



Kellie Jolly Harper

A look into the basketball star's life and career

October 2023

Special Supplement to
THE EXPOSITOR

Kellie Jolly Harper career highlights



Elementary School Basketball



Age 8

Name: Kellie Jolly Harper

Birthday: May 3, 1977

Hometown: Sparta, Tenn.

High School: White County High School, 1995

Education: B.S. (Math), Tennessee, 1999

COACHING EXPERIENCE

OVERALL

- In 28 complete years as a Division I coach, assistant or player, Harper has made 23 postseason appearances (16 NCAA/7 WNIT) with a combined record of 621-300

- Her career record in 19 full seasons as a head coach is 373-247 through the 2022-23 campaign

- She is one of only two coaches to guide four different Division I women's programs to the NCAA Tournament, doing so at Western Carolina, NC State, Missouri State and Tennessee

- Has directed her teams to 15 postseason appearances (8 NCAA, 7 WNIT), leading Tennessee (2022, 2023) and Missouri State (2019) into the NCAA Sweet 16 as a head coach

- Member of USA Basketball Women's Junior National Team Committee (2021-24)

TENNESSEE

- Head Coach (April 9, 2019, to Present)

- Record through four seasons is 88-39

- 2022 Tennessee Sports Writers Association Women's College Coach of the Year

- 2022 Werner Ladder Naismith National Women's Coach of the Year Late Season Watch List

- Led UT to back-to-back NCAA Sweet 16s in 2021-22 and 2022-23, making her one of only seven coaches nationwide to do that in each of the past two seasons

- Guided UT to four straight third-place SEC finishes during her tenure and to the 2023 SEC Tournament Championship game, the program's first appearance since 2015

- The 25 victories in 2021-22 (25-9) and 2022-23 (25-12) matched her most as a head

coach and UT's highest total since 2017-18

- She led the 2021-22 Lady Vols to their highest rankings (No. 4/5) since the 2015-16 season

- Four of her players at Tennessee have gone on to play in the WNBA, including top-10 overall picks in 2021, 2022 and 2023

- Her UT players have earned All-SEC seven times, SEC All-Freshman three times and SEC All-Defensive twice

- A program-best 12 of 14 Lady Vols made the SEC Academic Honor Roll in 2021-22

- Eighteen of 29 Lady Vols playing for Harper have earned SEC Academic Honor Roll recognition a total of 38 times through last season

MISSOURI STATE

- Head Coach (2013-19)

- Six-year record: 118-79

- 2019 Kay Yow Coach of the Year

- 2019 MVC Coach of the Year
- Won two MVC Tournament Championships (2016 & 2019)

- Two NCAA appearances (2016 & 2019) and three WNIT berths (2015, 2017, 2018)

- NCAA Sweet 16 (2019)

- Led Lady Bears to first national ranking in 15 years (24th in final 2019 USA Today Sports Coaches Poll)

NORTH CAROLINA STATE

- Head Coach (2009-13)

- Four-year record: 70-64

- Guided Wolfpack to three postseason appearances, including the 2010 NCAA Tournament and 2012 and 2013 WNIT

- Earned six top-25 victories in four seasons

WESTERN CAROLINA

- Head Coach (2004-09)

- Five-year record: 97-65

- Directed Catamounts to four postseason berths in five seasons, including NCAA Tournaments in 2005 and 2009

- Her teams won the school's first two Southern Conference Tournament titles in school history

- Named 2007 SoCon Coach of the Year

- Three of her squads placed in the WBCA Academic Top 25

CHATTANOOGA

- Assistant Coach (2001-04)

- Three-year record: 78-15

- Served on head coach Wes Moore's staff

- The Mocs won three straight Southern Conference titles

- Chattanooga went to three straight NCAA Tournaments

- Worked with four all-conference guards, including the 2004 SoCon Player of the Year

AUBURN

- Assistant Coach (2000-01)

- Administrative Assistant (1999-2000)

