

Through Her Eyes: Stories of Women Who Shaped Basketball

Oral History Interview transcript: Carol Callan (USA)

Oral History Interview Questions

Setting the Scene:

1. (Circumstances) Help us set the scene and describe how you first came to the sport of basketball: how and why did you first pick up a ball, and what was it like? Who did you play with in those early years?

It's funny, it really wasn't a choice because my father was a basketball coach. In 1940, he won a Hoosiers-style state championship with a small team from a small town in Missouri and that was his beginning, quite the beginning, and then he moved to St. Louis, Missouri, which is where I was born. I had an older brother, so we just picked up balls. We actually had a small court in the basement of our house. When I say small court, we were little kids, so we didn't need a big basketball court, and my father put up a basket and we would just shoot around. He taped a little lane down so we could play.

2. How popular was women basketball and did basketball serve as a bond in the community?

As I continued to grow, I lived in a neighborhood of only boys. I think if you talk to a lot of young girls at that time, there weren't that many opportunities in school to play sports, so you just played in the neighborhood and basketball was an important piece, but to be honest, we played every sport.

Growing up in St. Louis, Missouri, the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team is very, very popular, and we lived in the city, so we would play on the street in front of our house, which was a bit protected from traffic. But we would play baseball during baseball season.

We would play basketball in what we call an alley that was connected to our street. A neighbor put up a hoop, so we would play basketball when it was basketball season and then, quite honestly, my mother wasn't really happy with me doing it, but we played football, American football, during American football season. So, I had the opportunity to grow up in a tough and rumble kind of way

with an older brother and a bunch of other guys who didn't treat me like a girl. They would tackle me, they treated me like just another kid in the neighborhood who wanted to have fun, and so I grew a love for all sports, mostly team sports, and would then also go with my dad to his games. Also, he started a basketball camp with another coach in St. Louis and I would go and "work the camp". My duty was minimal, I checked in their valuables so that they could be safe and do their basketball, but I would also try to do some of the same drills. Now, I was the only girl in this gym, with only guys, my brother, and the two sons of the other coach, so I guess you could say I just was surrounded by boys who loved sports just as much as I did.

3. **(Environment) We are curious to learn what basketball was like at that time in a pre-Title IX (landmark federal civil rights law) era. What was the basketball structure that you first encountered, also at school?**

I went to a parochial high school and grade school and so it was a kindergarten to eighth grade school. When we got to probably grade six, we would have an after-school program, and we played volleyball. I remember volleyball more than I do basketball, but we played all sports after school, although very unorganized other than within the school setting.

When I got to high school, you may or may not appreciate this, but I was in high school before the legislation called Title IX was passed in the United States. When I was a freshman and sophomore in high school, we had something after school called Girls Athletic Association, and it was maybe once a week. All the girls would come and we would just try different sports, but we didn't have an organized team because several years earlier, when they did have an organized team, one of the girls got hurt in a game, she hit her head and the school thought that sports were too dangerous for girls to play. There are four years in high school, so it wasn't until my third year in high school that they reinstituted interscholastic sports. So, for my last two years in high school, I played. Back then, you had leagues and our school participated in two different leagues. One was a private school setting which was for parochial schools. Mine was a religious parochial school, and then there were just private schools, where people paid to have their kids be educated.

4. **We are curious to understand the 6x6 league back then. Was there something you learned that helped later?**

In that league, we played six-on-six basketball. I also played in a league that was with public schools and that one was five on five, so you can imagine there wasn't a whole lot of strategies going on because we kept shifting from one to the other and the six-on-six, quite honestly, was really fun because you had two permanent defensive players on one end of the court, two permanent offensive players on the other end of the court, and two rovers who could dribble anywhere and I was a rover, so I got to play a little bit of everything. Early on, dribbling was limited to three dribbles and then you had to pass the ball so in some ways, it actually was a great way to learn the fundamentals of passing and movement off the ball rather than overdribbling. Anyway, that was the six-on-six style. I preferred, I suppose, the five-on-five style because that's what the boys did and it was a transition from thinking that girls had to maybe only play on half of the court to, yeah, we can do the full court as well, and so I was really at the beginning of that, but when I graduated from high school, I then went to college in the middle of Missouri, a small school and once again, there were no sports my first two years, so it took a while to get that going. There were intramural sports and I was part of a sorority, and so we would do intramural sports, but they didn't have an intercollegiate competition. They started it my junior year, but I chose to do a semester abroad in Vienna, Austria, so I did not participate that year. The only time I played interscholastic sports in college was my senior year and I played volleyball, basketball and softball.

I even had an invitation to be a professional softball player in a very, very small, limited professional softball league. Basically, they paid nothing, so I chose to just get a job after college and spent one year in Kansas City working for Hallmark Cards as a computer programmer. I did not appreciate the nine-to-five world, so I went to graduate school in Boulder, Colorado, at the University of Colorado, and ended up getting hired as a teacher and basketball coach at a high school. That started my professional career in sports. I never was too far away from basketball just because my dad was still coaching, and I always was his probably biggest fan other than my mother, so I stayed close to it.

5. **You mentioned Title IX before, it was a key achievement: a federal civil rights law passed as part of the Education Amendments of 1972. This law protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance. How big was it for basketball – and sports in general– and how did it impact on society through basketball?**

It was originally approved because a woman wanted to go to law school, and she did not have that opportunity and took the government to court. So, it really was an academic law at the beginning

that if a school or a university received federal funding, and that was primarily large public colleges and universities, then they had to provide the same opportunities for men as for women.

