



Celebrating 50 Years of Title IX

50 For 50:

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KSHSAA

By Rick Peterson

Former Shawnee Heights multi-sport star and Washburn University Hall of Famer Dani (McHenry) Schmidt was never shy about trying any sport and will be forever grateful she had that opportunity.

Title IX, which is marking its 50th anniversary during the 2021-22 school year, opened doors for female athletes across the United States and Schmidt took full advantage, participating in soccer, softball, volleyball and basketball growing up.

By the time Schmidt entered Shawnee Heights High School in the late 1990s, Title IX had been in effect for some 26 years and she said she had plenty of options to further her skills.

“I would honestly say that where I fell into it, I never felt like we were second to boys

sports or that there wasn't an opportunity," Schmidt said. "If I wanted to do something, I felt like I was afforded the opportunity.

"Obviously, there was a lot of hard work and all of that before me to get to that point by the women who started Title IX and got things up and running, and because of all their hard work I never felt like I was at a disadvantage by being a female or that I couldn't go do something if it was really something I wanted to go do."

Schmidt's father, Ron McHenry, is the long-time women's basketball coach at Washburn University, coaching the Ichabods to the 2005 NCAA Division II national championship, and Dani said her father was very good about encouraging her and her siblings' athletic endeavors without pressuring them.

Dani's younger sister, Sami, is the head volleyball coach at Shawnee Heights, while her younger brother, Ronnie, is Washburn's head men's golf coach.

"My dad obviously wanted to provide us opportunities, but I never had to have a conversation with him where I was like, 'You're making me do something that I don't want to do,' " Schmidt said. "And I think he would have been OK with that if it ever got to that point.

"He was very realistic, and he had coached kids for a long time so he kind of knew what you had potential in and would kind of nudge you in that direction, but he was never over the top in terms of me not wanting to do something and being forced to do it. I never specialized and it was never like, 'You're going to have to pick one,' or any of that. I was able to do it all."

Schmidt eventually narrowed her focus to volleyball and basketball, leading Shawnee Heights to back-to-back Class 5A state volleyball championships in 1999 and 2000 while also starring for the T-Birds' basketball team.

After a stint with University of Kansas volleyball team, Schmidt transferred to Washburn, where she continued to be a multi-sport athlete.

A three-time All-MIAA pick, Schmidt became the first AVCA All-American in Washburn history when she earned honorable mention in 2003. She was a third-team pick in 2004 and finished her career with 1,491 kills while leading WU to its first NCAA Tournament appearance in 2002.



Photos courtesy of Washburn Athletics.

McHenry also played basketball under her father for four years, playing on WU's national championship team and helping Washburn win four MIAA regular season titles.

At a time when many athletes are encouraged to specialize at a young age, McHenry is a firm believer in the benefits of playing multiple sports, at least through high school.

"I think it 100 percent helped me," she said. "I don't ever see a negative, honestly, with kids trying multiple sports. Usually, what specialization turns into is that's what you're best at, but I have young kids now and that sport may not be what your body grows in to and it may not be what you eventually like in five years.

"I have a hard time with making kids pick that (one sport) at a young age and that doesn't even get into the injuries and overworking the body. Getting to play more than one sport you usually have a different group of kids, and you use different body skills and movements. I was very fortunate that I was able to do that."

Schmidt and her husband, Jesse, who was also a standout athlete at Shawnee Heights and Washburn, are the parents of three sons and Dani said they do their best to make sure the children get the same opportunities they had to experience everything sports has to offer.

"They play soccer and they play baseball, basketball and flag football," Schmidt said. "We're kind of letting them try it all and, honestly, if you ask them, they'll change their favorite sport with whatever season it is, and I'm fine with that."

We are grateful to partner with WIN for KC, an organization with the mission to empower the lives of girls and women by advocating and promoting the lifetime value of sports through opportunities for participation and leadership development. WIN for KC and the KSHSAA believe involvement in activities and sports lay the ground work for supporting well-rounded citizens in our communities and beyond. For more on WIN for KC visit: <https://www.sportkc.org/win-for-kc>