

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 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the American Volleyball Coaches Association.

## PHASE 1 | FEATURE 1

# FLORA "FLO" HYMAN



# FLORA "FLO" HYMAN



*"To be true to one's self is the ultimate test in life. To have courage and the sensitivity to follow your hidden dreams and stand tall against the odds that are bound to fall in your path. Life is too short and precious to be dealt with in any other fashion. This thought I hold dear to my heart and I always try to be true to myself and others that I encounter along the way."*

# FLORA “FLO” HYMAN

Flora Jean “Flo” Hyman was born July 31, 1954 in Los Angeles, California, the second of eight children born to George W. and Warren Hyman. Towering over her peers as a youth, Hyman was nicknamed “Jolly green giant” and was always the target of stares and questions about her height. Standing 6’2” as a 12-year old, she used her height to her advantage and began playing in two-on-two beach volleyball tournaments with her sister Suzanne as partner. By the time Flo was a senior in high school, she had developed a lethal spike.

Hyman graduated from Morningside High School in 1972 and attended El Camino College for one year before moving on to the University of Houston. Now at 6’5”, Flo would become the first female scholarship athlete at the school majoring in mathematics and physical education.

Coached by Ruth Nelson, Flo would go on lead the Cougars to two top-five national finishes, become a three-time first team collegiate All-American, and be named the Broderick Cup winner (now the Honda Sports Award) as the nation’s best female collegiate volleyball player.

# FLORA “FLO” HYMAN

Joining the United States Volleyball Association’s (USVBA) year-round training squad in 1975, Flo decided to leave Houston early and focus on her National Team participation. The United States Women’s Volleyball National Team failed to qualify for the Olympics in 1972 and 1976. With Flo Hyman as the star player and Arie Selinger as national team coach, the team qualified for the 1980 Olympics only to have President Jimmy Carter boycott the Moscow Olympics in protest. Determined to put American volleyball on the map, Hyman remained with the Team. When the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games arrived, Flo and the team were primed for a fairy tale playing in her hometown. While the team fell short to China in the gold medal match, the Americans secured a silver medal making it the highest finish ever for the US Women’s National Team. In addition to Olympic competition, here are some other international competitions that Hyman participated in:

World Championships – 1978, 1982 (Bronze Medal)

World Cup – 1977, 1981

Pan Am Games – 1975, 1979, 1983

NORCECA Championships – 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1983

World University Games – 1973, 1977

# FLORA “FLO” HYMAN

After the 1984 Summer Olympics, Hyman made the decision to pursue professional volleyball opportunities in Japan. Prior to leaving the states she joined forces with Mrs. Coretta Scott King, civil rights leader and wife of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, Democratic vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro, and astronaut Sally Ride to lobby for the Civil Rights Restoration Act and strengthening of Title IX legislation.

Hyman planned to play in Japan for a couple of seasons before returning to the States to dedicate herself to broadcasting and coaching American volleyball and continuing the fight for equal rights.

In her second season with the Daiei, Inc. professional club, the team had risen from the third tier to the top division. Playing in the third set of a match 380 miles west of Tokyo in Matsue City on January 24, 1986, Flo subbed out of the match and collapsed shortly after taking her seat on the bench. She was taken to Matsue City Red Cross Hospital where efforts to resuscitate her failed.

Originally thought to have died from a heart attack, it was later determined from an autopsy requested by the family upon her body’s return to California that her death was caused by a rare connective tissue disorder called Marfan’s Syndrome.

Due to its genetic predisposition, it would later be determined in testing that Flo’s younger brother had the same disease. He would go on to have open heart surgery to correct the problem almost certainly saving his life.

Her death, while extremely tragic would embody Flora Jean “Flo” Hyman’s commitment to be ‘true to herself’ and advocate for the well-being of others.

The life and legacy of Flora Jean “Flo” Hyman continues, visit [www.flohyman.com](http://www.flohyman.com).

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