It's quite interesting that it took until 1972 to acknowledge that, but it wasn't too much earlier that women got the right to vote anyway. So, what happened was then it became not just admittance to colleges or graduate programs. It really took on a life of its own when it was used to make sure that both girls and boys, men and women, had the same athletic opportunities, and it took a lot of lawsuits initially to push colleges, universities, schools to do equal programs or maybe not equal programs but somewhat fair programs. My college was a girls' college anyway, so that it was a matter of just probably money and how much they could afford to do to then get started with it.

6. The Title IX law sure looks great on paper, but how difficult was it to really make it work? Did you experience any kind of discrimination and how did you face it?

When I went to graduate school and got my job teaching, it was an interesting dynamic. I was the girls' basketball coach and the boys' basketball coach said to me "hey, we need to practice after school every day because I have to go scout other teams playing", and so there was still an attempt to push girls to a worst practice time. Fortunately, the athletic director at my high school, who basically was my boss in the athletic area, had made it very clear that we were going to be treated the same, and the school district had the same salary for boys and girls coaches based on years of service. So, I said to the boys' coach "hey, I'm going to scout as well, so I think we should trade off". So, we came up with a way of maybe for one week the boys would have the early practice time right after school, and then the next week the girls would. Men who were coaching males realized that they were going to have to go along with this.

7. Often, it takes time to harvest the results of progress. Title IX had an impact on women's sports both in the short term and the long run. Could you elaborate on how significant that impact was and how significant it still is for women, from your point of view?

In my life, as in my professional career, all the way through today, there seem to be inflection points when girls' sports have gotten a good shot in the arm, if you understand that term. There have been headwinds many times, but now there were tailwinds. The first inflection point that I observed was Title IX, because it was passed in 72 and I only became national team director in 1995 for our year-

long program that led to the 1996 Olympic games, which is basically 23 years later. Girls who could benefit from Title IX were born and they could take advantage of really good programs all the way up in our country.

One of the strengths of sports is that our school system is a pipeline to develop athletes, whether it be grade school to then high school teams, to then college teams to professional opportunities. So, because of Title IX, the 1996 Olympics were basically called the Title IX Olympics, because women's basketball won the gold medal, gymnastics won, soccer was big, volleyball, softball were big too... all the sports and all of those female athletes were the beneficiaries of Title IX, because their college programs had put in the opportunity to become an athlete whether you are a male or a female.

I was talking to someone, and this is an interesting part of being part of FIBA, saying something like, "the U.S. don't get government support for their sports programs, you know, we have USA Basketball, we get sponsorship money or grants from the U.S. Olympic Committee, but the government does not give us money", and that person said to me "hey, you have the greatest government program in the world called Title IX". And Title IX was not so much that the government was giving money, but they were saying that if you were going to have a sports program, you needed to have both men's and women's, and the resources had to be the same. That is the benefit of Title IX: what you spend on men's basketball, that budget, should be somewhat reflective to the same as women's basketball. Whether it's paying coaches, whether it's the money provided to travel to train, how many coaches you have, how many scholarships in college there are... Title IX is that sort of government program that's not a direct funding source, but certainly is a tremendous opportunity source.

8. **Twenty years after the Atlanta '96 Games, the so called Title IX Games as you said, the high demand to develop a basketball Pro League by women players led to the creation of the WNBA. Another huge boost to women's basketball.**

Title IX was the first inflection point. Around 1990, something very interesting happened at the college level, specifically with the University of Tennessee and the University of Connecticut, which had become very popular and had developed a great rivalry. ESPN was just outside of where the University of Connecticut is, and they had taken an interest in UConn basketball and in having

viewers to the Tennessee-Connecticut rivalry on TV. There was some interest by the NBA to see if women's basketball would sell...

So, all of this kind of came together at the same time in 1994, and the executive committee of USA Basketball, which I was a part of, began to consider "is it the time for professional women's sports in the United States" in a big way, supported by the NBA. At the same time, the U.S. women had neither won the gold medal in 1992 in Barcelona nor at the 1994 World Cup... There was a feeling like we needed to train more and prepare more to make sure that we were ready to sort of take back a gold medal in 1996.

So, with the idea of "does women's basketball sell?" and "let's prepare more in 1995", the decision was to do a year-long program leading into the 1996 Olympics to see what the business side of basketball looked like and also to be more competitive in our home Olympics in Atlanta. I was hired to be the director of that national team in 1995 and when I speak of an inflection point, even we didn't realize how that team would be accepted. We knew it was something new, we knew it was going to be really interesting, but it was almost like riding a wave: you want to ride on top of the wave, just a little bit ahead of it so you don't get swallowed up by it. And it was almost like this incredible outpouring of interest in our team: we played 22 different colleges in preparation, so fans around the country could see our team play, we hosted Ukraine I don't know how many times, we hosted Cuba, we went to a tournament in Australia, we went to China for a tournament, we played 52 preparation games for those Atlanta Olympics, we won all 52. We almost lost in Russia, which was actually interesting, and then we just sort of swept into Atlanta and were not to be denied.

9. It's like a repeated pattern that lasts more or less 20 years with a clear message: women basketball draws attention, women basketball can sell.

