

The Road to Olympus

U.S. Women's Hockey Coach Katey Stone '89 Goes for Gold in Sochi

Thursday, February 20, 2014

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It's the journey and the destination for U.S women's Olympic hockey coach Katey Stone '89.

Wildcat Nation will have plenty to cheer about during this month's Winter Olympics games: Seven UNH alumni will be representing Team U.S.A in Sochi. Joining Katey Stone '89 and Kacey Bellamy '08 on the ice will be men's hockey standout (and Toronto Maple Leaf) James Van Riemsdyk '09 and Paralympic sled hockey player Taylor Chace '11. On the slopes, alpine skier Leanne Smith '07 and monoskiers Tyler Walker '08 and Laurie Stephens '07 will seek to bring some gold to the blue and white.

Conversations with Katey Stone '89 about her job — head coach for Harvard women's ice hockey on hiatus to coach the U.S. women's Olympic hockey team — sparkle with words like “fun,” “joy,” “excitement.” But make no mistake: Stone is all business. At Harvard since 1993, she has amassed more wins than any other coach in Division I women's hockey. She's coached nine former Olympians and six winners of the Patty Kazmaier Memorial Award, the highest honor in women's college hockey. Now, she's set her sights squarely on gold at Sochi. It's a natural goal, but also a lofty one. If she succeeds, her team will be the first to stand atop the podium since the 1998 squad prevailed in Nagano, Japan.

Stone's Olympic journey began in 2012, when she was named the first-ever female coach of the U.S. women's hockey team. It took her to Lake Placid, where in June 2013 the U.S. national team of 44 became the Olympic team of 25, through months of training in Bedford, Mass., and to a winter schedule that saw the team ping-ponging across the nation's northern border for repeated games against its Canadian counterpart. Earlier this month, she and her ultimate 21 players boarded a plane for Russia for their final push for the gold.

“To be a part of the Olympics, representing your country, it's an incredible honor,” she says. “I'm humbled by the opportunity,”

Stone's coaching philosophy, while ever evolving, stems from her time at UNH, when she skated for coach Russ McCurdy. “He stressed doing the little things well because they were the most important,” she says. Coaching the Olympic team — a group that includes former Wildcat Kacey Bellamy '08 — bears more similarities than differences to coaching a college team, Stone says, although the stakes are, of course, far higher. There's also the challenge of “coaching through the egos” to achieve cohesion among players who have always been stars.

Yet the core motivation Stone aims to instill in her Olympians is the same she stresses to her Harvard skaters: That they're capable of far more than they believe. “I love when the light goes on and they realize they can do so much more,” she says.

Coaching is in Stone's blood. She grew up in Watertown, Conn., in the shadow of the Taft School, where her father coached and was athletic director for decades. Her brother Mike is head baseball coach at the University of Massachusetts, and sister Kelly '79 and brother Jim are athletic directors at independent schools.

Stone followed Kelly to UNH, where she majored in physical education and was a standout player in not only hockey but also lacrosse. So positive was her own experience of athletic double-dipping — more common in the 1980s than today, but never widely accepted at Division I schools — that she allows her Harvard athletes to

pursue a second sport. She expresses guarded dismay that hockey, like many sports, has grown to demand year-round, narrow-focused effort. “There’s not a female hockey player or lacrosse player who’s going to make a million dollars playing the sport, so I say do what you want for as long as you can,” she says.

Stone says that it’s the fun, as much as the skills and drills and team dynamics, that could put Team USA back atop the Olympic podium. “If kids love what they’re doing,” she says, “they’re going to play their best.”

Originally published by:

UNH Today

GLOBAL REACH



University of New Hampshire

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The stories are written by the staff of [UNH Communications and Public Affairs](#).

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