

Through Her Eyes: Stories of Women Who Shaped Basketball

Oral History Interview transcript: Teresa Edwards (USA)

Oral History Interview Questions

Setting the Scene:

(Circumstances)

1. 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?

I grew up in a really rural South Georgia area and growing up as a country girl, you don't really have access to much. So, we made use of all the resources in our yard. And there was a lot of woods. You found a lot of gems, a lot of great things like flat, and distorted balls that we considered great toys and tools to play with, right? And I'm the only girl of five. However, I'm the oldest. So, the boys didn't really make me better, I kind of made them better.

I always tell everybody basketball really chose me. I didn't really choose it because the first time I touched a ball, it felt like I knew the ball. I could truly connect to it. No one taught me how to dribble. I taught myself or I just learned simply by watching others. The first ball I ever touched was always deflated, because my mother didn't have money to spend on a real ball. So, these old, buried balls we dug up or stumbled upon were treasures we found. There was always something someone came up with, most popular was balloon balls. Anything you found, you managed to bounce it. There was always a way to figure out that it would bounce. I was bouncing tennis balls. I was bouncing any type of balls. I even tried to bounce a baseball. And with that in mind, as a child, I feel like that really impacted my skill set for being good.

The first time I played basketball was with my cousin Charles, who did everything: he loved to fish, he loved to hunt... but he also loved sports. Cousin Charles was exciting and independent, so I tried to be the same. So, every time he picked up a ball to play basketball, I would follow him.

- 2. Your humble origin and your will to play basketball led to build your very own first and unique rim. A great example of creativity.**

Yes! It's true. One day, my brother and I were just playing in the backyard once again, and we found a bicycle tire. I looked at him and I was like: "Hey, if we just knock these spokes out, get the middle out, we can nail it to the tree. We have a basketball rim".

And that's exactly what we did. And once I did that, it was like magic. Of course, all my coaches in high school and college will tell you that my shot was very flat. And it was!

There's no arc to my shot at all. But it was because I shot at that rim nailed to the pine tree in my grandmother's front yard. It stayed up there for years. And I really did practice my shot on that tree and through the rim of the bicycle tire.

- 3. How was your first approach to girls' team basketball after many years of practice in the backyard?**

I never saw girls play basketball when I was growing up. Never. Only the boys played basketball. And I would sneak off and try to play with the boys all the time, because I lived a block from the park. My mother would come outside and yell. I could hear her voice, and I would run home. One day, when I was in 7th grade, as I was coming home from school, I heard balls bouncing, so I looked inside the gym, which I actually didn't even know was a gym. I was so gullible. And I saw girls playing basketball. I was like, "oh my God, girls do play basketball!". I thought I was a conundrum and that I was weird because I was the only girl in my hometown that wanted to play basketball, and I only played with the boys. I went inside the gym and asked the coach if I could play. She said yes. That was the first experience of me playing with girls. And that was a girls' tryout. I didn't even know. That's more than great karma. That's a blessing. That's like, wow, that's my gift. It was as if I was being drawn and driven into the right direction and the right path to make this career of mine that I had never imagined. I just happened to stumble upon that day in that gym and it was a tryout.

- 4. Your love for the game, your passion for basketball... It seems it was never enough for you, and you found a way to practice more even though it meant lying to your mother... saying you were at school helping your teachers!**

Being a kid from the South, living with my mother, who at that time was a single parent with three kids and a baby: how was I going to explain to her what I was doing and how was she going to pay for it if I made the team? So, here is what scared me. My mother is a singer, she sang in a choir, a devout church woman, right? And for as much as she watches me run around outside with the boys,

she's wondering where in the world am I getting this basketball skill set from? She had never watched long enough to realize I was playing basketball in trash cans, off the tree and sneaking off to the park with the boys. She just went to work, came home, cooked, cleaned, and took care of the children. She didn't pay attention to the in-betweens of running around with marbles, kick ball, running races and playing football. She really didn't think I could play when I was forced to own the truth of tryouts. She didn't understand. So, I convinced myself that, she's not going to believe me. My mother's motto is 'never lie to her'. Whatever you do, do not lie. As a child, I always knew that. And I was very afraid to lie. Which made me very gullible in life. But that was my mother's motto. So, I had to respect her as I was accustomed, because the way I grew up, I got spankings. You didn't get put in a corner: you got real spankings in the South as a young black kid, okay? And my mother's spankings were real. She's only 17 years older than me, so she was quite young when I was a kid.

I was afraid, very afraid that she was going to spank me as I summoned the courage to lie on the first day arriving home late from school. I'm late and you don't return home in the South after the streetlight outside your home comes on. You must beat the streetlight on. You are inside the house before the streetlight comes on. So, I don't beat the streetlight when I come home late from school because of this basketball thing, and I'm scared to death. And she's like, where have you been? And I'm like, I was helping Ms. Clark - I will never forget this teacher's name. So, I'm helping the teacher, and she goes, Oh! okay. Second day, same story. I'm not a good liar, okay? Same story. I'm helping Ms. Clark. Stupid me. Third day, I made the team. But on the third day that I tried out, I had to return the sneakers that coach Weaver let me borrow for those three days. Because I only had one pair of school shoes at the time, the coach actually let me borrow old sneakers she kept stored. So, when she told me I was on the team, she brought me to her office, and she said, you must get your own sneakers. That's when thunder hit. That was the longest walk of my life going home.. Having to tell the truth on that day was crazy-scary being that I was Mildred Edwards child but, if I wanted to play on the team, my mother had to buy me my first pair of basketball shoes.

5. **(Society) Reflecting on basketball's impact in the region, can you describe the role it played when you were growing up? Was it part of the larger culture or media atmosphere, and if not, how did basketball carve out its special niche?**

For my community, basketball was just a sport. It was something for kids to do. Because I was from the South, I'm a country girl, there's not a lot of trouble to get into growing up in my hometown.

Because of the type of family, I was raised in and the respect level I was taught, I didn't get in a lot of trouble as a kid. Although there was always something to do, what was inside of me felt different when it came to holding, dribbling and playing with a basketball. Once I became known for the game

in my hometown, girls' basketball became everything for my hometown. I was so driven to just play, to win. I think I had a level of innocence for a very, very, very long time. I played basketball into my 30s with just sheer innocence and simply traveling a journey: they, (my coaches) said, you go here next, you go there next, etc. And, off I went to wherever basketball called for me with the help of my high school coach Cindy Kozlowsky.

