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. 1.40

SHARON CLARK
Let’s be honest. Being a volleyball coach is not a profession many would put at the top of their list of dream jobs. A dream job is not always aligned with your destiny. Circumstance can play a huge role in determining our futures.

Sharon attended Hiram Johnson High School in the Tahoe Park South area of Sacramento, California. Her talent and performance as a volleyball player at Hiram would land her the opportunity to play college volleyball at California State, Sacramento.

The Hornets volleyball program was led by 2007 AVCA Hall of Famer Debby Colberg who won over 800 matches and two national titles in her 32 years leading the Sacramento program. Playing for such a legendary coach like Colberg can produce a series of defining moments in a student-athlete’s career. For Sharon, it came as she was closing out her collegiate career in 1988. Colberg staged her annual senior night skit, where she would impersonate her vision of each senior on their future endeavors. For Sharon, Colberg impersonated a head coach. Colberg knew that Sharon would make a great coach and for Sharon that sealed the deal. If a hall of fame coach like Colberg thought she could be a great coach, that was the affirmation she needed.

Sharon graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in physical education in 1989 and in 1994, a master’s in sports administration. In 1993, she started her head coaching career at Humboldt State University in Arcata, Calif., where she coached just one season before moving to UC-Davis. She spent seven years coaching at Davis when circumstance intervened. She had no intention of leaving California or leaving Davis when she was faced with the decision to move to Indianapolis, Indiana with her then fiancé and now husband. A job in Indianapolis was waiting for him, but not for Sharon. As she pondered her decision, she said if a Division I job became available, she would make the move. The Butler University head volleyball coaching job was vacant, and she got the opportunity to interview for the job. She loved the Butler campus, the city was nice, so she accepted the offer to become the head women’s volleyball coach. Indianapolis and Butler University are now home after 22 seasons even though she will always be a California girl at heart.

While Colberg’s impersonation was powerful and defining, there was one aspect that Colberg could not impersonate. Sharon was only the second African-American coach that Butler University had hired in its athletics history. Being hired as the head women’s volleyball coach at a predominantly white, wealthy, high academic Division I institution was groundbreaking. Although Sharon doesn’t think much about being a trailblazer, she does recognize and is fully aware of how being hired at Butler in 2000 carved a pathway for other coaches that look like her to get opportunities as well.

Sharon realizes how much volleyball has contributed to her life. She furthered her education because of it. Volleyball has allowed her to travel the globe. She wants others to be given every opportunity to experience the same. Sharon may not think much about being a trailblazer, but she is a groundbreaker in every sense of the word. In January of 2020, Sharon became the President of the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) after being elected President-Elect in the fall of 2018 and serving one year in that role. Two months into her tenure as president, the world would be turned upside down by possibly the worst pandemic in the history of humanity. With laser focus, Sharon as president of the Association has been unwavering in accepting the great responsibility in seeing that the organization lives up to its mission, remains relevant, and continues to be a voice for all volleyball coaches despite the epic challenges the pandemic has caused. With all that volleyball has meant to her, she understands the platform that she has been granted. She is committed to making volleyball an inclusive space that provides opportunity and access to the sport she loves so much.

As the all-time wins leader for Butler women’s volleyball Sharon has empowered her student-athletes to be disciplined and self-motivated to be better players on the court and achievers off it. Sharon admits that the volleyball coaching profession can be unforgiving for an African-American woman. The journey has left some scars, but it has also brought the joy of seeing her student-athletes become better volleyball players and better people because of her dedication to mentoring and guiding. The same can be said for the countless others that have been impacted by Sharon’s leadership, inclusive spirit, and love for volleyball.

“Through Her Lens”, we simply cannot hide behind the privilege that volleyball has afforded us all. “Although there is no formal way to get into coaching, it’s a great profession. I hope and pray that others will see it and those who really have a drive for it will want to do it. It’s great to affect the lives of others, but more than that I get so much from my players. I get so much more from them than I could ever give to them.”

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