

Family business

A Q&A with Wildcat legend Shalin (Spani) Klein

- Jeff Chapman Contributing writer - Feb 28, 2026



Kansas State senior guard Shalin Spani, left, high-fives her teammates during the Wildcats' game against Missouri on Jan. 19, 2011, at Bramlage Coliseum. Spani had to miss the entire 2010-11 season because of a knee injury suffered during her junior year.

My friend Shalin Klein is back in Manhattan. I had the chance to visit with her, but it wasn't easy and it took a while to complete this conversation because she is **VERY BUSY!** Not just settling in and managing the family, but she's moving her mother-in-law to Manhattan and her house too, running a school and is truly actively immersed as the First Lady of K-State football.

I first met Shalin when she was about 4-5 years old at a wedding reception. The Spani family and other guests were at Blackjack Hills by St. George for the afternoon affair.

There seemed to be a lot of Spani's, and one guest, Greg Ostertag, who was playing basketball at KU. I don't recall the bride and groom or much detail, but my friends and I were bartending and serving food.

What I do recall is thinking, this family, especially Gary and Stacey, is such a wholesome bunch of really good people. And these tiny-long-dark-haired Spani girls are going to all be great at sports some day and hopefully go to K-State.

Chapman: Your family has an amazing history of athletics, starting with your grandfather, but also your parents and of course your sisters and cousin and the guy you married. Tell me about each of them briefly and what that is like to be raised in a family of superstars.

Klein: Oh man, football is basically all I knew from the start. My grandpa (Frosty Westering) coached for 40+ years at DIII Pacific Lutheran, won an NCAA DIII National Championship, is in the College Football Hall of Fame — essentially a legend... but most importantly, poured his heart and soul into every player and every family member. My dad (Gary Spani) as you know was a consensus American linebacker and college football hall of famer as well at KSU — leading tackler — he was the toughest competitor on the field...played with such abandon and fire. My sister Taber played basketball at Tennessee for the legendary Coach Pat Summit. Such a unique talent — 6'1'' sharpshooter and creator. Another sister, Tanis, played at DII Southwest Baptist and my other sister, Sajel, played at Avila University, where you work, in Kansas City. It was truly a way of life and part of so much of what we did... just didn't know any different!

Chapman: Can you throw a tight spiral?

Klein: You know it, of course I can!

Chapman: Have all five of you Spani sisters played basketball as a team against anyone?

Klein: Sadly no! However, the three oldest, Taber, Tanis and I were all on the same high school team. That was a fun year — and we won the national championship my junior year with three Spani's on the team, the most of us all together at once.



Kansas State's Shalin Spani goes up for a layup against a Washington State defender in their game Nov. 20, 2009, at Bramlage Coliseum.

Mercury file photo

Chapman: How and why did you choose to go to K-State?

Klein: KSU was my first offer as a freshman in high school — that meant a lot to me. I always wanted to follow my dad's footsteps... and it felt like home, from the moment I got on campus.

Chapman: What was your favorite part of being on the basketball team?

Klein: My teammates — we were so close... and we competed together and accomplished some amazing things because of that culture we had.

Chapman: Your teammates, that roster was loaded: Ashley Sweat, Nicole Ohlde, Brittany Chambers. Who was your toughest competition?

Klein: We had some stone-cold killers on those teams... there was never a dull moment in practice — Ashley was so hard to guard, she could shoot and beat you to the rim. Kimberly Dietz was lethal and so quick. Shalee Lehning was one of a kind — able to beat you in any facet. So, they were all so good.

Chapman: What was your relationship with the K-State coaching staff?

Klein: They were awesome. Especially Coach P (Deb Patterson) and (assistant coach Kamie) Ethridge. You know, Jeff, teachers, parents and coaches are often the most influential people in your life, and they were a huge part of challenging me and growing me into womanhood; they made me want to be the best by pushing me in so many ways, but all positive.

Chapman: I met you the second time when you were sidelined for an injury and we spoke at one of those First Methodist Church basement dinners about your outlook on sports, on life and you seemed to have the maturity of a 40-year-old with a game face, but you were accepting a different pathway. What was your takeaway from that time off the court?

Klein: (sighs) Oh — man, sometimes you don't see what God is doing in the grand scheme of things until much later in life. The lessons of patience, persistence, never giving up, and surrendering your plans for what God has, were just a few takeaways...it was the most defining, most challenging time, but truly built me and my character the most.