6. How did basketball allow you different opportunities than earlier generations – and how did that imprint within you the desire to create change? To create bonds?

As a kid in my hometown, I never knew that I wasn't supposed to play, nor did I know that girls didn't play with boys. With my mentality, I just didn't see them. I was the only girl on the playground with the boys, I don't know how people viewed that while looking at me. It seemed like people stared at me all the time, but I got used to it or I just didn't care.

I do remember the Girls definitely pointed fingers and laughed at me all the time because I looked crazy out there to them. I was playing on hot asphalt with the sun shining on us. I was playing just as hard as the boys. Every time I go home now, there's a guy that I used to play with who remembers those days. It's like, you are just as good as everybody. It was crazy to get beat by a girl every day. It was crazy. Nobody in my town, none of the boys even could beat me as I grew. I started playing with grown men when I was in high school. It changed the concept of who I was. I had this nickname that I refuse to tell you. I had a nickname that everybody called me. When the colleges came looking for me, no one knew my real name. The coaches from all around the country came into this small town asking, "hey, does anyone know where Teresa Edwards lives?". I was the only basketball player with a name in my town. One coach said, "it is so baffling, no one knows that kid that's this good". I thought that was so funny.

7. Did basketball have the power back then to become a social force and impact for good?

I grew up in a small town with a nickname and when I became this player known around the world, the coaches came knocking on the doors and calling my high school coach. That's when my hometown got on the map. That's when people started wondering how to spell Cairo and how to pronounce it correctly. That's when the political powers of my small community became more interested in girls' sports and me, and things of that nature. I think the challenge was that it was a

girls' sport. It wasn't football. Football runs everything in the South. It's the dominant factor for everything in the South. It still is today. That was the difference maker. That changed the structure of how sports were viewed. It changed the game for the girls for a while. It brought state and national recognition to my small town. Of course, that had a major impact on me. But as a child, I never knew what I could be or do or not. No one ever told me no. My mother only told me not to climb trees.

8. **Related to the previous question: how important was the Title IX Scholarship you received and what did it mean (opportunities created, what it allowed you to do, benefits...) especially growing up in a 'tight' economic situation, where your mother was making a great effort to raise the family, also with the help of welfare checks as you shared once?**

You're right. I had humble beginnings. I understand now, as I look back, or did when I graduated from college, what having colleges wanting me to come and providing these funds meant. I didn't know how important college was until I wanted to play basketball further in my basketball career. Having the University of Georgia and all the universities offer me a full ride to go and play at another level, it totally changed my life. I wouldn't have gotten out of that small town otherwise. I would not have had an opportunity to travel the world. I would probably not have had an opportunity to see a different state than Florida, because I could drive across that state line in 20 minutes. But it (Title IX which I was not aware of at the time) just opened my world up tremendously and taught me so much, it gave me the freedom to flow. I just didn't know the world was so big but the University of Georgia provided me a lifeline and basketball paved a career because I was fortunate to be born after the trail was blazed to offer me a scholarship with equal access.

9. **How did learning about the opportunities offered by this scholarship mark a turning point in your efforts to drive change, give back to others, and establish personal boundaries?**

I never knew basketball could give me so much, honestly. I used to say all the time that I've dribbled the ball around the world, and it's given me a whole world just to dribble. Just because I can shoot this ball, I can see the world.

And I used to take that back home and talk to the kids about it, just to let them know how to be disciplined and just to be, I don't know, when you find a gift that you love, to tell how far it can truly take you if you stay true to it, if you give it your all, if you stay honest with it and just take care of yourself, and nurture the gift that you have. It can give you a world because that's exactly what that scholarship did to me: it opened up doors beyond college.

It built that hunger and desire to want to bring more people along with me, to give back to my community. Even to this day, I still go back to my hometown, and I coach the kids or like right now, I try to raise money for the Jackie Robinson Boys and Girls Club there. I just left a couple weeks ago speaking and giving autographs and talking to kids, and I'll be there next week. I don't know. It's important to understand going beyond the boundaries of your hometown. It's so important to step out and see the world for what it has to offer beyond the boundaries of that small town you live in. It's so huge. You can bring more to the world, and it inspires you to give more to others.

Imagine, it was just basketball I played that day. It was that gift that I loved. I would do it for free. I would play the game for free all my life. But the game was starting to give me and now I was like, I have got to give back. You must give back.

It's the circle of life. You must give back. Basketball has always allowed me to do that.

Diving Deeper

10. Thinking back on your career, what is the importance of having either a role model or someone who has played or coached at the highest level serve as a point of reference? You have stated that growing up, there were no visible female basketballers to serve as role models – that you looked up to Dr. J. Can you articulate the need for younger generations to, in Billie Jean King's words, "see it to be it"? Who were your early basketball influences and/or role models? In your Hall of Fame induction speech, you said you almost got yourself killed trying to copy all the crazy moves of Dr. J, and also that you worked as hard as Michael Jordan to reach perfection.

Dr. J was the only role model because he was the absolute best. He was just amazing. I wanted to fly like him. I wanted to cradle that ball like he could in his hands. I wanted to deceive my opponents like him. I wanted to feel that joy of winning. The thrill of victory is when you can see three people in front of you and still get to the basket. Dr. J could do that. I would look at him like I could do everything he could do. I could immediately go outside and try it. On the pine tree, you're right. I almost killed myself. I'm trying to do a reverse layup on a pine tree. You don't do that, but I still try that. Julius Erving was just amazing to me. Then, there were the classy character traits he had. He was just a really well-dressed, handsome guy. He looked like he had a perfect life, a perfect family, a perfect wife, kids, everything. How could you not model yourself? The awakening is realizing, oh, you're not a guy. You're not a man. You're a woman. There's no pro league. That awakening was

earth shattering, because I didn't know that I could actually go overseas. I had to dream differently in my head. I did that until I found myself a girl on TV playing ball, and I woke up.