- Worked on the staff with three-time NCAA Coach of the Year Joe Ciampi

- The Tigers advanced to the 2001 NCAA Tournament Second Round

COLLEGIATE PLAYING EXPERIENCE

- Tennessee (1995-99)

- The Lady Vols forged a 131-17 record during her playing days

- UT won three straight NCAA titles (1996 to 1998), going 39-0 in 1998

- The Big Orange won two SEC titles and three SEC Tournament crowns

- Played 132 games at point guard for Tennessee

- Scored 894 points and had 452 assists in her career

- Still ranks seventh at UT in career assists and is 10th in three-point field goal percentage (.364, 99-272)

- 2009 UT Athletics Hall of Fame Inductee

- 1999 WNBA Fourth Round Draft Pick of Cleveland Rockers

- 1999 Honorable Mention All-American

- 1999 All-SEC Coaches Second Team

- Three-time SEC Academic Honor Roll member

- 1999 SEC Community Service Team

- 1996 NSCA Strength & Conditioning Female Student Athlete of the Year

From Lady Warrior to Vol: Kellie Jolly Harper breaks down her career

During a recent one-on-one interview with Kellie Jolly Harper, she talked about growing up in Sparta and how the small-town atmosphere helped shape her future. She also elaborated about her career and how her experiences led her to coach the Lady Vols.

I love Sparta. I always have, and I always will. It was a great place to grow up. The community just embraces you as you are growing up. The small town feel is me, it is my vibe. I can't pick up the University of Tennessee and put it into Sparta, just have to learn how to love Knoxville just as much.

Growing up, on my Dad's side of the family, most of them were Tennessee fans. My mom's side of the family were Vanderbilt fans, and I lived about halfway between both, and, growing up when I was in high school, Vanderbilt and Tennessee were often #1 and #2 in the women's basketball rankings. So I was very neutral on where I wanted to go until I came to Tennessee and visited here and met with Pat [Summitt] and then I knew at that moment this was my dream.

My dad [Kenneth Jolly] was an administrator, a teacher, and a basketball coach for many years for both boys and girls. With him being an administrator and us living about a minute and a half away from the school, I could get in the gym at any point. When I was younger, if there was anybody who played on the high school teams, that is who I idolized. I loved going to both of the boys' and girls' games, I loved those players. Growing up there, being in junior pro and senior pro, playing at Findlay Elementary, sports and mostly basketball, was my world. That established our niche in the community.

Both of my parents played college basketball. My mom is about as competitive as anybody I know. I learned really quickly at a young age there is a difference between winning and losing. I think that fueled my desire for success. I saw my parents really competing, and they showed me what it was like to do it the right way.

When I was in middle school and early going into high school, I felt like I might have the opportunity to play college basketball. It was probably my sophomore year, maybe junior year, before I realized maybe what level I could go to. Fortunately for me, we were able to work hard and get better and have multiple scholarship opportunities, and good for me that Tennessee was one of them.



Photo by JERRY LOWERY

SPECIAL HOMECOMING. Kellie Jolly Harper shows her appreciation by leading a round of applause for her fans who attended the Welcome Home event at White County High School.

For me, it's not winning a state championship. That is what will always stick with me. I always tell people I remember the losses more than I remember the wins. We were ranked #1 in the nation for about eight weeks during my junior year, and we still didn't win the state championship. But, that tells you how good our state was and how talented our state across the board was. It still stings, I wanted that, but so many other memories of going into big sub-state games when people were lining up early in the day to make sure to get in and get a seat, packing the gym, just some great moments at White County High School.

Anytime my brother, Brent, starts into comparing the lack of state championships on my side and the multiple state championships on his side, then that's when I come back that I had three national championships in college, so he doesn't go there!

Brent being three years younger than me, we played a lot of basketball against each other. We probably never finished a game of one-on-one ever; we were extremely competitive. My brother, Ross,

was 11 years younger, so we didn't have that competition like Brent and I did. I still respect both of them and their knowledge of their game. Ross is a coach, and Brent is a former coach, and they have a lot of knowledge that I enjoy utilizing.