Chapman: Did you consider trying to get a medical redshirt and return?

Klein: Well, yes and no. You may not remember but I had multiple injuries, at least one set back every year. Always with knees, from my senior year in high school until the last one my junior year which ultimately ended my playing career. I arrived on campus as a freshman rehabbing a torn ACL and was able to play some that year. It was a special team and year as we won the Big 12 championship that season.

Chapman: Looking back, that was just a blip in your life, and your life as a business entrepreneur, educator, mother, and wife has changed that perspective I would imagine?

Klein: Yes! That is so accurate. Great question. Since I made the decision then to repair my knees for the long term, I am able to do more things with my kids. Running around with them and enjoying so many normal activities has been a blessing.

Chapman: So that's when you joined the staff?

Klein: Yes, Coach P gave me an opportunity to stick around the sport I loved and a sisterhood that was so important to me. So thankful for that chapter in my life. Albeit challenging and working through many emotions. That's when I met you at the church and those emotions you recall were real and raw and spot on.

Chapman: *Did you and your sisters feel pressure having all of the All-American athletes, your uncle, mom, grandfather, and father?*

Klein: Uh, yes. Haha! It was always A LOT of expectation...but I wouldn't have it any other way! As iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17) — it was always a challenge, and I hope I was always up for it!

Chapman: *This will be the third time for you and Collin to be on campus, what draws you back home to Manhattan?*

Klein: I think the journey of being a football family is so unique... you can go anywhere — and making each and every place “home” is so crucial. But Manhattan has such deep roots for both of us that it naturally has remained home regardless of our place in this football coaching journey.

The people are amazing — and we are honored to be here.

Chapman: *Once you get back and are all settled in (including moving your family) what kind of things will you personally get involved with in the community? Have you found a place to live yet? Are you joining anything or volunteering yet?*

Klein: Ha! There are so many avenues I dream of going down, however most importantly, I am so excited to get our family settled and our children excelling in school and friends and community. Next is the incredible opportunity to love on our football families and create a culture that is second to none here on the staff. Another special chance is to invest into the organization I founded, RISE Academy. We are growing and expanding and it's so exciting to see where that organization is going. I plan to join multiple boards and organizations to lend a hand in helping create as much incredible momentum that we can have! The challenge will be finding my best “yes's.”

Chapman: *Tell me more about RISE. Was this influenced by your upbringing and schooling from your father at his private school, Metro Academy, in Kansas City?*

Klein: For sure! There are pros and cons to every school situation and I'm a massive advocate for families finding school opportunities that they thrive in! So being able to curate an educational experience that takes the foundation and environment of traditional school with the flexibility and creativity of homeschooling was an exciting challenge to create!

Chapman: *This started in 2023 when you were here before and then you left; How, what, why?*

Klein: You know Collin was also homeschooled, so as our oldest was reaching the 3½ age, we started to think about how to educate our kids. As we explored some incredible schools and places, we landed on trying to find something that blended things and nothing like that existed in MHK. Hence the curation of our own!

Chapman: *Your children are obviously in the genetic line to be super athletes too, are you seeing any signs for the next family All-American(s)?*

Klein: I think Collin and I will always expect great effort and great attitudes — they aren't quite 5 stars just yet...so let's give it a couple years! (She laughs) hahaha!



Kansas State football head coach Collin Klein, his wife Shalin, and their four children: 7-year-old son Beric, 5-year-old son Rhett, 4-year-old son Trek and 3-year-old daughter Briar.

Courtesy photo

Chapman: Tell me about your kids.

Klein: Beric (7), Rhett (5), Trek (4), and Briar (3) ... 4 in 4½ years, we're crazy... but so blessed. Beric is such an amazing leader of the crew — intellectually gifted and a special kid. Rhett is my linebacker and athlete — get out of his way. Trek is a survivor — he has been fighting to beat his three older brothers since Day 1.

And then there is the princess... She runs the roost and has Collin wrapped! It's so precious. They're the best.

Chapman: Your father and your husband have a really special bond and friendship. I have read a couple of stories about it. Would you care to share your view?

Klein: Collin is my dad's first son-in-law. He has always been amazing with my family...and I know they share a common language in football — so cool to see them be able to have that unspoken connection that only those who walked where they did only know.