When I got to college, playing at Georgia, it was Michael Jordan for me. I started recognizing traits he had that were very similar. I guess his determination, his purpose, was to find a way to win, and that was mine too. Every time I played, regardless of whom? I played against, with my teammates, I had to find a way to win. To do that, I've got to know what my teammates can bring to the table as well. I've got to know in which situations I could put them in and in which I couldn't.

I was a takeover. Michael was a takeover. I started comparing those traits, and I loved this guy because we wanted to bring people with us. We wanted to elevate your game. My teammates, I always wanted to elevate their game as opposed to just go play and leave them. I understood the game. I understood the team. You need every component on the floor. I had great teammates. I was very fortunate to play with a lot of great players. Even then, I always had a way of captivating or being a leader on the floor like him. I didn't like to lead with my mouth. I hated talking, but I had a way of playing that people would follow. I loved that. Michael was that guy as well. In a huddle, I wasn't afraid to get in your face and tell you exactly what you weren't doing or what you needed to do. I thought that was another trait that Michael and I shared. He became that model for me throughout college and actually throughout my pro career.

I met Michael on the 1984 Olympic team. Watching his career in the pros, it just propelled me. They were my role models — Dr. J and Michael Jordan — since I never really had a female role model in sports.

11. How did your own real-life role models/reference points transfer their accrued knowledge to you as a young player?

My mother was my everything. She was a woman who never complained. My mother and my grandmother, they never complained. They got up before the sunrise to go to work. They'd come home, cook and clean. They'd make sure we had everything. She never questioned my desires and my determination to do things, as long as I did things the right way and I did what she said to do. She never questioned that. She just followed me. My mother was watching basketball. I never knew what she was watching for a long time.

Then she became the loudest coach, surely, that I didn't want to hear when I went home. She was

that woman. I never saw her break under pressure. I learned that life is much bigger than basketball and how to live and survive in the world. When I look back, I wonder how she managed. She's amazing. Impeccable. She raised four boys, one girl, and she never complained. She probably complains more now than she ever did when I was growing up.

12. You played everywhere overseas. What kind of legacy did you leave? How did you try to transfer your own accumulated know-how to younger generations of basketballers you played with, whether on U.S. national teams, in the WNBA, or with your international clubs in Italy, Spain, Japan, and France? How did such knowledge exchange differ between the U.S., Europe, and Asia – and what might you attribute this to?

That's a big question. Probably hard for me to answer that one because I would always hope to leave a legacy, but you never expect to leave a legacy when you're just looking for your next place to play. It's nice to be wanted. I spent the bulk of my career abroad playing in foreign countries being wanted, so that was a great feeling. I think I left an imprint of something in different places and on people, and I still have connections with some of those people, which definitely tells me I left my imprint there. It's important.

I think the first time I got on a plane was to go to Italy, it was in 1986 or something. I had just graduated, and I was an All-American. This guy named Bruce Levy, approached me at the final four, he was the only agent who was out there that I knew of who was actually helping young girls go overseas to play, because we didn't have that Pro League in America. He asked me if I wanted to go to Italy and play as a cup player. I could only play as a cup player. They already had a league player, and they only allowed one American to play in the league and be on the floor at once. I was like, "sure". I didn't know what he meant, but sure. It was the first time someone said, they're going to pay you to play. I'm like, sure. The first contract I got offered was \$15,000. For me, a country girl, that was good money. I got on a plane for \$15,000 to go to Vicenza and play with them in the EuroLeague. It changed my life. I didn't know the language. I ate the best pasta food in my life. Pizza is also off the charts good. I gained more weight there than ever in my life as well. Landing in Italy, not speaking the language, the common theme to the story was basketball.

I knew everything in Italian when they spoke basketball. But once I left the gym, I didn't know much. It was the common thread. Beginning to make friends, speaking broken English, broken Italian

together, all of that is the awakening of newness. All of that is the beginning of me opening up my world. Having that opportunity to travel abroad, it was hard. Basketball was hard. Living was easy, but basketball was hard. When I got off the plane and got onto the basketball court there, it was the first time I realized that I was not a star. I had to start over. Those girls you're playing with are great. They're just as good. They're not going to let this foreign player come over here and just be a great player. You're going to have to earn it. It was really like starting all over again.

I played on one of the top teams in Italy, so I already knew that. Being on the Olympic team already and having a name, they knew who I was, but I didn't know who they were. When we practiced, practice was harder than the games. Those girls beat me down. Not in a bad way. This was a competitive energy. This wasn't personal. They didn't dislike me for any racial issue. It wasn't like that. It was basketball. It was physical. I had never played that physical until I got to Italy. I thought practice was hard. The games, they got to you too.

13. Do you believe that your international experience – with its challenges, such as homesickness and stepping out of your comfort zone, as well as learning from players and coaches – helped you develop and elevate your game to become the player you were and the person you are?

My game grew so fast, so quickly over there. Being an American playing on an Italian team, I felt like I was on an island. I played with Janice Lawrence, who was also an Olympian that year in 1984. I had the comfort of playing with another American on that EuroLeague team. However, it was the foreign players who taught me how to grow up in the game. Being able to bring that back and add that to my national team status, that was huge.

The growth elevated me. I thought I was really good in college, but I really grew when I started playing pro ball. I love that concept about girls and women. We grow beyond college. Boys think that they've got to a stage, whereas we continue to elevate our game to heights that we've never seen before, if you approach it in the same manner. I couldn't wait to get more of that international experience. I felt lonely. It was many months of being away. We had the rotary dial. We didn't have cell phones and the internet. I had to get two operators just to speak to somebody at home. I'd speak five to ten minutes, and it was over \$100. That was out of my budget, so I couldn't call home much. It was a very lonely road. However, it was probably the greatest gift beyond college that I could have received, because it just kept elevating my life as a person. I made friends in foreign countries, whether I spoke their language or not. I was accepted everywhere I went. I never really had a hard

time.