Family is important. Growing up with a very connected family is what I knew. My husband is my assistant coach, so we work together. We have two children: a 9-year-old and a 5-year-old. One thing I try to do is incorporate our family and bring our children into the program. I was able to witness Pat do that with her son, Tyler. That has been really important to me. My parents supported me; they were involved in my life growing up. I want to do the same for my kids, and it's not easy at times with this job. I have to bring them to me and into our program. If there is something I can be at to support my kids, I will be there.

Playing for Pat Summitt, you got to see all sides of her. I was a pleaser. I was going to go the extra mile and toe the line. If she told me the sky was purple, I was going to believe that until she told me otherwise. We got along. I was pretty

low maintenance, and I did the best I could to be the player that she needed me to be. I wanted to do it right, but, if I didn't get it right, she let me know. She pushed you mentally and physically. You grew more than you ever thought you could grow. You could handle more than you thought you could handle. I do think my background - growing up in a small town, growing up in Sparta, having tough coaches and ones I really admired - I think I was really prepared to play for her. I think our similar backgrounds in terms of small-town girls with dads that pushed but loved them, I think that helped our relationship.

I loved Pat, and I loved playing at Tennessee. I know that is a part of me that I'll have forever; it's a big part of me. I recognize that in every interview I have I am going to talk about that and be asked about those years. I am OK with that. I understand that's a huge part of who I am. But, I am also really confident in who I am now and how I've grown and how my career has moved over these last few

INTERVIEW: FROM LADY WARRIOR TO VOL

CONTINUED FROM 3

years. I think having those experiences early on really helped, but you have to stand on your own, you have to be your own self. I'm not trying to be somebody else, but I still really love, respect and admire the time that I had as a player.

There was constant growth for me as a coach. My first head coaching job was at Western Carolina, and I was 26 years old. I had no idea what I didn't know. I learned so much, I was there five years, and it was the best place for me to start my head coaching career. You are very hands on. I had three...people reporting to me, and it was easy to manage and a great learning experience. That started me off on the right path.

Coming back to Tennessee was never on my mind. I know people hear that and they don't believe me. But in my mind, this was Pat's job. It was always going to be Pat's job, and she was going to be here forever. You couldn't view Tennessee without Pat Summitt. When Holly Warlick took over...I love Holly and so proud that I played for her, she is one of the best human beings in the whole world. So, I was a big fan. It never crossed my mind that this could be my path because I was such a fan on the outside looking in.

There will always be Pat Summitt connected to the Lady Vols. That is going to be forever, regardless of who is in this seat. The fortunate thing is I played here, I loved being here, and I loved Pat. I have no problem honoring her every single day. I'm not intimidated walking past her statue - I'm proud of it. If I was trying to be here and trying to compete with her legacy, you couldn't do it, it would eat you up. That's not my goal. My goal is to be the best me that I can be and to make this program be the best it can possibly be. If I am doing that, I will feel good about who I am and not trying to be someone else.

Throughout my career, leaving Western Carolina and going to NC State and then to Missouri State, my role has changed even though I was still the head coach. Times have changed, you can't coach like you did in 2005. It just wouldn't work. Coming to Tennessee, I had a lot of experiences that I went through - both good and bad - that molded me into the coach I am today. All of

the things that I have done give me that. Here at Tennessee, you are in a different position because you lead the Lady Vols. There is an accountability and a responsibility not just to the community here, not just to Tennessee, but to women's basketball. That is a big thing. There are a lot of eyes on us. I believe that when the Tennessee women's basketball team is good, then women's basketball across our country is better. I think we lead the way. There are a lot of eyes on us. You want to honor the tradition and the past. Nobody has the legacy that we have. But, we have to forge our own way. Our players have to create their own legacy. That is a very unique position for our players to be in. It's really special to celebrate what came before while you are creating your own legacy.

