



PATRIOT VOLLEYBALL COACH CATHY KOKEL

When Cathy Ray Kokel stepped foot on the Dallas Baptist University campus in 1998 as a recruit for the Lady Patriots Volleyball Team, she had no idea about the plans God had in store for her career at DBU. A standout on the volleyball court from nearby Red Oak High School, Kokel was invited to try out for the DBU Volleyball Team by the team's head coach at the time, Kristi Arrington.

"I came to the tryout never seeing DBU before. As soon as I walked on campus, I loved it, and I left praying that I would be asked to be a part of the team," Kokel said. "A couple days later I received a scholarship offer and committed to DBU."

For the next four seasons, Kokel starred for the Lady Patriots as an outside hitter. In 2000, she helped guide Dallas Baptist to the NAIA Regional Championship Finals, and as a senior in 2001, she led DBU and the Red River Conference in overall kills and hitting percentage. For her play, she received NAIA Honorable Mention All-American honors and was a First Team All-Conference selection. In addition to her accolades on the floor, Kokel was also named the team's Spiritual Leader as a junior, DBU's Female Athlete of the Year as a senior, and the school's Homecoming Princess in 2001.

Following her final season of eligibility, Kokel was asked to remain a part of the program as a graduate assistant in 2002. Midway through her first year on the DBU coaching staff, Kokel's career path took a turn when the Lady Patriots' head coach left, making Cathy the team's interim coach for the remainder of the year. After guiding her team to an impressive run to the NCCAA Regional Tournament, Kokel was asked to take the reins as the team's new head coach.

"I never wanted to be a college coach; that was not in my plans, but I knew it was what God wanted for me, and so I said yes at the age of 22 and have been here since," said Kokel.

Since then, Kokel has been at the helm for 12 seasons. In 2008, her squad won a program best 24 matches and finished as the national runners-up at the NCAA National Championship. One year later, the Lady Patriots made school history, winning their first ever Heartland Conference Tournament Championship and advancing to the NCAA Regional Tournament in Warrensburg, Missouri. In 2013, DBU punched their ticket to the program's second NCAA Regional appearance by winning the Heartland Conference Tournament.

Along with her team's success on the volleyball court, Kokel has coached 21 All-Conference performers, one National Player of the Week, and an NCAA Division II All-American, Cameron Hartson, who is now a graduate assistant

on Kokel's staff. Beyond the wins and player accolades, it's the opportunity she has each day to be a Christian mentor that she cherishes the most.

"For me, coaching at DBU is more of a calling than it is a career. I believe God has called me to mentor these girls, guiding them to be better people, leaders, students, wives, moms, and daughters," Kokel stated. "Do not mistake that winning and competitiveness are not a huge part of this program, or a constant desire I have in this position, but in 12 years I have never had one player tell me they want to go on to play volleyball after they leave DBU. As their last coach, I want these girls to leave filled with confidence, purpose, and passion for their next endeavor. I want to know they grew closer to the Lord while playing here at DBU, and I am reminded daily in a player's face, body language, conversation, and prayer of the influence I have over these girls, and I take that as my highest responsibility as their coach. Win or lose, the relationships I make with these players are what brings joy to my heart, and I believe that is what God is smiling at when He looks at this program."

Outside of coaching volleyball at DBU, Kokel and her husband, Jordan, along with their son, Brooks, live in Grand Prairie and attend church at the Community at Lake Ridge in Mansfield.

