



Mekia Valentine

Ms. Valentine passed away on March 26, 2020.

* Story credit to Santa Barbara News-Press Writer, Mark Patton *

Ms. Valentine, a 6-foot-4 transfer from Wake Forest, was the first player Lindsay Gottlieb recruited when she succeeded Mark French as the Gauchos' coach 12 years ago. The 6-foot-4 center had been ranked as the nation's No. 23 recruit and third-best power forward by Full Court Press while coming out of high school in Greensboro, N.C. She made the ACC All-Freshman Team in 2007 while averaging 5.9 points and 4.7 rebounds with 50 blocked shots, the second-most in Wake Forest history. She followed that up with averages of 6.0 points and 4.8 rebounds with 44 blocks during her sophomore year.

Gottlieb was ecstatic when Ms. Valentine opted to transfer to UCSB. "Whatever points or rebounds she accumulates, that will never tell the story of Mekiya Valentine, her competitiveness, and what she brings to the table," she said. "Above all else, she is an absolutely outstanding young woman."

Ms. Valentine redshirted during the 2008-09 season and then led UCSB to a 19-12 record and WNIT berth as a junior in 2009-10, averaging 12.3 points and 9.7 rebounds. Her 4.0 blocks per game set a school record and ranked third in the nation. She received second-team All-Big West Conference honors and was also voted to the Big West All-Tournament team. She also made second-team all-league as a senior while averaging a double-double of 11.1 points and 11.2 rebounds with 3.7 blocks. Her 347 rebounds that season set a school record. That mark was broken this year by Gaucho freshman Ila Lane, after getting 378 rebounds for an NCAA-best average of 13.0 per game. Ms. Valentine still holds UCSB records for career rebound average (10.5 per game), blocks in a game (11), blocks in a season (120), and field-goal percentage in both a season (.620) and career (.595).

The New York Liberty selected her in the third round of the 2011 WNBA Draft – the first Gaucho chosen since the Minnesota Lynx picked Kristen Mann in the first round in 2005. She opted to go overseas, however, and spent the next four years playing professional basketball in Israel, Poland, Romania and Germany.

Ms. Valentine returned to Santa Barbara after her retirement from basketball and studied nursing at SBCC. She also worked as a human resources assistant for a local computer software company.