

2025

AVCA Thirty Under 30 College



Heather Gearhart

Winthrop University
Head Coach

Career Accomplishments to Date:

- WU:
 - .818 conference winning % as head coach
 - 2 NIVC appearances
 - 2 conference championship match appearances
 - 3 power conference victories (2 as HC)
 - Freshman, Setter, Scholar-Athlete of the Year in the Big South (as HC)
 - 31 all-conference honors
 - Set single match & single season attendance records as WU HC
 - 4x AVCA All-Academic Team, 4 COSIDA academic players
 - College Coaching HotShot by VBMagazine
 - 3rd in NCAA dps, 44th in kps, 60th in opp hitting
- Akron:
 - Most overall wins since 2003, 1st MAC tournament since 2012
 - 3 all-MAC
- Tennessee:
 - 14-win increase, NCAA tournament & 2nd Round
 - 3 all-SEC, 2 All-Americans

Coaching Roles:

- Winthrop - Head Coach: 2023 - present
- Winthrop - Interim Head Coach: 2022
- Winthrop - Assistant Coach: -2021
- Akron - Assistant Coach: 2019
- Tennessee - Volunteer Assistant Coach: 2018

What made you decide to get into coaching volleyball?

I wanted to get involved with the sport that gave me so much and figure out where I fit in doing the same for others. I didn't know what it would bring me initially, but the relationships and lessons you're able to teach young people through volleyball is very impactful. I want to ensure the time I have with each athlete is valuable in preparing them for their lives after sport, and instilling core values that extend far beyond their athletic careers.

**What are your career goals in the sport?**

Eventually, I want to have my own training facility that focuses on the holistic development of youth athletes. The development would include on court and off court support in ensuring they're prepared for their next steps as they head into college.

Which coaches have influenced you the most?

I've been fortunate to have an incredible roster of coaches I've learned from at each stage of my career, & all had equal influence on my philosophies as a coach/player. The first coaches to get me involved with volleyball and teach me the foundations: Carolyn Hudson, Woodie Taeatafa, Jennifer & Candace Saleaumua, & Dan Nieman. In club, I had some of the best who taught me so much technically & tactically that I still use today: JJ Van Niel, Said Souikane, Jimmy Gekas & Ozhan Bahrambeghyi, Eve Rackham, Tyler Adams, Bill Ferguson, J and Chris Hames, & Joe Sagula all influenced me so much since college.

What do you enjoy most about your coaching job?

I love getting to know the players and build relationships with them. I think the best part of my job is seeing how much they grow from the beginning of the recruiting process through graduation and into adulthood. The learning moments are great - even though they're not always easy - and seeing how much perspective is gained from them. Seeing and hearing my players be role models for others and represent themselves well is incredibly rewarding.