14. One last question regarding influential persons who helped you during your career. In your Hall of Fame speech, you thanked your coach in a particular way: *"From the first red clays of Georgia to the Hall of Fame. I was an oyster who tried to become a pearl. He rinsed me off and found a pearl".*

I wouldn't have gotten out of my hometown without my high school coach. She was a Polish young woman from the family of the Kozlowsky's, and she was born and raised in Florida. Florida is only about 20 miles from the Georgia line, which I was raised in. She came to my hometown of Cairo, Georgia, a year before I went to high school, right? She got there, she was an outsider. Had she been someone born and raised in Cairo, I don't believe I would have gone through those four years of high school in the way and shape that I did. This young lady saw something in me and said, oh, I got to do this, without even thinking... So, this short blonde-haired woman, who wasn't rich, but had the concept of just hardworking ingredients built in her and good human values, decided that —I didn't know this until later —, she would go around town asking people to give her money to fly me to try out for USA Basketball. But it was at a junior level, okay? I had the opportunity, after she raised that money, going from door to door, to every organization, I actually don't know all the people she asked for it, but she got enough to get me on a plane, get me a hotel, and get me fed for a weekend to try out. And I think I was a junior in high school when she did that. She didn't have to do that. That's special. And when she did that, she drove me to the airport, and before I got out of the car to go into the airport, she told me what she'd done, she told me what to do, she told me never to squander those resources, she just talked to me like a mother. And I was an alternate at the National, we called it the National Sports Festival in America, where we had four different regions for young kids, and they would play each other at a big tournament. It was kind of like a miniature Olympic for us. And I was on the South region's team, I was an alternate. She was still proud of me. She came back, she was proud, she picked me up, no problem. And I went straight to a basketball camp for the University of Georgia and behold someone got injured.

So, they called for me, and she had to get up, go to the camp, pick me up, put me on another plane to New York, to the tournament. I had never been to New York. You know, all these things are just happening fast.

This lady is just special because she had the wherewithal, she had the humanity, she had, I don't

know, something special. To me, she was a gift. Because she had only been there five years in that city. When I left, she left. When I went off to college, she left that town. There's no mistake in that. That was meant to be for me. So, for her, that was the red clay. But then when I got to Georgia, that was just the beginning.

Because Coach Kozlowsky only taught me the basics of the layups and the fundamentals, which we all need. That's your foundation. She gave me the foundation.

But when I got to Georgia, I was this rough-edged, stubborn kid. I knew how to win, I knew how to fight, I knew how to play against guys. And this coach was a pain in my neck. I loved him. But he just didn't know how to let up. He would just come at us.

Every day, he would just come at you. And he saw something from the athletic side. She saw something from the human side, how do I get this kid, how do I help her here? Well, Coach Landers is one of the players. And that's what I really, really, really treasure about him. He was able to train young girls and coach the game, whereas most men coaches coach girls. See what I said there? Very valuable.

He taught us the game. He would actually say it in the huddle. I'm not here to treat you like girls: "I'm here to coach". And I love that. Because he gave us such an abundance of 'the game'. And he taught us to learn A, B, and C before we even tried to go to D, E, F, and G. He kept piling it on. And even with that and learning the knowledge of the game through Coach Landers, he still kept seeing things in all his athletes, especially in me. He would push me so hard that I thought I was hard on myself. And I would shut down. I was like, dude, you do it. I was so stubborn. I'm telling you, I was a stubborn athlete. Which is a good trait, I think. He kept rinsing me off. He kept rinsing me off like a pro. He just kept rinsing, rinsing, rinsing, and pushing, and pushing. And it was a great push. Because for me, it became a game. It became, I'm going to show him. Oh, you think you want me to do that? I'll do this. I'll do it more. I'll double it up on you. He brought all of that out in me. That's why Coach Landers was so special, and always will be. Because I think the most abundance of basketball came from my years with him.

15. What do you consider to be the most significant chapter/phase of your career, and in your mind, what makes it important? What were the global events that most influenced it? In your experience, what are the differences in playing in a continental FIBA tournament, a FIBA World Cup, and an

Olympics – and how has competing in each of these changed over the course of your career vs what that is like today?

I think when you play with the best, like when we have our tryouts here in America, it's the best. It's the best of the best. It's hard. Tryouts are very hard. It was. It's not as hard today. It's easy. But it used to be very hard. It would be over 300 girls. It would be three sessions a day. And every session, someone got cut. It's not like that anymore, but it was very, very hard. So, if you landed amongst the 12 to 15 girls who got picked up, you were playing at such a different level that I just craved.

It was great to go play pro ball. That meant that I had to carry the team. I was responsible for winning at a different level because I was getting paid to carry these teams in foreign countries. But when I came to America, it was different. Nobody cared about what you did in a foreign country. They just all wanted to wear that USA jersey and represent the country on these national, Olympic or World Cup teams. And in doing so, the level of play is just, oh God, it's like playing, I don't know, in the stratosphere. It's like closing your eyes and making passes and knowing that somebody is going to be there.

It's different than setting somebody up and orchestrating. And it just became addictive... Once you make one team, you want to make them all. For me, that's how it was. And representing the USA, I guess I became part of an emblem. In some countries, that's all they have. In our country, you're always fighting to be one of those players on that team. But somehow Katrina McClain and I became a staple. Teresa Edwards, Katrina McClain, we're staples. People know that we're going to be on that team. We didn't know, but people knew. And I don't know, it became a natural part of who I was. I went up and played against Australia. I knew exactly what type of energy they were going to bring. I knew it was going to be very physical. I knew they were going to key in on certain things. I knew what their strategy was going to be, to be quick and physical. Because they didn't always have great shooters. You just knew. When we played Brazil, they had Hortencia [Marcari*]. Paula came later, but they had Hortencia, who was off the chart. Too good. You just hoped she would play a bad game. Once you knew what every country was bringing, you craved it. You couldn't wait to be back out there. The energy is totally different for FIBA basketball. It's just totally different. You are on a world stage. You could put Spain and America in a barn. But because we have the words Spain and USA on the chest, it's like one hell of a game. It's going to be the best you've ever seen in your life. I played Russia in the thick snow somewhere and didn't know where we were. Who cared? We didn't

care what was outside. I could see snow up to the window. But all that mattered was what was going to happen and the end results of those games. That level of play and the girls who went at it constantly back in my days. The girls that showed up to play those games. That could have been the last game of our life, and we would have died perfect. Because that's the way we loved to play. That was the game. We wanted to be with the best, play against the best, and we didn't care who was watching. That's the glory of this game. When I saw those foreign players I used to play against, you could just look at each other. You already knew what you were feeling. They were proud of that. I used to come home and when I spoke, people always wanted to know what it felt like. But you couldn't always give it to them.

