

Carol Menken-Schaudt (1957–)

By Tami Richards

Carol Menken came to Oregon State University to study broadcasting, grateful for a basketball scholarship that would pay for her tuition. She would graduate OSU with the distinction of being one of the highest scorers in the U.S. women's game, with skills that would earn her a spot on a semi-pro team in Europe. During her basketball career at OSU, Menken-Schaudt entered the record books with 333 free throws, 955 field goals, 901 rebounds, a career scoring average of 27.7, and a total of 2,243 points. She also won a gold medal in the 1984 Olympics as a member of the U.S. women's basketball team.

Carol Menken was born in Albany, in the mid-Willamette Valley, on November 23, 1957, to a family that was not athletic. While her maternal grandmother did play on a basketball team in 1930, her six-foot-eight-inch-tall father did not play the game, and none of her three siblings were very interested in sports. Menken, who was six foot four as a teenager, attended high school in Jefferson, Oregon, where she played sports in physical education classes but had little interest in team sports and no experience with organized basketball. After graduating in 1975, she set her sights on the graphic arts program at Linn-Benton Community College in Albany and worked at a local art supply store to pay her tuition. After two years, she changed her course of study to drafting and began a third year at Linn-Benton.

In 1972, Congress passed Title IX of the Federal Education Amendments, which prohibited schools that received federal funding from discriminating against students "on the basis of sex," including in athletic programs (the act was renamed the Patsy Takemoto Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act in 2002). In response, Linn-Benton Community College formed a women's basketball team in 1978. That fall, Coach Dave Dangler recruited Menken because of her height, and she joined six other women to play for the Roadrunners, Linn-Benton's first Oregon Community College Athletic Association (OCCAA) women's basketball team.

In 1979, Menken transferred to Oregon State University in Corvallis, where she was the second woman to receive a sports scholarship at the school (the first was high-jumper Joni Huntley). She joined the OSU basketball team and worked with coach Aki Hill, who had studied for three years with UCLA coach John Wooden. Hill taught Menken the fundamentals of the game, and Menken matched Hill's instruction with energy and commitment. While playing for Hill at OSU, Menken achieved a field goal average of .692.

Though Menken's main motivation for playing basketball was to pay for her education, she had an opportunity to play for the U.S. national team in the summer of 1981 and was recruited to play semi-pro ball for the Italian women's basketball league. She took a break from basketball during the 1982 season to marry Ken Schaudt, a team manager of the men's basketball team at Oregon State, before picking up the ball again to play in the Italian women's league. She averaged 25.4 points and 12.4 rebounds per game during the 1983 season and won a gold medal at the Universiade (World University Games).

Menken-Schaudt gained a spot on the final U.S. women's basketball team in the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, where the United States won the nation's first Olympic gold medal in women's basketball. At twenty-six years old, Menken-Schaudt was one of the oldest players on the team and served as a leader for the younger players. Although not a starter, she got playing time and practiced with starters to improve their game. (Also at the Olympics that year was OSU athlete Joni Huntley, who won the bronze medal in the high jump competition.)

Menken-Schaudt did not hang up her basketball shoes after winning Olympic gold. She graduated from OSU with a degree in broadcast communications in 1985 and played internationally in Italy and Japan until 1988. She returned to the Corvallis area in Oregon and began her radio career. She and her husband have two children, both star athletes.

Menken-Schaudt was inducted into the State of Oregon Sports Hall of Fame in 1993 and was the first OSU female student athlete to be inducted into the Pac-12 Hall of Honor in 2018.

Sources

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The Oregon Encyclopedia

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