There is no doubt when you are in my position you represent so much more than just 13 players. You represent alums, our university, our athletic department, but you are also representing our state. There is no doubt about it. I love the state I'm from. I love the University of Tennessee, I love the state of Tennessee. I love that I can say it's mine, and I always have. I've loved everywhere I have coached. I have had passion for every program and every university, I truly have. But, it's just different when it's yours. That is something I carry with pride. I know I'm very visible when I walk around this campus, this community, or back in Sparta. For me, just being who I am is always important. I want to be proud of who I am as a person, not just a coach. If you are trying to be the best person you can possibly be, you aren't putting on a show. I'm just me, and I want to be me at all times and hope that's good enough.

I'm a Tennessee girl, it's just who I am. There's a big difference between growing up and living in Sparta and being the head coach of the Lady Vols in Knoxville. Where it's important to me is that I don't change throughout that. Deep down, I'm a small town girl. My parents raised tobacco growing up, so I worked on the farm. I still love work today because of that. I don't think I've changed. I have grown and I have learned. I have a lot of experiences outside of White County that have opened my eyes and have a broad scope, but it hasn't changed who I am.



Photo by JERRY LOWERY

FAN. Pinkie Tubb Hill, who was 95 at the of this photo, is an avid basketball fan and has had season tickets to all of White County High School's basketball games for decades. Hill, who has been a great supporter of Harper throughout the years, shares a few moments with the new Lady Vols coach.



Photo by JERRY LOWERY

WELCOME HOME. L-R: Bill Johnson, of Sparta, former banker who was a star football player at the University of Tennessee, shows his support for Kellie Jolly Harper during a Welcome Home event. Seated next to Johnson is his wife, Rena, and Kenneth Broyles, former standout football player at Tennessee Tech.

Kellie Jolly Harper's mom is probably her biggest fan

JOHN GOTTLIED

staff writer

If Kellie Jolly Harper's father, Kenneth, was her biggest influence, her mother, Peggy, must be her biggest fan. I had the chance to sit down with Peggy to discuss her daughter. As a Lady Vols fan, I'll admit I was excited. Kenneth was my high school vice-principal, and I knew very little more about him. I knew nothing of Peggy except that she was Coach Harper's mother. I met her at The Expositor, and she was wearing an orange Tennessee shirt.

Peggy confirmed everything I have ever read or heard about Kellie's dedication to basketball. She said that Kellie loved to swim and taught herself to ride a horse. Peggy made sure I knew Kellie was third in her graduating class. She told me about Kenneth taking Kellie's AAU team to a national championship. She recited the highlights of Kellie's basketball career as a player and her coaching resume, but you can read all about that online.

What you can't read online is how much Peggy loves her daughter. Peggy says she doesn't see Kellie as much as she would like, but she talks to her frequently. Peggy said besides her coaching responsibilities, Kellie has numerous speaking engagements. Peggy noted that Kellie enjoys public speaking, and Peggy enjoys hearing her speak. Understanding how incredibly busy Kellie is, it is all the more impressive that she takes time out of her busy schedule to talk to young players from her former elementary school. Peggy explained that Kellie cares about the influence she has on younger players.

It is evident that Peggy is proud of Kellie's accomplishments. She speaks fondly of Kellie and Ken talking "x's and o's" in the car on trips. Peggy enjoyed just being a fan and watching the games. Peggy listed Kellie's coaches over the years and mentioned that Mike Shockley was Kellie's coach for her freshman and sophomore years at White County High School. Peggy spoke fondly of Coach Pat Summit and



L-R: Peggy Simpson Jolly, Kellie Jolly Harper, and Kenneth Jolly

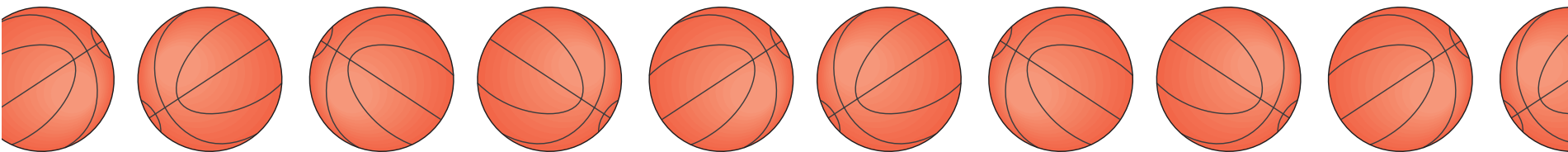
her influence on Kellie. She mentioned Pat having the Lady Vols run plays she had discussed with Ken and Kellie.