You just couldn't. I knew one thing. When we went to that jump ball circle, and it was a different country, we all knew what we felt at that point. It was not even butterflies. You were not scared. It's just the weirdest thing you cannot explain. It's pride. It's another level of pride, though. It's unequaled in the world, but it's so respected on both sides. That's what I loved about it. It was so respected. I knew exactly how my opponent felt. She was going to bring it, and I respected it because I was coming the same way. That's what I really, really loved about playing at that level, playing FIBA tournaments and going to Europe and playing professionally. All of that encapsulates greatness in legendary games, if you can live through it.

[Hortencia Marcari, from Brazil, is one of the most legendary women's basketball players. She is a FIBA Hall of Famer, World champion in '94, and silver Olympic medalist in '96]

16. During your amazing career, there's an astonishing fact: 161 appearances with the national team and 153 victories. Only 8 defeats. Many stories to be told, can you highlight the greatest loss and the greatest win?

Victories and losses... So many cherished moments. Gosh, it's a hard question. It was so much. You know how many years I played. I'll tell you, let's start with the negative: of course, the biggest loss was in '92. I didn't lose that much, but '92 will always remain painful. Actually, our loss to Brazil at the World Cup in '94 was worse.. That was tough.

17. Being such a ferocious competitor driven by victory, how did you deal with the short 'bronze era' of your career: PanAm Havana '91, Olympics '92 and World Cup '94 in Australia? Was that the toughest period of your career and what did you learn from it?

Yes, it was. It was really bad. I know, I know. You can look at it like, I mean, for real, you still got a medal and all that stuff. But I wasn't used to losing. I wasn't used to it. Right? Just wasn't. And it was our fault. I think America started relaxing. We kind of just expected it. And that's good, because we needed to wake up. I hated that. It was under my watch. But it was hard.. I think '92 was a shocker. Really, just a shocker. But I got to give it to the Unified Team.. They knew how to play us. They really played the game to perfection. Back then, we only had about, I guess, a good month, maybe two solid hard weeks to train before the games. And it was a new squad of individuals that had no chemistry. We thought we were so good that we could go 5 in and 5 out. They were sitting on the sidelines going, OK. And I can tell, hindsight, not before the game, but afterwards, years later, that they did a great job just slowing us down. We would just run past people all the time. We were so athletic, correct? They decided we weren't going to run on them. And they did. Usually, you could decide anything you wanted against the USA and we were still going to do it. But this time we couldn't do it. We did not get to run against the Unified Team. And they squashed those dreams right out the window and they had their own. And I love that because, well, hell, I don't love it. But we learned a lot. We learned a lot about where we were headed. It opened our eyes. And I think here's what you got to learn. It becomes a little political right here when I say this, but I don't think anyone was putting real effort into women's basketball at that time. It was just putting a team together and saying go and win. Well, it wasn't going to work anymore. Most of the best players were actually playing abroad internationally. And we didn't really have to come home and put on a USA uniform. We could have come home and just rest. So, the fact that you would play eight months in Europe, then come home in your summer months off and still put on a USA uniform, and then have to go directly back to Europe, was really considered hard. It's even worse today, but we thought, well, that's a lot. The fact that pro players would still come home and play should have been more appreciated. But I think there was a lot of change in other regards, coaching-wise, players-wise and all that. And, hey, we lost. Get over it. Uniform on and goodbye.

18. Leaving aside bittersweet moments, you were for many years – until Diana Taurasi won her fifth Olympic gold in Paris '24 – the only female basketball player to win five Olympic medals (four of them gold, like Lisa Leslie in 2008). Also, you managed the incredible feat of being both the youngest and the most veteran - not to say oldest - gold medalist in your sport, having helped Team USA to the title for the first time in 1984 at the age of 20, and for the last in 2000 when you were 36. In the first one, you were very young and in the last one, you were the veteran voice, the one that gave advice, the one that paved the way teaching what you learned to the young girls. How different were those tournaments and which ones did you cherish the most?

The first one was fun, just fun. It was here in America, it was in L.A., and it was fun. I was the youngest one. I didn't even really want to try out for the team. Honestly, I was like, I'm not going to make it. But my college coach said, you know, you have just as good a chance as anyone. So, I went out and tried, and I made it, and I was shocked. I was the youngest, and I acted like the youngest, and I learned a lot. Sat on the bench a lot on that one, watched the older players do their thing. But they taught me a lot. They taught me how to be an older player. But because I sat and watched, I was like, okay, I got to come back. The second Olympics, it's like, I have got to go back. I need to know what it feels like to be out on the floor and to actually play to win for our Olympic team. And I did. That's the bug bit. That was a double goal. And the third one was probably the prime of becoming a young lady. Playing abroad, fully engrossed in society as a young woman, not a kid, not in college. You know, you kind of tend to feel invincible when you're at that age. So, you're not thinking. You're just doing it.

And in '92, , thinking that we were just going to go out and win another medal. Of course we lost. '96 was the redemption team, and the whole process changed. So, '96 will probably always be my biggest Olympic Tournament. In Atlanta, how we encapsulated the schedule, how we had an undefeated tour leading up to the Olympic Games, what the main goal was, having an opportunity for America to truly respect and watch women's basketball at a different level was hard. And understanding that we carried that shield, and we carried the game for American players and the future of young girls here in America. We really realized we were carrying that torch to unveil something different that would perhaps give us an opportunity to have a Pro League here. And we did actually start two different Pro Leagues. Those games and the importance of giving back or

leaving the game better than we found it will always be the highlight of my career when it comes to the Olympic Games.

