

BECKY HAMMON

Becky Hammon, a 1999 graduate of Colorado State University (CSU), set numerous records at the university playing basketball and was recruited by the New York Liberty of the Women's Basketball Association (WNBA), where she played point guard. She went on to coach basketball, becoming the first female coach in the National Basketball Association (NBA), serving as an assistant coach for the San Antonio Spurs. Her outstanding achievements at CSU earned her the honor of having her jersey and her number, 25, retired in a ceremony at Moby Gym in 2005.

EARLY LIFE

Becky was born in Rapid City, South Dakota. Her athletic ability and love of basketball came to the fore when she began playing the game at Stevens High School where, in her junior year, she was named South Dakota Miss Basketball. In her senior year she was voted the South Dakota Player of the Year. Graduating from high school in 1995, she was voted the best female athlete by her graduating class.

COLLEGE CAREER

Although she was overlooked by many college recruiters, being considered too small (five feet six inches) and too slow, an assistant coach at Colorado State University saw her play and recruited her. She played basketball so well at CSU that many of her records still stand. Becky did not let being shorter than average stop her. Playing for the Rams, she made All American three times and was named Colorado Sportswoman of the Year. In the 1998-99 season she helped the team advance to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Sweet Sixteen tournament after they had posted a 33-3 season record.

Her records include all time points, 2,740; points per game, 21.92; field goals, 918; three-point field goals, 389, and 538 assists. The Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WNBA) awarded her the Frances Pomeroy Naismith Award as the best senior player under 5 feet 8 inches. She was inducted into the Colorado State University Sports Hall of Fame in 2004. She was also designated as ESPNW's Woman of the Year.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AS A PLAYER

Becky signed with the New York Liberty women's basketball team in May, 1999. She soon became a fan favorite, and in 2003 she took over as Liberty's starting point guard. Despite having that season cut short by a knee injury, she scored her 2,000th WNBA career point in 2005. In the off season she played with Rivas Futura in the Spanish League.

Traded to the San Antonio Silver Stars in 2007, Becky earned the nickname “Big Shot Becky” thanks to her ability to make shots at critical moments. That year she earned a career high average of 18.8 points per game, fourth best in the league, as well as leading the league in assists.

Becky led the Silver Stars to a WNBA record of 24-10 in 2008, earning them a spot in the playoffs. In game one of the playoffs she scored 30 points, but her team was defeated in the final game by the Detroit Shock. In 2007 she became the seventh player in WNBA history to score 5,000 points.

In order to compete in the Olympics, Becky became a Russian naturalized citizen in 2008, joining the Russian team in the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games.

In 2015 Becky was inducted into the Ring of Honor, which recognizes players who have “made the most significant contributions to the Liberty’s tradition of excellence and to the growth of the WNBA.”

COACHING CAREER

A torn ligament in 2013 spelled an end to Becky’s career as a player. The next career step was coaching. During a year-long rehabilitation she often attended the National Basketball Association’s San Antonio Spurs practices, coaches’ meetings and games, where her opinion was frequently sought. In August, 2014, the Spurs hired her as an assistant coach, making her the second female coach in NBA history. Head coach Gregg Popovich praised her work ethic, her basketball IQ and her ability to build personal relationships.

“When she speaks,” said one of the Spurs players, “I’m all ears.” Another player said of her, “Becky Hammon can coach NBA basketball. Period.” In December, 2020, Becky made history as the first female acting head coach when Popovich was ejected from a game against the Los Angeles Lakers, leaving her in charge.

She has been part of an all-star coaching staff and served as the first female head coach in the NBA’s summer league in 2015.

Becky was not only the first female full-time assistant coach in the NBA, she is the first female assistant coach in any of the four major sports, football, basketball, baseball and hockey. She has set many records and earned numerous accolades and is an outstanding example of what women can achieve.

A LIFE LIVED LARGE

Becky Hammon made maximum use of her skills, abilities, talent and passion to pursue a career path that opened doors for other women. Tackling the obstacles in her way

with determination and energy, she forged ahead with daring and resolve to make the best possible use of what she had to offer the game she loved. She stands tall in spirit as a pioneer in her chosen field.

Her Legacy:

A trailblazer in the sports industry, a difference maker, a catalyst for change and just prefers to be called simply “Coach.” CSU Basketball success, played professional basketball in the US and Europe, 1st woman hired in NBA as Assistant Coach of the San Antonio Spurs.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

- What is Becky Hammon’s strongest asset?
- Why is she so popular with the players?
- Does her career help women rise in other sports? If so, how?
- What do you admire most about her?

GLOSSARY

Accolades—honors and awards

Assists—help with making a basket

Field goal—a basket scored on any shot other than a free throw

Inducted—admitted into an organization

League—a group of teams which play against each other

Ligament—tissue that connects bones to each other

Naturalized citizen—someone born in a different country who becomes a citizen of another one

Work ethic—honorable behavior on the job

TIMELINE

1995—graduates from high school, recruited by Colorado State

1995-99—earns honors and sets records on women’s basketball team

1999—graduates from Colorado State University, recruited by Liberty WNBA team

2003—becomes Liberty starting point guard

2005—sets record for 2,000th WNBA point

2007—traded to the Silver Stars

2008—becomes naturalized citizen of Russia, competes in the Olympic Games

2012—competes for Russia again in the Olympics

2013—knee injury ends her career as a player

2014—hired as assistant coach with San Antonio Spurs
2015—Ring of Honor

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gonzales, Shelley. "Ram Tough." Noco Style Magazine, pp. 32-33, September 2018.

Lytle, Kevin. "Hammon First Woman to Coach NBA Game." Fort Collins Coloradoan, January 2, 2021.

Written by Barbara Fleming, Author, Coloradoan Columnist and Living Her Legacy Wordsmith