Peggy said Kellie works hard and does things the right way. Peggy says Kellie never complains to her about any criticisms she hears. She said she just keeps doing the job. Kellie has found success everywhere she has played or

coached. Peggy says Kellie wants her players to experience winning a championship, and she understands what it takes to win.

When I asked Peggy what she would like the people of White County to know about Kellie, she said Kellie is always there for her players, the university, and the fans. She will always

do things the right way and do what's best for her players. Regardless of her natural talent and work ethic, I seriously doubt that Kellie Jolly Harper would have achieved the success she has without the influence of her father, Kenneth Jolly, and the love and support of her mother, Peggy Simpson Jolly.



Holland says Kellie has a special understanding of basketball

JOHN GOTTLIED
staff writer

Steve Holland coached Kellie Jolly Harper when she was just Kellie Jean Jolly, during Kellie's junior and senior basketball seasons at White County High School. Coach Holland was assisted by Kellie's father Kenneth Jolly, the assistant principal of White County High School. The Jolly family seemed to live and breathe basketball. Kenneth and his wife, Peggy, both played for Tennessee Tech. At one time, Kellie and both her siblings were college basketball coaches. Kellie, her father, Kenneth, and her brother, Brent, are all in the WCHS Hall of Fame for their performances on the basketball court.

In an interview with Knox News about Kellie's father, Kenneth, Coach Holland said, "He was as nice and classy a man as I've ever been around in my life. He really was. I learned basketball from him, but I learned about life from him."

Coach Holland told The Expositor that he has no doubt that Kellie got her love for the game of basketball and her work ethic from her family, especially her father.

Coach Holland said that Kellie had a natural ability, but it was her work ethic that made her special. He said all the girls on that team elevated the play of their teammates. They were all very close and had played together for several years. Several girls from that team went on to play college basketball. Coach Holland said opposing teams always had a bulls-eye on Kellie's back. Kellie used the attention to feed open teammates the ball.

"All the girls knew why we ran each play, but Kellie had a different level of understanding," said Holland.

Coach Holland has followed Kellie's career and recalled a conversation he had with Kenneth Jolly while Kellie was just getting into coaching. He said he told Kenneth that one day Kellie would coach for the University of Tennessee. Kenneth, who passed in 2012, didn't live to see his friend's prediction come true. Coach Holland said he has always been a UT fan, but since Kellie became head coach, he is an extra bit more of a fan. Coach Holland said that Kellie was the kind of player a coach gets maybe once in a career.



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DEDICATION. Rhonda Girdly, Kellie Jolly Harper, and Carla Farley at Findlay court dedication

Former coach talks on Harper's drive

JOHN GOTTLIED
staff writer

Besides being a dedicated kindergarten teacher, Rhonda Girdley has been the glue that has held Findlay Elementary girls' basketball together.

Coach Girdley coached when the Findlay teams were still the Devils. She also coached when Kellie Jean Jolly wore Findlay red, over half a decade before Kellie Jolly wore Volunteer orange and about three decades before she would return to UT as Kellie Jolly Harper, head coach of the Lady Vols. If Kellie's first coaches were her family, then Coach Girdley must be at least a distant cousin.

Coach Girdley was Kellie's coach from 1987 to 1989. Those three years must have had quite an impact because Coach Girdley and Coach Harper are still close. Coach Girdley takes her current players to see her former player coach the Lady Vols in Thompson-Boling Arena, and Coach Harper always makes time to talk to the new generation of Findlay players. Coach Harper always has an encouraging word for young players. The court at the new Findlay gymnasium was named Kellie's Court to honor the former Findlay

standout, and Coach Harper was present for the dedication.