From that team and that interest, the NBA realized "yes, women's basketball could sell", and they started the WNBA. At the same time, another group of our athletes and local business people in the Bay Area started competing professionally in a league called the ABL that basically lasted two years, without some of the support that the NBA was able to give as well as television that the NBA could give to the WNBA. That was a huge inflection point. Interestingly enough, if you go back to 1953 and the first World Cup, you notice there was some interest, early on in the 70s too, to start a women's professional league, but it just simply didn't have the resources behind it. There were other attempts

at it, but clearly the WNBA has lasted and really got a good kick start from the success of our national team program.

Nowadays, we're living another inflection point, but maybe we should talk more about the history. Obviously, what we're living now, we all understand it, but I do think it's interesting how there is, every once in a while, a boost that nudges women's basketball on.

10. (Identities and Basketball) With regard to how basketball creates identities in societies, you've lived in many places and also have had the chance to experience many different types of basketballs and societies: what positive impact can basketball have in developing bonds between people? And particularly, how did basketball afford you different opportunities than earlier generations – and how did that imprint within you the desire to create change?

I understand what you're asking. It's interesting because, again, we didn't always have opportunities to be on teams that really were sustainable. It was more activity oriented; coaches weren't necessarily trained. I had women coaches the whole time in high school and in college, but honestly, my college coach sort of thought I knew more about basketball than she did.

We always talk about the life skills you learn, the confidence you get, and then for me, I still wasn't sure what I wanted to be, but I never let go of sports. I was thinking "okay, I'm not going to be a teacher, I'm not going to be a coach", but then I went to college and I really enjoyed college, so I thought "well, maybe I could be in college somehow" and I didn't end up there. I went a different direction into high school. But every preparation I had always kind of brought me back to basketball. When I finished my graduate school, I got the opportunity to coach and teach at a local high school. There is no better preparation in life than being a teacher and a coach, because you have in your hands young people and they're vulnerable, they think you're really good, they trust what you say, and you have a responsibility to do what is best for the majority of them.

Sometimes, a parent maybe doesn't agree with the way their child is treated, because they are looking at it from their perspective, not necessarily the team's perspective, so I learned, the hard way sometimes, especially when I became athletic director. Now I'm an administrator and I must deal with how you are going to resolve this. You have to learn how to listen, how to think on your own, and respond in a thoughtful way that takes the emotion out of things. And sometimes, quite honestly, I didn't do a great job at that. I probably was a little too young starting off in the beginning of those

things, but because I was young, I think the athletes liked being a part of the team. But I also would become defensive, trying to protect my decisions and I for sure made some mistakes. However, we actually learned how to work together. In my last year of coaching, we won a state championship and those athletes, as well as others along the way, remain friends today.

Then I became the athletic director at our high school, and I was dealing with kids but also primarily with the team of coaches, who are adults. I think it was also a little bit difficult at the beginning for me because I was younger than most of the people I was overseeing. So, basketball taught me how to bring people together as a team. It wasn't till actually I was the national team director that I really understood working together for a truly compelling goal which is a gold medal. There's nothing more compelling than that.

But when I was the high school administrator, it was hard to articulate what the goal of our high school athletic program was other than to develop young kids in their journey and to show that sports and participation on a team can be equally educational and an important part of your career. Most companies that are looking to hire really enjoy hiring athletes, because they know how to work towards a goal, they know how to manage setbacks and maybe use it to their advantage, and so sports has always been sort of my north star in navigating through my life. And maybe at times I didn't even realize it, but I always drew back upon it.

Diving Deeper

- 11. Looking back on your career, how important is it to have a role model as a point of reference? I'm curious to know who your role models were at different stages of your career, and why Disney is such a significant reference for you.**

I think for every kid, especially in the US and maybe around the world, going to Disney World or Disneyland, it's like the happiest place on earth, that's what they call it. And honestly, it is. It's just such a good feeling. But Walt Disney obviously was brilliant before his time. And his brother, Roy Disney, has a quote: "When principles are clear, decision making is easy". And I came to that a little bit later in life. I didn't know about that quote when I was a high school administrator. I sort of wish I had; I would have framed things differently. Because I was able to use that concept in talking to all the athletes that have come through USA Basketball and our women's programs from the U16 on up, to let them know what principles our core values are. That is how we make decisions. If you have to

discipline somebody, you do that, because maybe it's not in line with our core values. But at least you have something that leads you.

12. Related: role models on the court?

When I was a kid, and even in my early career, well, number one, there were no women's professional basketball players. So, in that neighborhood of boys, when we would play basketball, it was generally like a three on three. So 3x3 is a natural growth out of what kids just do. I wanted to be Jerry West, who was a Los Angeles Laker, and my brother wanted to be Elgin Baylor. So, we were sort of somehow tied into the Lakers, yet the St. Louis Hawks were our team. So, when growing up, I would fashion myself out after men, because that's all we had as role models.

13. Related: biggest references as athletic director?

When I became the athletic director, when I became the coach, then, it's a funny thing, you think, okay, I've got to find a really good coach out there to model after. And so Pat Summitt and Geno Auriemma are the two. There was a coach here and in at the University of Colorado in my town of Boulder, Ceal Barry, who was a great coach when I was a high school coach. I would also pay attention to what she was doing.

My first year of graduate school, I volunteered with the women's basketball team at the University of Colorado. The coach was a part-time coach, who actually was a teacher at the high school I eventually went to. And it's part of the reason I knew about the job opening. I was paying attention to how he did things. The University of Colorado men's team had Sox Walseth, who was a great men's coach. And he eventually became the women's coach at the University of Colorado, right before Ceal Barry.