And even when we still get together – I’m turning 60 – and every time I get to talk about it with those kids, I still feel like I’m 30, 27, late 20s. I don’t even know how old I was in ’96. But that team is special. I think we changed the face of the game forever. And the process we had to go through to get it done was incredible. And, yeah, the impact of that one is great too. Atlanta will always be the greatest one. And 2000, the only reason I played in 2000, to be honest with you, because I wasn’t counting Olympics, and I wasn’t counting to make history, was that after the gold medal game in Atlanta, Lauren Jackson, from Australia, told the media “wait till they come to Australia”. And I was like, “is she for real?” So, I heard her say that, and I’m like, this kid is crazy. All right, we’ll see when we come to Australia. And I just buckled up. I’m like, I’ll be back. I’ll be back. And I wanted to make sure. I took it personally. I was like, I want to make sure we’re going to bring that gold home. We’re going to bring it back again. It was the hardest thing in my life, because I was the oldest one on that team. Again, half of the team was new. And I realized that the game was changing around me. I was like, OK, this is it. I can’t do it anymore. I don’t want this pressure anymore.

19. **“I took it personally”. That’s good what you said, because it’s the most repeated phrase of Michael Jordan, your idol, in The Last Dance. When he was looking for motivation, he always said, “and I took that personally”. So that was the spark for you to come back and to prove them wrong.**
I looked at that kid like, for real? Did she just say that? Yeah, OK. We need those things.

Going Global

20. **Throughout your career, you traveled widely thanks to basketball. What are the most important things that you have achieved, learned, or observed thanks to basketball?**

It’s everything. It’s like, how do I say it? It’s really everything. Even when I coach high school kids now, I’m like, you’re defined by these character traits in which you exude to me in this basketball court every day. Basketball, everything I’ve learned about the game, like how I respond to anything on the court, I truly feel like it has taught me how to behave in life. And it’s important to me, too, because it takes courage to own your truths and to hold yourself accountable on the journey of

becoming. I'm on stage and you're going to see me play and how I react to the officials, how I react to pressure, how I react to success. All of those matters, because these are character traits in which we all possess truly define us. I think sports brings it out of us, our true character. I've learned that along the way, that it truly brings that true character out because you're put under so many different influences so quickly, so instinctually.

And even when you're not watching me, it matters to me what I'm doing. Always carry yourself as if you're always being watched.

When you aren't watching me, I'm in the gym, I'm working my tail off, but I don't even want you to see what I'm doing. I want you to just be amazed that you can't stop me, you can't guard me, or you didn't see that coming by the time I get to the court. I think I still work that way in my life. I'm tolling away at a book, or I'm tolling away at my next project, or I'm tolling away at things, and to many's surprise, they're wondering when and how did you arrive at this place of success? That's right. That's how I played the game as well. I'm telling you, it was just a gift of discipline. This gift is so huge, it mirrors passion. I mean, that was my gift and how I was designed. And discovering myself along the way, it's my everything.

21. To what extent do you consider yourself to be a sports diplomat?

This game, these experiences, I don't know, just becoming a captain of a team were meaningful. I didn't want to be captain. Becoming a captain of some of the teams, traveling the world, influencing others, or not influencing people, paved my way.

People listen to me because of what I've learned in basketball. And so, what I say has to truly make sense, have a purpose. And I have to understand that it holds weight, and it influences people.

So, I should be very careful about what I say, how I say it, and when I say it. It's all because of basketball. But maybe because you are a role model and your legacy goes beyond the court, that's maybe why you were chosen to be in the London Olympics in 2012.

22. Related to the previous question: What was your most memorable moment as a sports diplomat abroad during your playing career and why? How does that stack up with your role as *chef de mission* for the 2012 U.S. Olympic delegation and why do you think you were 'The chosen one'?

Could you describe a little more what that experience was like as a sports diplomat – and also what it was like to uniquely represent the sport of basketball within that setting?

I don't think I was the initial chosen one, so I won't be gullible. There was another guy that they chose and then I don't know what happened, but they called me and I felt really special. Of course, yes. Wow, yeah. I was a kid in the candy store. I'll be honest with you. Because I learned the delegations, the head of delegations for other countries had much bigger roles than I had. In ours, we have so much taken care of. I was just a figurehead, but it was really nice when I had an important duty like showing up at the media, putting out a few little fires or just motivating kids in the village and making sure we kept status quo and understood why they were there, things of that nature. But for the most part, I was a kid in a candy store. I could go to any event ever in my life. I had a driver taking me everywhere I needed to go. I had an all-access pass. Oh my God, can I do that again? I'd never seen all the other sports. I'm usually performing, right? So, it's like you play a day, you practice a day and it's that way for two weeks, right? If you make it, it's two weeks. I had never seen the Olympics like that. I would like them to let me do that again. It was awesome. Seriously, it was awesome.

At the '96 Olympics in Atlanta, at the opening ceremony, I was the person to recite the oath. And I think honestly that was bigger, because you really did have to get a vote from every sports captain. They get in a room and all the captains of every sport at the Olympics are there and they vote for you. Having the votes of my peers and of people in other sports who didn't really know basketball was probably the biggest moment representing the USA when I was on the basketball team.

23. You played internationally everywhere: did you suffer any episode of racism or sex-gender discrimination of any kind?

No, only once did I feel that... I was traveling with my Italian team to a game in Budapest, I think. I had to learn a lot really fast about Europe as a whole. I felt attacked, because they were throwing coins, but they were throwing coins at everybody. So, it wasn't just throwing it at me. At first, I thought it was something like that... "Is it because I'm black?" You don't know, right? And then, it wasn't, it really wasn't. But it was only in one game that it ever happened to me. And thank God, I could barely understand the language, and it didn't bother me. We just got called the N-word, myself and Janice, after a game. We won. We got out of there as fast as we could.

And the team understood. I think the team understood that we were under a little pressure, but they got us out of the building and actually onto the train that same night, trying to get out of town because of that. But it wasn't violent. We just heard them yell that. The fans were really mad. That happened so many years ago. And that same trip was amazing anyway, because that was back when the borders were covered by Russian soldiers, and we stopped to get our passports checked. They took all of the team's passports and personnel off and they took them off the train. And then they brought everyone's passports back except mine and Janice's, the two American passports. We sat there another hour. It was my first time away from home and that's the first time I ever felt like I may not make it home. That was very scary for me in the early days being 20 something. I think I was only about 21, 22. I didn't know if we were going to make it because I looked out the window and I just saw the soldiers carrying those big rifles.