Coach Girdley said Kellie had skills before she came to the Findlay team, but it was her work ethic that really stood out. She said Kellie was a joy to coach and a great teammate for the other girls. She was always helping the other girls on the team learn new plays and improve their skills. Coach Girdley recalled having a difficult time explaining how to set a screen to a player named Melissa. She said Kellie asked if she could try teaching her. Coach Girdley told her to go ahead, and, in no time at all, Melissa was setting perfect screens. Coach Girdley said Kellie was already becoming a great coach way back then.

Coach Girdley said she followed Kellie's progress through the years and has never been surprised by her accomplishments.

"Kellie was always the first player to practice and the last to leave," said Coach Girdley.

She said Kellie was a team leader and a captain on the court. She said she is proud of all that Kellie has accomplished and prouder that Kellie has never forgotten her hometown.



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A look through the archives...

Kellie Jolly Harper will lead Lady Vols basketball

(April 2019) - University of Tennessee Director of Athletics Phillip Fulmer announced, on April 9, 2019, that 1999 UT graduate and women's basketball standout Kellie Jolly Harper has been chosen as the new head coach of the Lady Volunteers.

The university and Harper agreed to a five-year contract with annual compensation of \$750,000 per year.

"I'm excited to have Kellie as our new women's basketball coach," Fulmer said. "She is a Lady Vol through and through. Her love of the game, her care and love for her players, and her loyalty to UT all came through during the interview process. Kellie has proven to be a winner at every stop in her career, taking three programs to the NCAA Tournament. She certainly knows the expectations that come with this job, as she has lived it herself."

Harper becomes only the third Lady Vols head coach in the NCAA era of women's basketball.

"I am incredibly humbled and honored to be named the head coach of the Tennessee Lady Vols," Harper said. "Tennessee holds a special place in my heart, and I am excited to embrace the legacy of this proud program. I can't wait to help each player and this team be champions, on the court and off."

A native of Sparta, Tennessee, Harper played point guard for the legendary Pat Summitt at UT from 1995-99, starting 132 games and helping the Lady Vols win NCAA National Championships in 1996, 1997 and 1998. She was part of a senior class that helped the Big Orange forge a 131-17 overall record as well as win two SEC regular season titles (1998, 1999) and three SEC Tournament crowns (1996, 1998, 1999).

One of only 11 women's hoops skipper to lead three different schools to the NCAA Tournament, she has directed her teams to 12 postseason berths in her 15-year head coaching career.

Harper guided Missouri State to NCAA appearances in 2015-16 and

2018-19 with WNIT berths on three other occasions. She also led North Carolina State to the NCAA Tournament in 2009-10 (plus two WNIT appearances) and guided Western Carolina to NCAA berths in 2004-05 and 2008-09 (plus two trips to the WNIT).

Harper owns a 15-year head coaching record of 285-208, including five NCAA Tournament appearances and seven WNIT berths in that span. In 24 seasons as a Division I head coach, assistant coach or player, Harper has made 20 postseason appearances with a combined 533-261 record, 13 NCAA Tournament appearances and seven WNIT bids.

She recorded a 118-79 won-lost record at Missouri State, claiming Missouri Valley Conference Tournament crowns in 2016 and 2019 and notching regular-season runner-up finishes in 2015-16, 2017-18 and 2018-19.

This year's squad improved measurably as the season progressed, resiliently overcoming a 1-7 start to post the program's best overall record (25-10) since 2004-05 and its top league mark (16-2) since 2003-04 with a 24-3 run over the final 27 contests.

The Lady Bears finished No. 24 in the final USA Today Sports Coaches Poll, which was their first national ranking in 15 years. Harper was named the Missouri Valley Coach of the Year and also was chosen as the 2019 Kay Yow Coach of the Year. That award is presented annually to the Division I women's head coach who embodies a winning spirit while displaying great character, on and off the court.

Harper took over a MSU program that was coming off a 14-17 overall mark and 6-12 league mark in 2013-14. After a 14-17/8-10 slate in her first season in Springfield, the Lady Bears never finished lower than third in the league standings and made the postseason every year.