So, I have observed a few coaches. I think the funny thing is that most of the great coaches will say, look, be your own coach, take ideas from others. I tried to do that.

When I became the athletic director, there were only three female athletic directors in the whole state of Colorado. We bonded and became friends. We didn't sit there necessarily and say how we needed to do things, but we laughed together. We would talk about a few things, but it was just camaraderie more than anything. And I still looked to other coaches at Fairview High School who were successful, because I think you just want to get little ideas from everybody.

14. Related: role models as USA Basketball team director?

When I became the national team director at USA Basketball, a guy that was instrumental in me getting hired was C.M. Newton, who was the athletic director at the University of Kentucky at the time. He had been a men's basketball coach and involved in coaching USA national teams. I just thought he was fabulous. He was very instrumental in me getting the job to be the national team director in 1995.

15. Related: nice mixture of knowledge in all different stages of your career and very smart to pick the best of everyone. Coming back to Disney, anything else you learned that helped you at the highest level with USA Basketball?

What you have to do as a female is, not just seek out one type of role model. Look around and take the best qualities of anybody you can. I might also say, you know, coming back to Disney, I went to a workshop that the U.S. Olympic Committee put on at the time, on customer service.

They had a guy come from Disney to talk about it. I learned more in that workshop than in any other workshop, I guess I should say. His main topic was providing moments like Disney did for me. I wanted USA Basketball women's national team programs to be just the same. In other words, we want you to come once. And then we want you to play again and again and again. Diana Taurasi just finished her sixth Olympics, Sue Bird was a five-time Olympian, so was Teresa Edwards, and Lisa Leslie took part in four. four- ... We want to provide a program that gives them those moments in addition to the idea of representing your country and winning a gold medal.

So, Disney also talked about those "Aha moments", which are often provided by the most frontline lower-level employee. And it's about how you treat somebody.

Sean Ford, my cohort at USA Basketball, and I started on the exact same day at USA Basketball. He was the men's national team director, and I was the women's national team director. He verbalized and would say "we want to under promise and over deliver". And that's what Disney does all the time. One example: the guys who sweep the streets at Disney, where you never see any trash anywhere, which is why, again, it's a fun place to go to. Well, many times, they get asked questions that are so obvious that they would make you want to roll your eyes when you've been asked a hundred times.

I felt that way sometimes as a math teacher. In my third algebra two class, I couldn't understand why those students didn't figure things out, because I had already talked about it twice in other classes. But you can't roll your eyes, you have to be a good educator.

And one of the things that this guy talked about was the three o'clock parade at Disney with all the characters, and everybody lines up to watch it. These guys would always get asked questions like "at what time is the three o'clock parade?". And instead of rolling their eyes, they're taught to answer and not judge, and then give more information. So, a good answer was "the parade starts at three o'clock". So instead of saying "the three o'clock parade starts at three o'clock", it's "the parade starts at three o'clock and the best place to watch it is over here or over there", so they don't even realize they asked an obvious question. Those are the kinds of things that I looked at when considering role models outside of the world of basketball.

- 16. After so many years, you've become a role model for many. USA Basketball players often name you as the common denominator in the program's success. Legends like Diana Taurasi, Teresa Edwards, and Sue Bird, among others, have highlighted your crucial role – both in front of and behind the scenes – recognizing your deep knowledge of every detail and your ability to solve any problem. You've even been called 'The Architect of Women's USAB'. How does it feel to be recognized in such a pivotal role, and what do you think has been key to your impact?**

I think several things come to mind. We talked about role models. My first opportunity with USA Basketball was when I was the high school representative to what they called their games committee. And it was 22 coaches, representatives of different organizations, who were on the selection committee to pick coaches and players for all the USA teams. The top college coaches at the time were on this committee. And I was smart enough to listen and think before I spoke. I realized that we didn't necessarily call it this at the time, but culture was really important. And up to that point, USA Basketball would pick a team and train it right before an event. There was no program.

- We realized, when I became a part of the executive committee, and then the chair of the player selection committee at that time, that we really needed to have a program concept. We needed to identify from the very beginning what were important pieces to this. So, Tara Vanderveer was our coach in 95-96, and she was a part of the committee from '89 to '92. I got to know her really well.

There were other coaches, the legendaries Jody Conradt from the University of Texas and Vivian Stringer from Rutgers, and also Jim Foster, who was at St. Joe's at the time and then went to Vanderbilt, Ohio State, and Joe Champi from Auburn. And I made friends with them. We would go for walks when we would be together meeting.

And again, I just listened. Because I was a high school person, and I was the only high school rep, I wasn't a threat. When I became a member of the executive committee and chair of the player selection committee, I wasn't a college coach who might have a hard time being neutral. Because it's a tremendous prize at the end of this journey, which is a gold medal, and being a part of an Olympic team.

I think I was a very neutral type of person C.M. Newton, After the program got approved by the executive committee and the board, C.M. Newton turned to me and he said, "what do you want to do with your career?" And I said, "well, I think I'd like to get into college athletics". And he said, "I'd like to help you. I really like your skills". And he said then, "would you like to be the director of this national team?". I was totally taken by surprise, but obviously very flattered and said, absolutely. That was the beginning to that journey.

