

FEATURED PROFILE

Virginian to represent the Commonwealth and Team USA in Paris

Coach Spotlight

by Chris Moody



From the halls of a small Virginia high school to the bright lights of Paris, Coach Delethea Quarles has traveled an amazing route. Her journey hits its pinnacle in early August when she will be one of the coaches for Team USA track and field at the Olympics in Paris.

Quarles, known universally as Coach Dee, will coach the women's jumping events and the heptathlon.

Quarles, now the director of track and field at James Madison University, this is her first chance to be on the Team USA coaching staff at the Olympics, although she has coached the United States' team in other international events, including serving as head women's coach in IAAF World Championships in Beijing in 2015.

Earning a spot as a coach for TeamUSA is a high-pressure, performance based selection akin to making the team as an athlete. It starts with application to be a coach for junior events and lower-tier international meets. In those roles, Coach Dee has traveled to Russia, Qatar, South Korea, Canada and Brazil. Along the way, she made the grade that allowed her to remain on the international staff.

"You're graded on performance," she said. "You have to get a certain grade to be able to apply again. It's a great time but a high-pressure time."

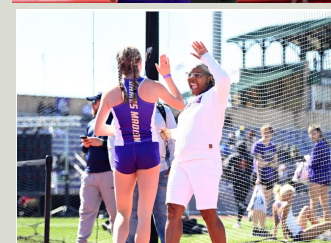
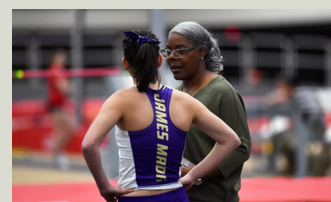
Because most athletes being their personal coaches, the team coach is less an instructor and more of a logistics expert. In addition to meetings, events, schedules and a thousand other items to coordinate for the athletes, Coach Dee has to be knowledgeable about an event to be an instructional coach if a situation arises where a personal coach is not available. More important, she has to be closely watching the competition in case a protest needs to be filed on behalf of an American athlete.

"My eyes are to be on my events in case there's a protest," she says. "We have to communicate if we need to go to protest table; you only have a certain amount of time. A lot of technical things related to fairness are things we look out for especially. Plus we are there to promote team unity. The men and women operate as one team. We do everything we can for our athletes to get on the podium."

In 2016, Coach Dee went to the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro as the personal coach for high jumper Jeannelle Scheper, a national champion at South Carolina who represented St. Lucia at the Rio Games.

For Quarles, coaching the heptathlon is a natural. She excelled in the event in her days as a college athlete, earning all-American status three times, including as a freshman at Campbell University, then twice at Liberty University.

A Virginia native who grew up in Covington, Quarles was a multi-event athlete for Alleghany



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High School, but high school meets did not have a heptathlon. Brant Tolsma, a coach at Campbell University, recognized that Quarles had the ability in multiple events to be a strong heptathlete.

“My college coach recruited me with a handwritten letter, where he told me what the heptathlon was and said I had done a lot of those events in high school and I’d be good at it,” Coach Dee says. “He said I could be all-American as a freshman. I went there and a lot of what he predicted came true.”

Tolsma, left Campbell for Liberty when the women’s program was getting started under head coach Ron Hopkins. Quarles followed Tolsma to Liberty, grateful for the chance to compete closer to her hometown. She was so successful that she was inducted into the Liberty University Athletics Hall of Fame.

“It’s a whole different place from my time. It’s humbling to walk on campus,” Quarles says.

Coming home is special to Coach Dee. After graduating from LU, she spent eight years on its coaching staff, she went to work on the staff at the University of South Carolina where she spent 25 successful years coaching 50 all-Americans and two national champions in jumps, including Scheper, and multisport events.

In 2022, she got the call to come home again, returning to Virginia as the track and field director at JMU.

“It’s special to come home,” Coach Dee says. “You’re home and people know you. They’ve known you since you were young. They are all invested in your success.”

And now the entire country is invested. Her jacket isn’t about a state or a university. It says “USA.”



GAMES THROUGH THE YEARS