But other than that, I never really had anything face-to-face, racial, gender-wise. I never struggled with that much, because not too many guys can say they beat me. No. And I'll be honest with you, I'm a little different. Sometimes, I feel like I have to apologize for not having too many bad times, I was just too focused.

24. **Lately, women's basketball has caught the attention of media and fans in the United States, and globally, driving new interest, investment and growth of the game. You went to play abroad because the WNBA didn't exist. You didn't have a Pro League to play there but the situation is totally different now with women players making headlines gaining more media attention. From your perspective, what can basketball do for women and girls in society? To what extent do you see basketball playing a role in addressing gender inequality and do you have any examples to share that illustrate your perspective/point? Where do you see good examples of basketball contributing to society and what characterizes success in this respect?**

We didn't have a Pro League in America when I got out of college. So, I didn't know where I was going to go. And I knew I wanted to play. I got this grand opportunity to go to Italy, which was the beginning resume for professional basketball in Europe. It is great, because if you make it over there, other teams will know you're there. Then your resume begins to grow and thus you have a career. But every time I went overseas, I was really lonely. I felt like a lone soldier, very quiet. I couldn't just walk out the door by myself easily, you know, just because I didn't know. I didn't know. I was afraid.

Living abroad made me want a Pro League in America so bad. I just, I longed for an opportunity to just play. And I started to voice it. And when I would play against the foreign players, American players who were overseas, we would always meet up at the games and have dinner or something if they stayed back. And that's what we would talk about. That was the main topic of discussion at a dinner table. How can we get respect in America? How can we grow the game in America? And I would always be the one leading that conversation, probably driven by just that feeling of not feeling at home. I think what really was troubling for my spirit was that America was considered the greatest country in those days, that's how everyone thought or sounded anyway. If that were the case, then we couldn't be that great if we didn't have a Pro League for women.

Why am I going to a foreign country to play basketball and consider it so great, when I actually don't have anywhere to play at home? What about the girls to come? I got on this little tangent. It didn't matter anymore if it was for me or not. It had to change. We had and still have too much talent. The game is too good.

25. So, you became some kind of a Pro League activist, raising the voice and using the power basketball was giving you to drive change in society.

This is when I started to feel the political ramifications of, oh, it's male sports here in America that dominates it. We just didn't have that equality on a professional scale at that time to match anything. There was no women's pro anything. Only the individual sports, golf and tennis, I think. And just learning the nuances of those types of things and feeling this desire to have a Pro League in this country, just kept propelling me to have these discussions with people. And I think, again as I told you earlier, losing drew more attention to our women's basketball than winning did. When we lost, and the NBA got behind the media marketing push of that in '96, it really changed the game forever for us. It really did. But it still put a lot of pressure on us, on a scale where people were watching to see, was it worth it? Was the investment going to be worth it, right? And we had to carry that through.

26. Despite feeling lonely abroad, what did you learn internationally on or off the court? Was there any valuable experience?

I just think playing abroad made me, it gave me, I have to say this, it really gave me a lifetime. That's my lifeline. I made a living from playing abroad. America didn't really give me a living for playing basketball. I owe international basketball; I owe foreign clubs much more when it comes to basketball for my living. I owe Italy, I owe Spain, I owe France, okay? I owe the people in Japan, because they gave me a living to play this game and to make a living out of it and to be, to have that platform, to have that voice.

I didn't have that platform here in America. I was trying to do something, to build something like that for the girls to come in, which you see today. So, for that, the game has truly grown and the girls who play today have no idea how far we've come, which is the scary part, because my wish is that we leave the game better than we find it, period.

27. You belong to a generation that paved the way for many women who later played basketball, or any other sport. That's quite a legacy.

No matter where you come in, leave the game better than when you came in and found it. I think the younger generation now, they're born into the professional league here in America. Nowadays, they have nothing to work for but themselves, their individual game. This happens all the time. This happens in men's sports, so it's not new, but it's really important to know the history, to know how far we've come, which is not that far really.

We've been there for so long. So, you're right. It's not just the growth of the game politically and in society, but physically.

These young ladies are really playing very good basketball here. And I guess to the point where I don't think we necessarily have to play it like men. We don't have to emulate men's personalities. We don't have to emulate the things that they do. I've never been an arrogant player. I don't subscribe to arrogance when you play. I really do subscribe to team sportsmanship. I think the girls are kind of going there a little too fast right now. So, I would like for them to kind of dial it down a little bit. Let's keep healing the game, making a good product of the game and playing, and it's by showing our skill level. They have never actually had to work on a society level to build the game. They've only grown into professionalism from what they've seen.

Still to this day, they probably watch more NBA than they watch WNBA in their free time. They are watching and emulating the personality and character traits of men still a little too much to my liking,

and I would like to change that a little bit. But I do love what the game is. I do love that the game is growing. I do love that we have a professional league here and that little girls have something to look up to. I just think we have to model it a little bit better.

Change Over Time: basketball, gender and society

28. **There's much discussion of basketball as a tool to work across various issues and have an impact on society thanks to its values: team work, camaraderie, effort, solidarity, support your partner, generosity, help, bond, commitment, play for the team... Something we encapsulate in the definition of 'Basketball for Good'. What would your definition for Basketball for Good be and do you think basketball can be an useful tool for making a better society?**

Absolutely, yes. You aren't playing with these questions. Every sport would fight over this one. For the commitment that is made as an individual and then the self-sacrifice that it takes when you become a part of a team, right? Like it's two-folded and then the everything else in between that every sport could add to the table as far as discipline, commitment, hard work, etc. We all have to do that. But basketball marries character, commitment to a team and understanding and respect for your teammates. The success of it depends on others, because an individual can't score 100 points, and if so, for sure not every time. The success of it depends on me understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the people around me as well as my own. So, it definitely mirrors society, it mirrors the world in which we do not want to always wake up and become disciplined with.

The good of it to me is once we all arrive and succeed together and we look back on all the elements that had to come together for us to be successful, we learn to value the whole. Learning to value the whole is self-sacrificing, yet you must be committed to the greater good for everyone to succeed at it. And that's what basketball gives us every time we go out there.