17. What do you believe was the key to your success? What lessons did you apply in practice? It's one thing to know the theory and put it on paper, but another to bring it to life at USAB – creating a culture and environment where players truly want to belong. How did you manage to make that happen?

For six years, I had been listening to the best coaches in the US and identifying things that were really important. Number one was teamwork. And think of the top talent that has come to these teams. Every one of them starts and plays an entire game, leading scorer, leading rebounder. And now they have to be part of a 12-member team where not everybody starts and not everybody plays the same. So, the focus on team was huge. And the little things like headbands or the color of uniforms, undergarments, shoes, all of that was a huge part.

The interesting thing in the 1995-96 National Team Program, these athletes knew how important it was to be a success and to represent the right way. We had a media training, and they said they wanted to be known as more than just basketball players. They wanted to be known as good people who were intelligent, who were devoted to their country, all of those kinds of things. And they set the tone for the culture. I was just a gatekeeper. I could help the younger ages shift.

- 18. Once the culture was created, how challenging was it to maintain? How did you manage to get all these incredible players to embrace the concept of 'Team'? Were there any particular players who were especially key in reinforcing this culture?**

Once we were successful with the culture we had in 95-96, then it was easy to just keep it going. If you've had children, being a parent is a nonstop task. It's 24-7 because they will try to pick away at some of your ideas of what your family should be all about.

Well, it's the same way with teams and young kids. But when the adults, the Olympic players, the national team players understand the culture and what that means, it just carries over to the point that Sue Bird would talk about the culture of USA Basketball. And I asked her one time, I said, "Sue, what is that culture?". And she said, and athletes are so good about just making it easy: "Our culture is that nobody cares about their stats". That's a definition of a true team. I asked Teresa Edwards one time, what is a good coach to you? And in my mind, I'm thinking all these things. She said, "simply somebody who makes me better". So, it would have been dumb not to listen to great coaches and the players. And we didn't have all the answers at the beginning, but through the course of time, the culture developed.

- 19. History shows that when a program becomes successful, people often let their guard down and rush to take credit. However, during your incredible run at USAB, you seemed to always stay vigilant, never relaxing, and ready to manage even the smallest issue before it escalated. How did you maintain that level of focus and commitment?**

When we would start with U16 teams and trials and bring all these kids in to try and make a team, I would go through and say, here's what our values are. Here's what our culture is. And then I kept after it as a way by being the team leader. I also had enough experience with selection committees. I mean, my first seven years, we were all just selection committees. And then my last 12 years probably, I was also the chair of our selection committees for the senior level and for the most, the youngest level.

So, I've understood that. And I also understand that I don't know everything. So, I'm inclusive. If we have a committee, I want to make sure everybody speaks up on what they think as we're going through those processes. So, you know, I'd like to think that I had certainly a part in the success, but I think the part that I had is that we have the best coaches. We have the best players.

I just need to do everything so they can be the best on the court. And that's what I wanted to do. And I kept going back to the under-promise and over-deliver. If somebody asked me a question, whether it's a college coach on where I should stay when I go recruit the U18 European championship, I give them more than just what they were asking. And I lead them to the schedule and all that. I mean, most coaches are pretty sophisticated these days, but, you know, that's just sort of been the way I've done my job.

20. When speaking with someone as successful as you, the focus often falls on the bright side and positive results. However, there must have been moments of criticism, such as players voicing concerns about not being selected. How did you handle those challenges?

Well, number one, I was in the line of fire when I was a high school administrator. So, I sort of knew what that could be like, because part of being the administrator is saying no to people and that doesn't feel good. I had to hire and fire coaches, so there was some of that. I can't tell you that I love it, but I've never shied away from a tough decision. I want to make sure that we have all the information before we make those tough decisions.

But probably the one thing I did mostly that kept me sane throughout it is that I'm not on social media at all. I'm not on Facebook, I don't go to social media. Only now do I start to read comments at the end of an article, because I knew more than anybody else as we were making those decisions. And because of that, because I understood how important it is to be a member of a national team, we didn't make decisions lightly. And many times, a head coach understands that if the team doesn't win, they're going to be the ones that people criticize, not me.

I wanted to make sure that we didn't let a head coach become so tunnel visioned that they would make a bad decision or get overly committed to a decision they wanted to make that maybe wasn't good for the overall team. The way we choose teams is we have committees. It's not one person. And the coach does not have a vote. The coach can say whatever they want and say, "hey, I like this player for this reason". But when I first became the chair of the player selection committee in 1993, it was made very clear to me by our executive committee that this is a committee process. And the committee is the one that needs to decide.

- 21. Can you describe your role on the committee? Did you assert your views, or did you prioritize collaboration by listening to others' perspectives? While it's easier to navigate after good results, how did you ensure the team made the most out of difficult or disappointing outcomes?**

I considered it my role as a chair or a member of the committee to always make sure that every athlete had a fair assessment. Sometimes it's obvious, like Sue Bird, Dawn Staley, they're the best point guards in the world. Nobody's going to argue with that. But there are some, once you get past maybe the top seven players in our country, where you can go so many different ways. And so, then it's about putting pieces together.

That's why it's important to have a committee. It's important to observe enough and not just evaluate them when they're playing on their college team or in their pro team. This is different.

I think in this year's Olympics, we saw more competitiveness out of all of the women's teams than ever before. And I might also say this, '96, '98, 2000, 2002, even 2004, there were games where we were behind at the beginning of the fourth quarter. But our depth always then took us, and there came a point where all of a sudden we would be ahead by 20 and everybody would think, well, we're so dominant.