Three of her last four editions surpassed the 20-win plateau. Her final Lady Bears team developed into her best one with a late season spree that included victories over No. 21 Drake, No. 24 DePaul and No. 13 Iowa State

and a nine-point loss to sixth-ranked Stanford in the Sweet 16. Harper's 2018-19 squad featured only one senior and included 11 freshmen or sophomores on the 14-player roster.

In addition to making the NCAA Tournament this season, Harper took Missouri State back to the NCAA Tournament after a decade absence in 2015-16, guiding her third MSU squad to an MVC Tournament title and 24-10 overall record. Her program also defeated SEC programs Missouri (twice), Arkansas and Ole Miss during her time at MSU.

Prior to her arrival at Missouri State, Harper became just the third women's basketball coach in North Carolina State history in 2009 and directed the Wolfpack to three postseason appearances and a 70-64 record during her four-year stint at the helm, including the 2010 NCAA Tournament. NC State joined Tobacco Road rivals Duke and North Carolina as the only Atlantic Coast Conference teams to score wins over the league's other 11 teams during that span and earned six top-25 victories in four seasons.

Prior to her tenure in Raleigh, Harper piloted Western Carolina to a 97-65 record and four postseason berths in five seasons, including a 70-31 mark her final three years in Cullowhee. The Catamounts captured the first two Southern Conference (SoCon) Tournament titles in school history while seven student-athletes captured all-conference honors during her tenure.

She earned 2007 SoCon Coach of the Year accolades and placed her squads in the WBCA Academic Top 25 on three occasions, including a fifth-place finish in 2007-08.

Before her first head coaching job, Harper spent three seasons as an assistant coach at Chattanooga, helping the Mocs to three consecutive Southern Conference championships, three NCAA appearances and a combined 78-15 record under head coach Wes Moore. She tutored four all-conference guards while at Chattanooga, including the 2004 league player of the year.

Prior to her time in Chattanooga, Harper spent two seasons at Auburn, the first as an administrative assistant before being promoted to assistant coach under Joe Ciampi for the 2000-01 campaign.

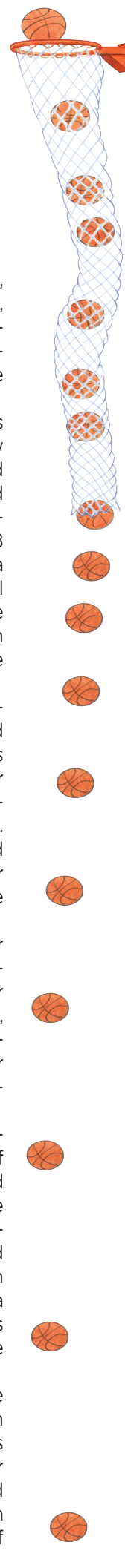
As a college player, Harper was part of a women's basketball dynasty at Tennessee. As a junior, she guided the Lady Vols to a 39-0 record and their third-straight national championship, averaging 7.6 points and 3.8 assists for the season and scoring a career-high 20 points in the national title game against Louisiana Tech. She went 4-of-5 from beyond the arc in that contest and was named to the 1998 All-Final Four Team.

Harper set an NCAA championship game record with 11 assists and dished out 20 helpers in two games for All-Final Four honors in 1997 after returning from a knee injury midway through her sophomore season. That year, the National Strength and Conditioning Association named her its Strength and Conditioning Female Student-Athlete of the Year.

For her Tennessee career, Harper scored 894 points and had 452 assists, leaving UT on the school's career top 10 lists for assists, assist average, 3-point attempts and 3-point percentage. She still ranks seventh in career assists and is 10th in 3-point percentage (.364, 99-272).

Harper was drafted by the Cleveland Rockers in the fourth round of the 1999 WNBA draft and earned her degree in mathematics that same year. She was a three-time SEC Academic Honor Roll member and earned both All-SEC Coaches Second Team and honorable mention All-America honors as a senior. She also was named to the SEC Community Service Team as a senior.

She played for her father (the late Kenneth Jolly) at White County High School, in Sparta, Tenn., and was a five-time All-American during her AAU playing career. She was inducted into the UT Athletics Hall of Fame, in 2009, and White County High Hall of Fame, in 2012.



