

Cherri Rapp's Basketball Story



I'm Cherri Rapp and I grew up in a small farming town in the Texas Panhandle called Estelline – population 300. The closest town of any size, Amarillo, was a hundred miles away. My dad was a cotton farmer and cattle rancher on land that my great grandparents settled back in the late 1800's. My mother was a schoolteacher. Both parents were avid sports fans so my siblings and I played a lot of competitive sports growing up. That included basketball, football, baseball, tennis, volleyball, track, and just about anything they let you do in a small school in west Texas. I ended up achieving a lot of success in both basketball and tennis in high school.

My siblings and I had to work in the cotton fields every summer, and it wasn't our favorite thing to do but we had no choice. When we complained around the breakfast table about not getting paid for our hard labors, my dad would say, "What are you talking about? I'm paying you three and a half a day. Three meals and half a bed!" That's not what we wanted to hear at 6:30 am, but the joke seemed to get funnier to him every year.

I was a big fan of the University of Texas growing up, and at an early age I planned to go to college there. My mother had serious "orange blood" in her veins, but my dad was a Texas A&M graduate. So a big rivalry always existed in our household, especially during the Thanksgiving weekend Longhorn/Aggie football game. Upon graduation from high school, I was "energetically encouraged" by Harley Redin to come play basketball at Wayland. He offered me a scholarship. A few other colleges also tried to recruit me for basketball, volleyball and tennis. But my mind was made up – I was going to Texas. They had no women's sports at UT in 1968 (at that time the only Texas colleges that had women's basketball were Wayland, and a few Jr. Colleges). So I was essentially giving up on that part of my life. I was headed to UT to study math, and let my blood turn orange too.

The summer after my graduation I was selected to play in the Texas High School All-Star Basketball Game. From there I planned to travel down to Austin for my orientation at Texas. The basketball week was a lot fun and very rewarding, but when I got to Austin I felt like I was just a number. I didn't know a soul, and I just walked around that big campus feeling lonely and scared. So when I got back home, I quietly asked my dad if he thought maybe Wayland still had that scholarship. He said, "Lets call Harley Redin and find out." We picked up the phone and called, and a few days later I found myself visiting the Wayland campus. And the rest is history. That was one of the very best decisions I ever made! My mother and my brother (who was a junior at Texas at the time) were both disappointed, and argued adamantly against my decision. But lucky for me, I had my dad on my side.

When I arrived at Wayland I was both happy and relieved, and I made friends instantly. The upper class Flying Queens put us freshmen (the Queen Bees) through initiation, and we also went through the regular student body initiation. It doesn't take long to make friends when you endure that together. I bonded quickly with teammates and other students. My mother changed her mind when she saw how happy I was. She immediately became my biggest fan again, just like she had always been.

Early that season Coach Redin let us freshmen work out with the Queens. I guess he was assessing our talent. He soon chose the team, and Susan Britton, Debra Martin and I made the Flying Queens. I was

ecstatic. I thought the Flying Queens were people you asked for autographs, like movie stars! I couldn't believe I was on that team. But I soon learned that it wasn't going to be easy. Barbara McAninch and Wanda Roe were blocking almost all of my shots. I was not used to playing with girls that tall and that good. One day Coach Redin came to me and asked if I had ever played guard before. At that time Wayland was playing the 6-player game. It consisted of 2 stationary forwards, 2 rovers who ran the court, and 2 stationary guards, or defenders. I guess he figured if I couldn't score baskets I could at least substitute for one of our 2 stationary guards when they got in foul trouble. I told him I had never played guard but I could learn. I didn't care where I played. I was just happy to be on the team. By mid-season I gained more confidence in shooting and was able to start scoring points. So Coach Redin devised a fast break that worked well. If I could beat one of the rovers down court, I became one of the rovers and went down to the forwards' end. I was much taller than many of the rovers so I could post them up, shoot over them, rebound over them, etc. Coach Redin was a master at taking a player (like me) and figuring out how to utilize that person's best skills for the benefit of the team. That's what made him a winner.

One of the most memorable moments of my freshman year (1968-69) was when Coach Redin designated me a starter in the game against Nashville Business College (NBC), the perennial powerhouse of women's basketball at that time. He put me in to jump at center, and he had our starting stationary guard at the scorer's table ready to come in and take my place as soon he could substitute. It worked, I got the tip, and then I came out very quickly. But I ended up getting to play a lot in that game. And the most memorable moment of all came after the game was over when my teammate Diana Lewis, a senior, told me that Nera White (NBC's legendary player) had asked who I was. Nera pointed me out and told Diana I was going to be a good player one of these days. I had never considered that I would be able to play competitively with the very best players in the country. I was just glad to be a Flying Queen.