We never really were, I mean, we were confident, but we were very respectful of who we were playing. I think we can always look back on situations. As a matter of fact, Sue Bird and I remember our bronze medal in 2006 at the World Cup, sometimes more than we remember the wins. It's interesting. That's how competitors are. We always looked at what would be the best team to put out there. And again, because I had no allegiance to a team, it was my role. I always felt, if all of a sudden the committee was saying, okay, we don't think this player is right, then I would kind of come back from a different angle just to make sure we were thinking correctly. And that'll sound very self-righteous, but honestly, I always felt that was my role as the leader to make sure that people still respected our process.

- 22. What are the most important things you've achieved, learned, or observed through your experience in basketball? In other words, how has basketball served as a tool for your personal and professional growth throughout your career and beyond?**

The interesting thing — and maybe the most important — that I've learned is that everything works out. That sounds, I don't know what that sounds like, but I read a lot. I read one year that the one quality that all Fortune 500 CEOs have is the ability to remain calm. And so when you are in the midst of a problem or when you are attacked, or you are threatened or things aren't going well, I won't say

that I always slept well, but I also always knew that if we work together, if U.S. women's basketball stakeholders work together, if we are a true team, everything would work out. It was hard for me to understand that. I always wanted to jump in and try to fix it sooner.

I took a personality profile, and one of my greatest strengths, but it can also be a greatest weakness, is that I want to fix things. I want things to go well. And so, maybe that was a good quality, but I also learned, don't try to fix everything. Rely on the people that you have that are good at what they do, and let them be good at what they do. Another Sue Bird quote, the more that Sue Bird was around, the more I would ask, "hey Sue, what do you think about this?" And I asked her one time a question, and I don't even remember what it was. And she said, "Carol, we're athletes, just tell us what to do. We'll do whatever you tell us to do". Which I thought was interesting, because I'm sure they questioned some of what I had them do, or what coaches had them do. But again, I think it's about developing a trust. That's the other thing I learned, mostly, is you have to be trustworthy. What you say, you have to do. You must have integrity for the process and the system, and make decisions based on that. I'm sure when players don't make our teams, that's pretty hard on them. That's a tough thing to hear.

There would be perhaps criticism that they could say, yeah, I know that's not true. But I think if you are trustworthy and try to make the process as fair as you can, then I think that works. So, I think those are the things I learned. I also learned to stay, we like to say, stay in my lane. I'm not an Olympic level coach. I've observed a lot, and I try to offer some thoughts on international basketball, and rules, and the things that maybe coaches that haven't been involved as much aren't aware of. But I know I'm not the basketball coach. I'm not a player.. You just know what it is you're supposed to do, and then do your job as best you can.

Going Global

- 23. How have you benefited from learning with international colleagues through basketball or other sports, and what knowledge or insights do you think you may have shared with them in return? In essence, how do sports like basketball promote the exchange and transfer of knowledge among participants?**

All the time. I always enjoyed watching other teams and how their coaches coach them. Again, I'll go back. We don't win because we're just so much better than other teams. We win because we

respect those other teams. We've been very successful, especially when our players play in the EuroLeague or overseas in Asia, in different countries. You have to understand what's going on with your competitors and you really want a great rival because that will bring out the best in you. Especially as national team director, I was on several FIBA commissions, women's commissions and those kinds of things. When we would go to draws and have a chance to exchange with others, I would always listen and talk to them, trying to understand how they did it.

One of the greatest things now as a part of FIBA's Executive Committee and Central Board, is the opportunity to talk to athletes. I've been at Hall of Fame events. I've gone to other competitions. I spent some time with the Spanish players during the U19 World Cup recently in Madrid and I could talk to them; Lauren Jackson, I talked to her in Sydney, I talked to her in Belem, Brazil, during the Olympic Qualifying Tournament...

I think we need to be respectful and humble. It's funny because I had a staff member at FIBA wondering why our U17 team didn't celebrate more for winning games. I said, I think it's more because we're just trying to be respectful of our opponent that we just beat and to not rub it in. That's just kind of our way. Yet, she was so excited when we won the first U17 World Cup that our team was dancing.

24. Reflecting on your tenure as the USA Basketball Women's National Director, how do you see basketball as a catalyst for inspiring and connecting the next generation of players, coaches, and leaders globally? Can you recall a specific moment when you recognized your influence within the broader FIBA community?

It's funny how I think sometimes as a U.S. person, you're walking a fine line of being too much one way or not enough another way. I've always tried to do that. I've tried to do it by being curious about other programs and what makes them work. I remember when Australia started their Institute of Sport. I was very fascinated in terms of what that was. I thought it was brilliant in terms of how they took their best young players, trained them specifically, and even had them play as a team in their professional league. They were tough to beat and still are now that you're seeing the benefits of the Institute of Sport. I've always been fascinated about the Russians and how they've done things, or the Czech Republic. The best basketball countries, they're doing stuff correctly. I think we wouldn't be smart if we didn't try and figure out why and how.

I'm very open to when people want to know how we do it. Right now, there's a ton of international players who are coming to play in our colleges. They're learning the U.S. game. I think you don't have to look too much further than France in the gold medal game in Paris. Their women's team plays in a very similar way as the U.S. plays. They're very athletic. They're very strong. They're solid. They play the game very well.

