

Team Mom: CEU player juggling school, hoops, hubby — and 6 kids

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Deseret Morning News

Published: February 1, 2008

PRICE — Alisa Morley's husband has a fun idea he wants to pull off at one of her final home basketball games. Jedd Morley envisions their extended families, about 50 strong, cheering like crazy in the College of Eastern Utah's gym while wearing gold T-shirts emblazoned with the Karl Malone-inspired phrase: "The Morley Mama delivers."

Has she ever — and in more ways than one.

Between her freshman and sophomore seasons, Morley personally delivered five starters — and added a sixth-man through adoption — into her team at home. Some break. While many players honed jump shots and defensive skills, this 6-foot-2 player worked on becoming a mother of six.

By the way, Morley's offseason — if you can call it that — lasted 13 years.

Morley, now a 32-year-old CEU sophomore, first played at the college as a freshman in 1993-94. While draining 3-pointers and contributing to the Golden Eagles' success that season, she also met, dated and became engaged to her future husband. The former Alisa Chamberlain, an all-state athlete from San Juan High in Blanding, married Jedd and they began building a family that year.

Since being pregnant and battling for rebounds don't exactly mix, they figured Morley's college basketball career was over.

Turns out, it was just on a more-than-a-decade-long motherhood timeout as she raised Isaac (12), Max (11), Sara (10), Ryan (8), Diana (5) and Joseph, the 3-year-old who dashed onto the court during a recent CEU game in an effort to join his mommy on the bench.

The basketball bug started creating a small hoops fever inside of Morley last year when she occasionally assisted longtime CEU coach Dave Paur with his women's team. Her priority was to provide motivation. Morley tried to inspire players by helping them realize "they could do anything they believed that they could do."

Little did she know one of the inspired players would be herself. Morley decided to heed her own advice after the fact that she had another year of eligibility left "just came up" in a casual conversation.

Hmmm. What if? Nah. On second thought, could, should, hmmm ...

"It was one of those things you talk about and you're just laughing about it ... " she says. "I got thinking about it and thought, 'Well, why not?'"

Her old coach and husband might have laughed a bit with Morley, but Jedd encouraged her and Paur offered her a scholarship. The coach, knowing the NJCAA doesn't have time or age restrictions for student-athletes to finish out their eligibility, also gave her his best Gen. George Patton speech, telling Morley: "When you have your grandkids on your lap (in 20 years), you can tell them what you did and it's quite the story."

After a lot of butterflies and even more prayers, she decided to put herself back in the game.

"I just felt like it was a good opportunity — I could practice what I preach," Morley says. "It's been an amazing experience. You don't think you can go back and do something like this."

Making the difficult decision to return from the sidelines was the easy part. To get her back into playing shape, the Morleys trained for and competed in a triathlon last summer. As if that weren't enough punishment, she also joined Jedd in early-morning pickup games with guys at their church several times a week. She also started lifting weights.

The real agony — not counting final exams — came when the basketball practices and season started. It's been an ongoing challenge for the woman from Generation X to try to keep up with the teenagers from Generation Text. Then there are the diapers to change, meals to make, children to taxi around, housework, homework, kids' basketball games, practices, church, etc.

"It's got to be hard," Paur says.

Tell Morley about it.

"It's not always easy," she says. "In fact, it's hard to come and practice with the girls because I'm tired and I have to play through pain — a lot more than before.

"To me, it was easy to play before as far as my body and everything. I've had to work a lot harder to play. But it's really rewarding — probably more rewarding now than it was."

Ask how she manages to do it all — being a full-time student, a full-time-and-then-some mom and wife, a college basketball player while also keeping up with church responsibilities — and the grateful Morley's answer sounds like an Academy Awards acceptance speech.

First off, she thanks God for loving her, lifting her and watching over her kids while she's gone, especially on road trips when she really worries.

"I feel like Heavenly Father has just really blessed me to be able to do this," she says.

Morley also thanks her "very, very supportive" husband and family, including her accommodating mom and her chore-helping kids who have "stepped up." She thanks friends and baby-sitters for bending over backward, coaches for the opportunity, for their time and for being like fathers to the young players. She thanks teammates for their friendship and acceptance, the community for its mostly positive support, the school for helping her get on track for a desired bachelors degree, and "awesome" professors — even with, she says, "a college algebra class that's killing me."

She is also quite appreciative of how the school allows her to take one child or Jedd with her on road trips. By the end of the season, her entire family will have traveled with the Golden Eagles to away games.

Still, the road trips test both parents. That's one part of the experience they won't miss.

"Away games are tough," says Jedd, an LDS Church facilities manager. "Just having to take care of all the responsibilities I know what it's like to be a single parent."

"You feel like you don't have the control when you're away," says Morley, the mother hen. "You're still a mom and you want them to be safe."

As for her on-court performance, Morley gets frustrated sometimes. Her body doesn't quite move like it used to. Her shot — in games, at least — isn't quite as lethal as it once was. She gets more nervous on the court. She was a starting shooting guard; now, she's a backup center. Paur tries to keep her spirits up and reminds her that many competitive athletes retire at her age for a good reason — life speeds up, legs slow down.

"In some ways, it's kind of embarrassing. I'm not what I used to be," she says. "It still feels good. I don't think they expect me to be the superstar."

Nevertheless, Paur credits Morley, whom he calls "a tremendous shooter," for working her way into CEU's rotation. She has played in every game, with a highlight being her 13-point performance with three 3-pointers in a win over Glendale Community College. Overall, she is averaging 2.8 points, 2.0 rebounds and six minutes of playing time.

"Which is about six minutes more than I thought she would get," Paur admits, adding that he isn't doing her any favors.

"She asked me about it and I said, 'You earned it.'"

"I didn't expect to get a lot of playing time," she says. "I hoped to contribute if not on the floor (then) on the bench. ... I just hope I'm helping the team."

With a built-in cheering section, she has certainly been good for attendance.

"It's kind of fun to look to see my husband's there supporting me and my kids," she says. "They like seeing that their mom is doing something that is a little bit different and it's hard and they can see that I'm following through."

Though she might not lead CEU to a championship or earn MVP honors, Morley is optimistic others can learn from her experience. She wants to give "people hope that they can do things that are hard" and that "they can be motivated to do things that will better their life."

The WNBA probably isn't in her future, but Paur believes her story will provide inspiration for years to come.

Who knows, maybe she'll inspire another late-bloomer to try out for the team.

"I think," she says, "there's been a lot of people who've said, 'Hey, I have eligibility.'"

Question is: Can they deliver like the Morley Mama?

A typical day in the life of Alisa Morley and family

A typical day for 32-year-old CEU basketball player Alisa Morley and her six children:

5:30 a.m. — Morley wakes up. Tries to read Scriptures.

6 — Heads to church gym or CEU athletic facilities to shoot hoops, lift weights.

7:30 — Helps Max, Sara, Ryan and Diana rush to get ready for 7:40 school bus.

7:41 — Breathes.

8 — Husband goes to work, takes oldest son to junior high.

9 — First class starts. Drops off 3-year-old Joseph at baby sitter's house.

11 — Classes over. Picks up son.

11 a.m. -1:30 p.m. — Does home stuff with only Joseph around.

1:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m. — Basketball practice.

3:30 p.m.-8 p.m. or so — Does stuff with/for kids. Basketball practice, games, homework, etc.

After that-to-really late — Puts kids to bed, does homework, breathes again, sometimes sleeps

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Alisa Morley, 32, laughs with her teammate Chloe Wilson (44) as she holds her 3-year-old son, Joseph, after he ran across the basketball court midgame. (Tim Hussin, Deseret Morning News)