

Missy Decker-Heidrick, Jay Heidrick talk about life during and after K-State

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Missy Decker Heidrick dribbles against an opponent during her Kansas State career.



Jay Heidrick looks to pass the ball during his career at Kansas State.

- Photos courtesy of K-State Athletics

Both former K-State basketball athletes and now a married couple, raising a family in Olathe, Kansas, my good friends Missy and Jay Heidrick sat down together for a conversation about their time wearing purple. (Missy 1993-1997) (Jay 1997-1999)

CHAPMAN: Missy and Jay, let's start this off with a bang. When you two play each other 1 on 1, who is better? Can I guess she is quicker and you have the clear height advantage? (Both look at each other and are awaiting for the other to respond, and then like all questions from here forward, it's a very friendly but spirited competition for the ultimate correct answer.) Both of them secretly nodding to me in confirmation after the other speaks.

JAY: You might think that, but...

MISSY: But no, He is a better athlete, and I have better skills. (Jay nods in agreement)

JAY: We really don't play against each other very often, we don't make time, but we should.

MISSY: He tends to be more instinctive and I am a much better ball handler. I don't think we keep score, which is probably good.

CHAPMAN: How did you two meet?

MISSY: You wanna take this one? There are different

JAY: Yea, different ideas about how this really happened. Two people take credit for introducing us, but it all kinda happened at the same time.

MISSY: I was out with my girlfriends from the team at Lucky's in Aggieville. I was starting my fifth year to finish my degree and working as an intern for athletics.

JAY: I was with some of my friends from the team just out to meet people. I told someone I was looking for a girlfriend, and she pointed to this blonde across the room.

It was the Fall of '97. I just transferred from Barton Community College to K-State and we were friends with other basketball players like Brit Jacobson and Josh Reid.

MISSY: Also now married.

JAY: So I walked right up to her, introduced myself and apparently we talked for three hours.

CHAPMAN: Let me jump in here, so it was love at first sight, you dated and got married?

MISSY and JAY: Not Exactly. (in unison)

JAY: She blew me off at least three more times and I nearly gave up.

CHAPMAN: So how long before you went to Beloit, Missy?

MISSY: Oh, right away, like 14 days later. But were engaged in March.

JAY: Engagement, funny story, it was a scavenger hunt and many of our teammates and friends were there.

CHAPMAN: Missy what were you doing as an intern?

MISSY: I was doing an internship in sports marketing for K-State Athletics. I was loving the job, killing it. I was hired after I graduated that spring to be the assistant marketing director and was making a whopping \$22,000 with benefits and thought about a long term career in sports marketing.

CHAPMAN: Jay, let's talk about how you were recruited to K-State:

JAY: I wasn't. I was at Barton County and I had 5-6 offers to other schools, but was not sure if I was continuing as a player or not, so I walked on at K-State.

CHAPMAN: Jay, You were on the last team to have back to back 20 win seasons before Bob Huggins arrived. What was it like to be a bench player?

JAY: It's hard. After being a starter for most of my life, the time at K-State was basically the end of my career and I knew that going in. I embraced the role as being on the scout team and knowing not everyone can be a superstar.

CHAPMAN: What was playing for Tom Asbury like?

JAY: At the age of 20-21 things were frustrating, but now looking back, I chalk a lot of it up to just being young and dumb. Coach Asbury had his strong and weak points. I loved basketball, so I was just happy to be in uniform.

CHAPMAN: Missy, How were you recruited to K-State?

MISSY: My dad was a high school coach in Minnesota, so the summer of my sophomore year of high school I started attending the Blue Star recruiting camps in Terre Haute, (Indiana State U.) which was 4-5 days of games and drills. The coaches just watched us. I attended three years, which was my foray into getting seen, since there was no AAU in Minnesota at the time. I was looked at by 100's of coaches, but I narrowed it down to places I would like to play and get a great education. My sister played at Iowa State and was twice named Miss Basketball in Minnesota during her high school career. She went to Iowa State, loved Ames and that was my exposure to the Big 8 and I loved it. Loved the small college town. I visited a football game in the fall of 1992 in Manhattan, followed by a meeting in Krause and Wefald's offices, and that was it. I felt like I would be happy there, that it was going to be my own deal and not have to follow in my sister's footsteps.

CHAPMAN: What was it like playing for Susan Yow?

MISSY: Coach Yow and her staff recruited me, but they left for UNC-Charlotte in the spring and K-State hired Brian Agler. Agler was my coach in just one phone call, but I

felt like I wanted to stay at K-State, it was about the school for me, not the coach. I did also look at Bradley, LaSalle, Clemson, Creighton and Toledo. I was very close to going to Toledo.

CHAPMAN: What were Yow and Agler like in comparison?

MISSY: Susan and Brian were two very different experiences. Brian was hard-nosed, great XO's coach, very demanding and not all could handle it. I learned a lot, I was stubborn, so I wasn't going to be broken. For me personally, I was fortunate to get to play, but had to work really hard to earn it. Brian and I had a mutual understanding. He could count on me for 100% effort and I would get my chances.

CHAPMAN: His departure was both sudden and surprising:

MISSY: I was unaware of all of the off-court stuff that led to his downfall until afterwards, but the fact is there was an unhealthy environment and thankfully Max Urick helped us out of a very difficult time. There was a core group of strong women that endured the Yow-Agler-Hartman-Patterson transitional chaos.

CHAPMAN: Tell me about experiences with Coach Jack Hartman?

MISSY: It was incredible. Coach Hartman did T.V. and had observed our practices and so one day he walks in just two hours before our game with him as our new coach. Coach Hartman had so much knowledge and several players found immediate confidence under Jack. We had all heard legendary horror stories about his feelings for women's basketball, however, nobody else, but Jack Hartman could have stepped in and done it so easily and without missing a beat.