That summer after my freshman year was life-changing. We were switching over to the 5-player game the next year. Coach Redin sent Susan Britton and me to try out for a United States Team that was traveling to South and Central America for a basketball tour. (International teams played the 5-player game.) There were about 80 girls trying out from all over the country, and the coaches spent the first 3 or 4 days trying to pare down the group to those who really wanted to play. We worked out 6-7 hours per day, and started each workout with a 30 minute "grass drill," something football players did on grass. We ran for 30 minutes, and every minute we would stop and do some type of exercise, like push-ups, hit-the-floor-and-roll-overs, jumping jacks, etc. I wanted to quit after the first day. It was so demanding! But I saw Susan not quitting, so I just couldn't bring myself to quit. Girls were just falling out on the sidelines every few minutes -- and cutting themselves from the team. After the first cut Susan and I were still there. That secretly disappointed me because I just wanted to go home. After a few more days, the coaches made a second cut. Lo and behold I was still there (and even more disappointed!). I had to walk up the stairs to my room backwards because my calves were so sore. I made a big decision at that moment: If I had to remain in this agony, I was going to try as hard as I could to make the team. I totally changed my attitude about hustle, and how much effort I put out on EVERY single drill. In the end, Susan and I both made the team. Susan later told me the only reason she didn't quit was because I didn't quit! I guess that says something about the power of teammates. We traveled to Mexico City, Panama, and Columbia that trip, and before the trip was over I was a starter on the team. I will never forget that feeling of being a starter on the United States international team -- and realizing that less than a year ago I thought Flying Queens were people you asked for autographs! This USA team was made up of a lot of All-Americans, and I learned at that moment that they were all just people. Regular people like me. And that anyone can go as far as they want in this country if they want it bad enough, and are willing to work hard to get there. I played on United States teams every summer after that for six years, and I had a lot of fun. I traveled to the Pan American Games twice, once to Mexico City and once to Cali, Columbia. I went to the World Championship Tournament in Brazil, the World University Games in Moscow, tours of South America, Taiwan and Japan. I was disappointed that we didn't have women's basketball in the Olympics at that time. And I toured around the United States and competed against the Russian team for five or six games. We ended up in Madison Square Garden. For those six years I was able to play on teams coached by some of the best coaches in the nation, including Billie Moore from UCLA, Sue Gunter from SFA and LSU, and Cathy Rush from Immaculata College. And it was an honor being on the US Olympic committee as a player

representative. I served on the Kodak All American Selection committee for a few years and met a lot of coaches from around the country. My teammates on those teams have become leaders in women's basketball. My roommate on many trips was Pat (Head) Summitt, the legendary coach from Tennessee. I also played with Nancy Lieberman, a leader in all of women's sports, and Ann Meyers, who became a successful commentator on major networks for women's basketball. Those connections and relationships were priceless. But nobody ever topped Coach Redin in my world, as a mentor, a team leader, an innovator and a hero.

Eventually I earned a masters degree in math with a minor in computer science at University of Texas (yes, I finally made it to Texas!). Upon graduation I immediately took the job of head women's basketball coach at North Texas State, where I coached for three years. This was in 1976 and the first year they had women's sports. Title IX had just gone into effect. Later I moved on to Texas A&M where I coached for five years. In the mid 80s, I started my own business as a computer consultant. Within a year, Jody Conradt called and asked me to come on board as a part-time assistant at Texas. She wanted me to coach her post players. So I moved to Austin and was on the Lady Longhorns coaching staff for four more years. Again, I had the opportunity to watch a great coach in action. And also...I made my mother very happy! She got the best of both worlds.

Throughout my life I have learned so much from sports. There are a lot of qualities that make up a great athlete, but I think there are three that are the most important. And not one of those three is TALENT. Talent is certainly necessary but it's not the most vital. First, you have to be willing to work hard at your sport. You must put out all you have all of the time, and make it a habit. The second thing is -- you must be coachable. You must listen to your coaches and do what they tell you. They know more than you do, and they will always make you a better player. Look at Olympic athletes. They all have coaches, and they are all the best-of-the-best in their sports. And last but not least, you have to be smart. I don't mean book smart. I mean court smart. Field smart. Street smart. Learn to use your head on the court, or the field, or wherever you are competing. To a great athlete, the mind is as important as any other part of the body. Keep negative things at bay and focus on the positive. Everyone make mistakes, we make them all the time, but those who move on and LEARN from their mistakes are the ones who end up at the top.

I still stay in touch with many of the former Flying Queens, and also the current ones. I serve on the board of the Hutcherson Flying Queen Foundation, an organization formed to help provide funds for the current Queens program. I don't work in sports today. I am a QuickBooks Consultant, and I set up small businesses on QuickBooks software. I do a lot of training and teaching. But I continue to compete in athletic events. I have turned to golf and love this sport, and now compete in tournaments throughout the year. I also ride my bicycle for exercise, and each year I ride The MS 150 Bike ride from Houston to Austin to raise money for MS. I initially did this event just to test myself and see if I could ride a total of 175 miles in two days. I did it, and I was hooked. Now I do it to raise money. I have raised over \$125,000 for MS, and I've made lots of biking friends along the way.

When I look back at my life, I clearly see how that decision to go to Wayland shaped me and made me who I am today. It allowed me to go to all of those places around the world. It allowed me to meet so many people, both in this country and in other cultures. And it taught me just about all the lessons I have learned in this lifetime. It also gave me the desire to keep my body in good shape and embrace good health. Where would I be if I had gone to Texas instead, and majored in math? I'll never know, and I don't really care to