Now, mind you, we have three-on-three, one-on-ones, and all that. Still, five-on-five takes a team commitment. And that commitment is not just saying I've got to pass the ball. That commitment says I need to understand why I'm passing that, or why I should take the last shot or not. Everybody on a team wants to take the last shot. Well, maybe not everybody.

I do. I'm never afraid to take the last shot. But you also have to know that if that last shot isn't there, who do you pass it to? It mirrors life in many ways, and I could probably say that in three different

ways or more, but I understand the dynamic of a team. I understand the dynamic of my individuality and how that relates to a team. And that's the greater good. Yeah, that's great.

LEGACY

You were inducted to the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame in 2010, the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2011, and in 2013 into the FIBA Hall of Fame. What do these recognitions mean to you?

When you think of FIBA, it's the world. It's just the world. When you're recognized amongst the best in the world, it doesn't get any better. There's no way of going higher than that. There's no way. I don't want to use the words that don't truly exemplify what I feel, because I think you just can't go any higher. FIBA Hall of Fame, Olympic Hall of Fame for USAB, USOC... FIBA is at the top for me. That's the world. You can put something together in your country and call it something if you want, but when you got the world stage, when I see that list and when I stood there or when I watched others that I played against and I could still feel what it felt like, and I could still honor and respect my opponents because I knew how much they deserved it.

When FIBA started recognizing, I didn't even know that there was a Hall of Fame for FIBA. I didn't. And when I got what's for it, when I got the call and the email and everything and I was reading it, I was thinking, really? Everyone knows you played in the Olympics. Everyone knows you played in world championships. Everyone knows the resume, correct? But when you say FIBA, they don't understand. Like in Europe. You say FIBA in Europe, everybody knows exactly what you're talking about. But here, FIBA sounds like the NBA. Not on the same scale, sorry. Not on the same scale. Not for me. Not for a woman who played around the world, right?

So, to get that call, to get that email, to be invited, of course I had to go out and buy something really nice. I felt like you (I), can't have the right words, because when your body and spirit are full of joy, well mine are anyway, it's hard to express it correctly, because it's overwhelming, it's an abundance of energy that's going towards someone recognizing my game at the highest level, right? That's what the FIBA Hall of Fame was for me. You recognized my skill level, and you pulled me out amongst the group that I played with from that team and from many teams, right? And you said, now you are one of the greatest that we'll never forget. That's what you said. You said we'll never forget you. We'll always remember your game. You have a game that's associated with your name. That's huge. That's

all I ever wanted as a little girl. It's the only goal I set in life. I wanted to be known as one of the greats that ever played the game.

I said that to myself in high school, not knowing what I was saying. That's a big one. Not knowing, just a little gullible kid on a court going, hey, one day you're going to know my name for playing this game. But when FIBA does it, once you reach that stage, I think I don't need to be on another stage, honestly. For me, the most important thing was for my international friends rather than the American ones to see me there. That's crazy to say, but it really was more important that I got acknowledged amongst the Hortencias, amongst any foreign player that I ever played against.

I always look forward to seeing who's next, especially from the women's school. Who's next? It's the most beautiful feeling ever.

It's like, if we ever get together again, it would be the most beautiful thing you guys could do. You could bring a team of us there and let us all enjoy each other. That would be amazing.

1. **Explaining the success of your career, you once talked about the 'Three Ps in your career'. You said "blood, sweat and tears prepared me, hard hours and the love for the game gave me the passion for the play and the ability to rise to the occasion and to be there. I persevered to be there. I wanted perfection, but I landed in greatness".** Definitely. That truly defines my career. I strive to be perfect and in striving to be great and perfect at everything that I did, at every occasion on the court, I landed amongst some of the best legendary players in the history of the game, which made me a great player. That's how I felt. I don't know where you got that from, but I wrote myself a poem shortly after the 1996 Olympics. 1996 was a personal challenge. I wrote that book because to watch the game is one thing, but to know what I personally went through was another. That last poem came out of me like a flooding river. It was amazing. Sometimes, when I get in that mood of writing, I actually write better than I speak. It's amazing how that flowed through me and out of me. I really felt that. I truly believe that was an anthem to my career.

It was the best way for me to say goodbye to the game. Saying goodbye to the game was just saying I'm not preparing to be amongst the great ones anymore.

- 30 **In what ways do you think your role as a highly successful player impacted the development of basketball in Georgia, the United States, and more globally? Before answering, we will share some quotes about you from former players and teammates: Sheryl Swoopes: "Her game was so incredibly**

smooth, I tell the younger players to watch her"; Teresa Weatherspoon: "I'm honored to have played with her and see how she prepared to play and become the best, to be known as the best guard in the world"; Lisa Leslie: "Her will to want to win spread and that's where you know you deal with a great player, Teresa Edwards made me a better player"; Cynthia Cooper: "Women's basketball wouldn't have been women's basketball without Teresa Edwards for what she brought not only to Georgia, but to the US national team. She showed the younger generations that hard work pays off. That's why the USA is so strong, because we had a leader like Teresa for such a long time". Nancy Darsch, assistant coach: "She made the national team after an open tryout of 180 candidates".

Great players. It's nice to know that my impact on the game and my legacy will live on for a long time and that they were able to pass that on, because those are a lot of great players themselves. They're champions. They're kids I watched become grown young women in the game and that's what I'm most proud of. I was able to take a young girl and tell her she had to grow up fast when she made our team, and this is how you do it, and I didn't do it by talking.

I guess I'm most grateful for the fact that they saw that and they were able to use it for themselves. I didn't know I was doing that. I think I led by example. You have to understand, and I know it sounds humble but it's not: I hated losing. I just hated losing so much and I didn't want my teammates to be the reason I lost, so I was hard on them and I worked very, very hard when I played just not to lose, and I think that's what it looked like to them.

I accept that with a lot of gratitude. I don't know if USA Basketball looks like Teresa Edwards, but I know Teresa Edwards left everything she had to USA Basketball. I played with a lot of great players along the way, especially my humble teammate Katrina McClain, without whom I couldn't have done anything. She was an amazing, amazing teammate. She did things so naturally and we looked as one on most occasions on those teams. There would have been no Teresa Edwards without Katrina McClain though.