Former Warriorette inducted into Lady Vol Hall Of Fame

(October 2009) - Being a part of what most consider the greatest college women's basketball program of all time is an honor. Winning three national championships as a part of that program makes the honor just a little more special. The legacy becomes complete when selected for induction into the University of Tennessee Lady Volunteer Hall of Fame.

Kellie Jolly Harper, a 1995 graduate of White County High School and a 1999 graduate of the University of Tennessee, received what she described as "the single biggest individual honor I've received in my life," during a ceremony at Downtown Hilton, in Knoxville, when she, along with four other inductees, became the ninth group to be inducted into the university's Hall of Fame for female athletes.

Kellie Jolly Harper joins father on wall of fame at WCHS

(January 2012) - In a gym where she scored a ton of points and dominated the competition, current North Carolina State women's head basketball coach, Kellie Jolly Harper, stood at center court with a packed house on their feet applauding all the success she has enjoyed in her career.

Harper became the newest member of the White County High School Sports Hall of Fame and saw her banner unveiled alongside the one recognizing her dad, Kenneth Jolly.

A highlight video was shown, along with a taped message, from University of Tennessee coaches, Pat Summitt and Holly Warlick. After speeches from her former coaches, Rhonda Girdley, Donny Haley, and Stephen Holland, along with sports writer, Tammy Wilhite, Harper took the podium to accept the honor.

The following are some of the excerpts from her acceptance speech.

"It is an honor and a privilege to be inducted into this Hall of Fame. Growing up here, these were my heroes. All the athletes in Sparta who came before me were my heroes. Everyone tells the story of me getting a picture made with a basketball right after I was born, what they don't tell you is it was one of the maroon and gray plastic basketballs that the cheerleaders throw out at the ball games. That is very fitting.

"Basketball is a team sport. You need people to set screens, put back in all your misses and to pass you the ball. It is amazing the talent we had here. To all of my teammates I ever played with here in White County, I want to say thank you for pushing me and making me a better player and making us a better team. Thank you for making it fun because basket-

ball, at the end of the day, is a game.

"I have had fantastic coaches in my life. No doubt, without their positive influence, I wouldn't be coaching today. The Palks in junior pro, Rhonda Girdley and David Whiteaker at Findlay, Carla Farley and Donny Haley in middle school, and Coach Shockley and Coach Holland in high school.

"The coach who taught me the most is, of course, my dad. He taught me fundamentals, and he pushed me to do my best. He did that without crossing a line. He did it, and I still wanted to do it myself.

"One of the best things about playing at White County High School was the memories we have. In the 90's, if you came here on a Tuesday or Friday, everybody was at our game. The pride in the community was so strong that we even took the show on the road. Our fans made our away games feel just like home games, and we had some classic games. We knew when we put on that uniform that we were going to be supported. We appreciated that and it made our journey even more special."

"Growing up as an assistant principal's daughter, I was always at sporting events whether it was on the road at football games or here in this gym watching basketball. I admired and looked up to those athletes. I have always had the love and pride for White County and the sports teams here. I was proud to wear the maroon and gray. My life has taken me a lot of places. I've met a lot of people. Who knows what the future holds, but this will always be my home. This is a tremendous honor. I am humbled and very grateful."





Kellie Jolly Harper speaks at YMCA fundraiser dinner

(April 2018) - On April 21, 2018, the White County Family YMCA held the 2nd Annual Dinner-Fundraiser, with Kellie Jolly Harper as the guest speaker.

Once Harper took the stage, she talked about her career and how she got to where she is today. Harper, who was a 1995 graduate of White County High School, is most known for her time at the University of Tennessee, where she won three straight national championships. Harper closed out her speech by saying, "If you take anything from tonight, I want you to remember that, to reach your goals, you have to dream it, believe it, and then achieve it."

YMCA. White County High School graduate Kellie Jolly Harper speaks at White County YMCA.



Baby Kellie



Toddler Kellie