So do others, but I just thought that it's this kind of moment. It's an inflection point: all of the women's national teams are having more opportunities to play with the breaks in November and February, and the extra competitions now that are being put in. We're moving from 12 teams in the World Cup to 16. By the way, there used to always be 16.

So, it's navigating the business of women's basketball, but also the performance of women's basketball. I think we are very much at a time where we're having another boost.

Change Over Time: basketball, gender and society

25. Thinking of the larger FIBA Family today, what do you think constitutes progress in women's basketball? And for women in basketball? What do you think represents success in both of these realms? What can basketball do for women?

I've never stopped wanting to observe leadership and greatness and why it is. I'll read anything even today that talks about that. When I was President of the Americas, we started a program called Adelante, which is a women's leadership program. The idea is to try and help identify women who aren't always in positions of leadership, and then give them examples of great female leaders and educate them on how to do it. And we also sort of forced federations in the Americas to put promising females first, and then maybe they can see them in a different light.

And we also had them do a project. So, they had practical application to it. So, part of it is, taking what we've learned over time and helping, paying that forward to young women who need role models and need to understand what it takes to be a leader, a successful leader. And your role models don't have any one specific look. They occur everywhere and they are both males and females.

26. You previously discussed the significant impact Title IX has had on women's basketball and how the values of the sport influence young generations. Do you believe there is still potential for basketball

to contribute even more to society, particularly for young girls? What future goals do you envision for basketball in this regard, and how do you see your current role at FIBA influencing these efforts?

Yes, let me give you an example. I was in Venezuela talking to their U18 national team. They were very happy to show me around their facility. It was a bit of a training center. But I asked them, I said, what's difficult about being on your national team? They said they are still not treated legitimately as an athlete. That in their schools, sometimes in their families, people look at basketball, women's basketball, as too physical, too sweaty, not as feminine. And I said, well, why do you play? And many of them would say "I feel free when I'm on the court playing basketball. I love playing". So, we are definitely not there yet, because I think there are still societal and cultural issues depending on where you are as a country.

- 27. Women's basketball is gaining significant media and fan interest in the United States, resulting in increased investment and growth. Despite this progress, comparisons to men's basketball continue. How do you view these comparisons – are they helpful for the development of the women's game, or do they present limitations?**

I think that we have to emphasize the positive benefits of being a women's basketball player and not have to always defend our existence. So, I think one of the issues that is difficult to overcome is when people want to compare women's basketball to men's basketball. Women's basketball will never be as strong or as forceful. But guess what? We don't want to be. We want to show the intricacies of how you play the game and have five players on the court come up with a great result, which is a made basket or a stop defensively. We don't necessarily need to try and sell women's basketball as anything other than a true sport for its positiveness that it can have.

- 28. Women's basketball impact goes well beyond the court with its values. An amazing recognition is, for example, the Adelante program.**

We had a young woman in our FIBA Adelante program. This brought us all to tears. Her project was to start a basketball program at a boarding school in Suriname. And this boarding school is not what you're thinking. It was a school where girls who were being abused by their families were taken out of those families and brought to this school. And their families didn't even know where they were. She said her first practice, all they wanted to do was fight each other. She went home that night and cried. I think it took her a couple of practices and then she said, okay, I'm going to change and I'm

going to make the practice a competition. So, she didn't even do basketball. She did a race, and they got their competitiveness out. And slowly but surely, she developed a basketball program.

That, from a foundation standpoint for FIBA, from a participation standpoint for introducing the game to girls, should be a model. I mean, we don't want it to be that sad, but the way girls feel when they play basketball should not be diminished or disparaged because it's not what these people over here think it should be. It should be simply what young girls want it to be and what women want it to be. Not every girl has to want to play basketball. Just play something. I mean, there are plenty of sports now. Just play something. But I do think basketball, again, tests all skills. Dribble, pass, shoot, run, defend, attack, play physical. It's a beautiful puzzle and when you have all the pieces together, it's wonderful. And I think that's what basketball can do in addition to all these feelings of confidence, the ability to get along, understanding. And the final piece to it is the more that we get young girls playing, and not worrying about what box that has to fit into, the better it will be for women's basketball overall. A study was done in the US for the WNBA and they found out that the majority of women viewing basketball are former players.

So, if we can just get them playing, that would be great. Or the inflection point of Caitlyn Clark. Now, all of a sudden, people want to watch her because she is really good and she plays basketball the way the whole state of Iowa wants it to be played. So, again, I get a little passionate on it, but I just think there's so many great things about women's basketball. And it is a moment right now when the exposure is great, more games are on TV, more people are able to follow and be interested in it.

29. Basketball is often discussed as a tool for addressing various social issues. From your perspective, which core values of basketball can be applied to real-life situations outside the sport, and how can they make a difference?

I think they're the most critical part of the development of a person and a potential worker. It's interesting. I was a math major. Okay, I can do math problems. I can teach math, but the only way you get people to follow you, to perhaps hire you, unless you are an absolute scientific researcher in your own laboratory, is to always find a way to relate to other people. I've never played rugby, but my personal opinion is that basketball is one of the most difficult sports to play, and why some people don't choose to play it. It's non-stop movement in a very physical setting, and you have to play all positions. You can't just be a defensive player.

