

Meet
Leah Stiegler
VAS Board Member



by: Chris Moody, VAS Contributor

Madam Chairman of the Board of Directors at Virginia Amateur Sports is climbing the legal ladder with a passion for youth sports.

For the first time in six years, Leah Stiegler is not coaching a girls' youth basketball team this season.

That disappoints her, but it's understandable given the uncertainty of youth leagues being up and running in a pandemic. Additionally, after coaching a girls' youth team in Roanoke since arriving in the Star City after her 2015 graduation from the University of Richmond Law School, Stiegler recently moved to Richmond to expand the office of her firm, Woods Rogers Attorneys at Law.

Despite the interruption in her youth coaching efforts, coaching girls' basketball is a passion for Stiegler, a 30-year-old attorney who originally hails from Northern Virginia. She misses the chance to coach kids.

Her passion for sports made and natural altruism made her a perfect candidate for the board when a seat was open in 2018. In 2020 Stiegler was selected to chair the VAS board.

In addition to coaching, Stieger loves playing basketball, having played AAU from age 7 through high school. She's also a devoted Hokie fan, an obvious passion for the 2012 Virginia Tech grad.

"Once I learned so much of Virginia Amateur Sports is focused on youth sports, it seemed like a fit," Stiegler said.

For Stiegler, coaching is more than trying to educate girls on the finer points of the 3-2 zone. She wants to instill the lessons she received from sports – lessons that help her succeed as a professional attorney every day.

"Sports are very much my discipline in life. Sports teach about having a work ethic, discipline, endurance. You set goals," she said. "Without knowing it, sports really directed me to certain pathways: whether it's people you meet, people you know, seeing the world and going to different parts of the country, that's all part of the benefit you can get.

“Every lesson you learn in basketball, like you’re not always going to win or you have to practice until you get perfect. That’s what you learn,” she said. “If I hadn’t had sports, I wouldn’t have the great foundation I had to jump start my legal career.”

There’s pressure in taking a shot with a game on the line and an entire arena watching. Just like there’s pressure in a courtroom.

“In the courtroom, you have clients watching, maybe a jury watching. The judge might be changing direction, opposing council is objecting, and you have to handle all that, be prepared for that. You learn how to deal with a change in direction from sports,” Stiegler said.

One of the areas Stiegler wants to focus on is equity – to continue building on scholarships, as well as the sports and education clinics for low income youth to be more involved with the Commonwealth Games and VAS events. “We can look to increase our efforts in providing at-risk youth opportunities to compete. Our current community grant is a great example of having our keynote speaker (often an Olympian) motivate, inspire and tell their story to a large group of area youth.” Bringing more competitors to the Commonwealth Games and other VAS events benefits the organization, its partners and stakeholders. Stiegler wants to raise awareness of the games as well as increase opportunities for all Virginians to compete.

Stiegler’s move to Richmond could help VAS expand into central Virginia. She will be looking to spread the word of the VAS mission and the Commonwealth Games, looking to increase participation from the eastern part of Virginia.

“We would really like to have things happening all over the state,” Stiegler said. “Covid has put so many things on hold. We have no long range planning right now and we’re creating contingency plans. Hopefully as the vaccine is more present we’ll be able to operate the Games as normal.”