Chapman: But Shalin, they have a common bond in the protection, love and outlook of you and your future and that's really what the bond is, beyond two guys chatting football. You can't just conveniently take yourself out of the equation.

Klein: (pauses and voice cracks) For sure, I like that perspective! They both have a common language through football with X's and O's, but they also glorify the Lord and how they impact others... as well as an unspoken bond to protect me and our children is everything a girl could ever want. (complete delight in her voice)

Chapman: If you and Collin played one on one in hoops, who would win?

Klein: (Laughs.) Shooting, me; one-on-one, CK. That's the answer I usually give to the general public, but I am going to tell you Jeff, I would win. I would shoot him right out of the gym, just like back in college when we dated. He's got me in the physicality phase of the game, but it's all about points, Jeff, and I would beat his you-know-what on the scoreboard!

Chapman: Have you thought about the fact that you and Collin and your father have already made an impact on K-State, so anything going forward will only add to it? What do you hope happens next?

Klein: I hope everyone feels a few different things when you think of the Kleins and K-State and impact. I want them to unmistakably know we will outwork anyone.

Anytime. Anywhere. We will give our heart and soul to this place while taking it to heights it's never been. Our hopes and dreams are big...but ultimately, I hope people feel the light and love of Jesus through everything we are doing. He is the one who truly wrote this story in coming back home, so it's all in his hands!

Manhattan Mercury – February 28, 2026 https://themercury.com/features/a-q-a-with-wildcat-legend-shalin-spani-klein/article_7f861e48-9e06-41a9-a9d1-17c5d4c4dba9.html

About Shalin's Basketball Career: (According to K-State Athletics)

#23 Shalin Bree Spani (Klein)...Born July 20, 1988, in Independence, Mo... Daughter of Gary and Stacey Spani... Has four sisters, Taber, Tanis, Sajel, and Taris... Father, Gary, was an All-American in football at Kansas State and was inducted into the College Football and Kansas State Halls of Fame... He also played for the Kansas City Chiefs... Shalin received her degree in journalism and mass communications with a focus on public relations.

- **2010-11 Academic All-Big 12 first team – Did not play due to injury.**
- **2009-10 Academic All-Big 12 first team - Suffered a torn ACL in a March practice... Saw action in a career-high 28 games and started five... Averaged 17.2 minutes per game, including a career-high 38 minutes against Indiana State**
- **2008-09 Academic All-Big 12 first team - Finished the season with career-highs in points per game (3.9, 98 points), rebounds per game (1.8 45 rebounds), field goals made and attempted (28-of-8), three-point field goals made and attempted (21-of-68) and free throws made and attempted (21-of-24)... Played in a career-high 25 games and 348 minutes (13.9 per game)... Season ended by knee injury...**
- **2007-08 - Played in 24 games during her debut season in a Wildcat uniform, averaging 9.0 minutes... Recorded 1.5 points per game and 1.2 rebounds per game... Shot .387 from the field (12-of-31), including .364 from the three-point line (8-of-22).**
- **Six-time Big 12 Commissioner's Honor Roll selection**

HIGH SCHOOL CAREER - Four-year letterwinner and starter for coach Gary Spani at Metro Academy...Shalin led Metro Academy to the NCHBC National Championship her junior year...A three-time NCHBC All-American...She earned 2005 Street & Smith's High School All-American honorable mention in 2006... 2006 McDonald's High School All-American nominee... 2004 Miss Basketball Showcase All-American...Also selected first team all-state in 2006 and first team all-region in 2004 and 2005...Averaged 24.0 points, 8.9 rebounds, 4.1 assists and 4.5 steals per game as a junior...She holds school records in career points (2,467), career three-point shots (248), career field goal percentage (.513), career three-point field goal percentage (.390), points in a season (936), three-point field goals in a season (118), points in a game (43), rebounds in a game (18) and three-point field goals in a game (12)...Also holds the state of Kansas record for three-point shots made in a game (12)...2006 NCHBS National Tournament MVP...2006 Missouri Regional State Championship MVP...2005 5-State Regional MVP... Two-time NCHBS National Tournament leading scorer... 2005 Blue-Star all-star...Missouri Valley AAU Player of the Year...Spani Maintained an impressive 4.00 grade-point average.