You must play all positions, and you have to think. You have 24 seconds to run a play and to know whether you should be running this play, pass it ahead, do all of those things. You think on your own, and you develop the confidence because of the amount of time you've invested in it, but if you're not a good leader within your team, nobody's going to pay attention to you, and the best leaders have an incredible way of relating to their teammates and making their teammates even better.

I remember when Dawn Staley was our point guard in 95-96, and I've had the best seat in the world because I get to sit on the bench and listen to all of this. Let's say Lisa Leslie made a great play defensively, got the rebound, passed it to Dawn. Dawn would say out loud, I see you, Lisa. I see you. This play is coming to you. In other words, you made a great play.

It's not going to show up in the stat sheet, but I'm going to give you a chance to be rewarded by being the primary person for this play. Then, she was smart enough to know which play to run to get the ball to her. Our teams are only successful if everybody is on the same page of running that play, so that it gets to the best shot. I just think those qualities are absolutely what's needed.

30. This concept, this knowledge, this working together for the same goal is also gold for the daily work in any firm.

My husband works in the Leadership and Career Development Program for athletes at the University of Colorado. They have companies come to talk to athletes, also for the athletes to learn about those companies. Some of those companies want to hire. They are always interested in hiring an athlete because they know that they have learned how to work as part of a team. It's pretty obvious that it is what is important. I think it's interesting because in our collegiate educational settings, many times you used to be a coach.

When you finished being a coach, you moved into being the athletic director. Now, athletic directors are being hired from the business world because there's a need to raise so much money. Sometimes, those athletic directors don't understand that relationship with a team.

Yes, you want to come from the business world, but to have an athletic background is crucial. I think the hardest part for elite athletes is figuring out what's next, because they've been so successful at a sport and they don't look at all of the personal attributes they now have as a result of being an athlete. They don't necessarily have great guidance on what they should do next, but quite honestly, they could do anything. They really could.

31. Your influence extends far beyond the medals won by USAB and the achievements of legendary players. Through your work and vision, you've made a significant impact on the lives of many young girls.

We always wanted it to be a fair process for these players, because imagine you only have 12 on a team and we've got a whole lot of players out there who rationally or irrationally think they should be on the Olympic team. You can't imagine some of the people that would call me to want to be trying out for the Olympic team.

It was a little humorous and yet great because there was an interest in doing that, but it is about the way you treat them. The process has to be fair, and you have to care about them. Cierra Burdick is a good example, and I could talk forever about this.

Cierra Burdick was on our 3X3 team in Paris. They got the bronze medal. I'm sure they were disappointed that they didn't get the gold, but Cierra was on our very first U16 national team and then U17 national team that won the gold medal in France, no less. She sent me the nicest text about our relationship and believing in her. I think that's all you need to do: let people know that you care, and that you believe in them, even though I'm not their coach.

We used to have 150 girls come to our U16 tryouts and we picked 12. Think of all of the disappointment for those kids when going back home. Here's an interesting one. We picked Caitlin Clark for a U16 team. The next year on the U17 team, we didn't pick her. She wrote in an article that she and her dad got in the car. They were disappointed, they drove home and talked about all the things that she needed to do to get better. She came back, which is great, and she was on two more U19 World Cup teams. So, if we can have an impact on every individual player like that, whether they make a team or not, it's great. Once they make the team, we want them to understand that all those players who got cut, next year they're going to try and come back and beat you. You need to keep going.

32. You also left an imprint in many coaches of different teams. You always knew what each one of them needed at any time: advice, talk, a long walk, space, a coffee. You always took care of them.

We mentioned pressure of being in these roles. It's tremendous pressure, especially for the head coach, because if they don't win, they're going to take all the public criticism. And I know that. And so, again, I felt like I could offer an ear if they needed to talk about it or help find a way to still enjoy it, even though it is a tremendous pressure. I have sat next to coaches for which you could see it was

a tough deal. And when they do lose a game, it's real hard because all of a sudden, everybody can criticize.

So, it was always very important to me, and especially starting with Tara, because I knew Tara. It was important for me to understand Tara to the point where when somebody wanted our team to do something or Tara to do something, I knew before I went to Tara what the answer would be. So, you develop a real relationship, and again, if teamwork is our fundamental goal and value, then we better have a teamwork all the way around. And I always felt like that was my role with the coaches.

33. You were elected to the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, a high recognition in basketball for your contribution to this amazing game. What does it mean to you?

Well, let me start with that first in terms of the recognition. I mean, clearly, when you are selected to a Hall of Fame, it's an honor beyond description almost. And what's humbling about it is I feel like I was just doing my job. Because basketball and being national team director has brought more to me than what I gave. I can't always articulate what I've done for it. But the relationships, I think, are the most important thing. I have lifelong friends who have been parts of our staffs.

I think athletes are like students. When I had math students, they didn't tell me every day they loved me. But 20 years later, when I see them, and they tell me I was their favorite teacher, what a great feeling!

I remember when in 95-96, we were like a team, and I was like a general manager. And so, if the players were late, we'd fine them. It wasn't much, because they weren't getting much.

But I remember them saying, what's really amazing is you fine us, and we still like you. So, it's sort of the way you treat people, they treat you back. And that to me is the greatest piece of all of this. It's not there on a daily basis for me necessarily right now, but I find a different way through FIBA or for, whatever, when I see them. In the end, I just feel really good. You know, I left with seven straight gold medals. They now have an eighth. I still feel a part of the program. People engage you that way. Certainly, I feel very proud of that. No doubt.