Kim Oden?” As a youth growing up in Irvine, California, Kim Oden's interests were ‘climbing trees and playing Barbie with her friends’. At the age of 13, she began playing competitively with the Orange County Volleyball Club. Youth sports had been a part of her life growing up, but she really didn’t like volleyball very much at first. She wasn’t very good at it. She got bruises on her arms from the ball. She didn’t know any of the other players. After the rough start, her arms stopped hurting and she began to make friends. She really started to enjoy the sport and understand the values that youth sports can instill. Kim would go on to be a top player in the state of California and the nation at Irvine High School.

From Irvine, Kim would go on to compete for the U.S. Women’s Volleyball National Team from 1986-92 and 1994. Serving as the team captain for the 1988 Seoul Olympics team and the 1992 bronze medal winning Barcelona Games team. After her playing days, Kim would move into coaching both at the collegiate and interscholastic levels. In six seasons at St. Francis High School (CA), Oden would win over 100 matches as well as two California state championships.

The sport of volleyball took a young girl from Irvine all over the world competing in 16 countries and playing professionally in Italy, Brazil, China, and Turkey.

In 1996, Byron Shewman, a former U.S. Men’s National Team player, had concerns about the lack of access to the sport of volleyball for youth that lacked resources to play at expensive volleyball clubs. Shewman had a vision for how to mitigate change and approached Lincoln High School in San Diego, California and asked the athletic director if he could take over the volleyball program. Given the go ahead, Shewman found his friend Kim, who was training in San Diego with the National Team at the time and asked her if she would help coach the team. Kim will admit that she ‘doesn’t remember the specific conversation. She just remembers Shewman inviting her and being on board from the beginning’.

Kim’s beginning was being the only Black girl out of 300 at a club volleyball tryout in Newport Beach. She understood that there were obstacles for why there were so few Black girls playing volleyball...things like cost, location, and transportation. Many of those barriers still exist, but this was the beginning of a journey to help introduce young girls to the sport of volleyball and allow them to ‘discover the discipline, friendships, and joy this amazing sport provides’!

25 years later, Kim Oden is still on board. From the humble beginnings at Lincoln High School in San Diego with a group of 11 girls playing volleyball, Oden and Shewman became the co-founders and Starlings Volleyball, USA was born. She currently serves as the chair of the Starlings board of directors. A position she has held since January of 2021. Accepting the role, Kim shared this message...

“I am thrilled and honored to be named the chairperson of the Starlings Executive Board. For the past 25 years, the Starlings program has provided opportunities for girls in underserved communities to play the great sport of volleyball. Together with the Starlings staff, board, club directors, coaches, donors, and sponsors, I look forward to working hard to provide healthy and positive life skills and experiences so that each Starlings player has the chance to grow into a confident young woman.”

Starlings Volleyball, USA has served 25,000 girls since those days at Lincoln High School. Close to 800 girls have earned college scholarships and 90% of Starlings athletes have graduated from high school. Currently serving almost 4,000 female volleyball student-athletes, Starlings USA continues to impact the lives of young girls in more than 50 cities and Native American reservations across the U.S. Many Starlings alumni return so they can give back and help usher along the next generation of young women.

Did Kim Oden find volleyball or did volleyball find Kim Oden? Yes! And Yes! The volleyball community is blessed because of it. Thank you!

To support or learn more about Starlings Volleyball, USA, visit www.starlings.org.
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