CHAPMAN: Did he make you watch old men's game film?

MISSY: Yes! Haha, thus why we changed it up to the 2-3 zone.

CHAPMAN: Many have wondered about the inside stories of him coaching the ladies team and if it was torture:

MISSY: I have the best story: We had MARATHON practices with Agler. Clearly exceeding rules — part of why we were in trouble — but Coach Hartman was different. One day the whole team was through warm-ups and shoot around, and Jack looks at his watch, and says, “Get outta here. You’re good for today. I’ve got a tee time in a few. Get something to eat, take care of your homework.” It was awesome. He brought in solid positivity that was so very much needed by us all.

CHAPMAN: Then, in walks Patterson:

MISSY: Deb was from the respected SEC, Vanderbilt and made an immediate impact. She brought in real resources to the program. Travel budgets, gear... In the past we wore the same shoes all season, but Deb made outreach and visibility happen and evened the playing field for the women’s program. Plus it was the first season of the Big 12 Conference, and she gave us the tools and then the opportunity to return to the NCAA Tourney for the first time in 10 years. We made the championship game in the Big 12 Tournament. Deb, Kami Etheridge, Sue Sarafini... they helped to bring back pride to KSU women’s Basketball.

CHAPMAN: So you both ended up in Lawrence after Manhattan:

JAY: Full disclosure. I grew up a diehard KU fan, but that obviously changed when I went to K-State. I didn’t buy tickets my first year and people who went to KU were shocked. They asked “Have you ever been to a game in Allen Fieldhouse?” I told them I had made one game each of the past two years and had great seats.

MISSY: I was the assistant director of promotions for KU athletics for 2 years.

CHAPMAN: How do you feel about former athletes working in athletics versus non-athletes?

MISSY: I always felt like I understood the student athlete needs and was able to connect that type of promotion and support to what I was doing. KU was a great environment for that.

CHAPMAN: What were some of the highlights of your KU time?

MISSY: Well it was in the Late Night with Roy Williams hay day — my first week there was Late Night so that was a great introduction to the job. During my time at KU the Oklahoma State plane crash occurred and touched people throughout the conference especially. I realized people like Roy Williams and Bob Fredrick were wonderful humans with ultimate class. Such great professionals at their business. You know, you board a bus or a plane every day and you are thinking about the game, you are not considering anything else. I learned so much from Dr. Bob and from working for Max Urick too, things I carry with me today. Coach Williams and I talked after that tragedy, both realizing how fortunate you are to be able to be a student-athlete and/or coach and have those bonds with others.

CHAPMAN: Jay, what is it like transitioning from athlete to being in a professional career?

JAY: Athletics taught me so much that I use every day in my profession. It's being competitive. It's accepting roles. It's about looking at a seemingly impossible task and knowing it can be done. But most of all, it's about the relationships. If I go to a two week trial, I feel the same bonds with my trial team as I did with the guys from K-State. Those relationships are what make anything special.

CHAPMAN: Missy, you're doing Television for K-State women's hoops, what's that like?

MISSY: It's a lot of fun. I got the opportunity originally being asked to be a color analyst on the radio for a few games for KU while I was in Lawrence, and then was asked by the K-State Sports Network to be a color analyst on radio 25-30 games a year, then television opportunities followed and I took them.

CHAPMAN: Was this something you always wanted to do? You seem like a natural:

MISSY: It started as something I did in addition to my job. Today, as a mom, the flexibility to change up my schedule is great so the timing was good for me. I wanted to somehow stay involved in athletics and basketball. Since I know the system and being a coaches' kid, it makes it natural for me . It's exciting for a female to do it, so I just kinda feel like I should be there.

CHAPMAN: Jay, your take on K-State men's basketball today and Bruce Weber?

JAY: I really like Bruce Weber personally from what I know of him. He has a lot of challenges in front of him and if he's the guy to lead us past them, great. But at the same time, I want the administration, staff, fans, students to hold the program to a high standard of what it can be. We have to create a culture that demands and expects success. Just ask that silver haired guy sitting in the Vanier complex. The success or failure is directly tied to the culture created by the players, staff, administration and fans. You can't have greatness unless it's demanded and expected. And that is true for anything in life. You have to create a culture that demands and expects success. Just ask that silver haired guy sitting in the Vanier complex. The success or failure is directly tied to the culture created by the players, staff, administration and fans. You can't have greatness unless it's demanded and expected. And that is true for anything in life.

CHAPMAN: Jay, you're a big time corporate attorney now:

JAY: I don't know about "big time" but I am an attorney at Polsinelli. I do intellectual property litigation all over the country. Litigation follows the Ricky Bobby rule: "If you ain't first, you're last". In my job you either win or lose. No second place medals.

CHAPMAN: Missy, give me a quick summary of Wildcat women's basketball today and Coach Mittie?

MISSY: Coach Mittie is like lightning in a bottle. Jeff is great because of his recent history and just what KSU needed at the time. He has national recruiting presence, which has added new credibility to the program. He came to Manhattan because of the people, resources and great fans. I am excited about what he can do here and the trajectory of the program.

CHAPMAN: Tell me about Jay the athlete:

MISSY: Jay is smart. He is a lefty, has a nice shot and good form. He was a post player in high school and in college had to transition into a new role. He worked very hard to get to play. Ball handling was not his forte, but he was never afraid to play in the paint.

CHAPMAN: Tell me about the kids:

MISSY and JAY: Molly is our oldest, She is 13. She is really into softball, a sport neither Jay or I know much about, she's a great kid! William is 5. He is ALL BOY! She's right, they are incredible kids despite my deficiencies. Molly is big into softball and guitar and Will is into Power Rangers and karate.