

Net Results

Esteró's illustrious
beach volleyballer
BROOKE SWEAT digs,
dinks, and defends with
a zeal sustained by
faith and family

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Shot on location at BELLASERA RESORT, Naples





BROOKE SWEAT, RENOWNED BEACH VOLLEYBALL CHAMPION AND UNITED STATES OLYMPIAN, RESIDES IN ESTERO WITH HER FAMILY AND ENJOYS BEING A PART OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.

nited States Olympian Brooke Sweat put Florida Gulf Coast University on the map for volleyball as the school's first recruit to commit for the team's inaugural season in 2004. The Florida-born athlete attended the prestigious Canterbury School in Fort Myers and was inducted into FGCU's Hall of Fame last year.

Sweat credits her husband, Nick Sweat, and his twin brother, Chris, also professional volleyballers and Naples natives, for first getting her out on the beach to play. Brooke and Nick met at age 14 while playing in the USA South Volleyball club. The pair reconnected a few years later in college.

Brooke Sweat's love of the game and native talent launched her to professional status. She landed a spot with Team USA in the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro with partner Lauren Fendrick. Sweat's career, however, hasn't been all smooth sailing; she's dealt with a fair share of adversity throughout. She has had eight surgeries since 2004 and experienced a disappointing loss at the Rio Olympics. And Sweat just missed qualifying for the 2020 Olympic games (pushed to 2021 due to the pandemic) while holding rankings of sixth in the world and third in the U.S. with her partner, beach volleyball legend Kerri Walsh Jennings. Only the top two teams from each country head to the Olympics; Sweat and Walsh Jennings came up just short.

Sweat recalls the irony that the coolest moment of her life—playing in the 2016 Olympic Games—was also her biggest heartache. “We had every single emotion while we were there,” she says. “Looking back, it was really an incredible moment of my life. Unfortunately, we had the toughest pool for competition, and we didn't play our best volleyball. But,” she adds, “the experience of being there, walking in the Opening Ceremony, it really hit me—‘You're an Olympian, surrounded by the best athletes in the world.’”

Sweat relates that, despite tearing her rotator cuff and needing a minor repair, Fendrick still chose to team up with her. And for that Sweat says she's forever grateful. “She stuck with me through my surgery and getting me back in time for the Olympics. That was huge.”

In 2018, Sweat needed another surgery on her shoulder. “At that time, I thought my career was over. I was planning on moving back

home [from California]. And, you know, I was okay with it.” Sweat and Fendrick continued to share mutual respect as players and friends. Says Fendrick, “Brooke was always a hard worker, and she never complained. She was extremely dedicated, as is shown by her willingness to move across the country away from her husband for long stretches of training and competition. And that's also shown by her willingness to train and rehab through multiple injuries and surgeries.

“Her volleyball IQ, ability to read hitters, her jump, and her shot touch on the ball are incredible,” continues Fendrick. “I really enjoyed coming up with unique game plans together and really challenging teams to get the ball down against us.”

Through all her career trials, Sweat never lost sight of her deep faith. “It's really easy to just feel sorry for yourself,” she says. “That's not where I am. I know there's a plan for my life. And you know, [God's] plan is greater, more than anything I could ever imagine.”

Sweat also holds her family close. “I have great support from them,” she says. “Through all the tough times, they've been there for me and just reminded me, ‘God's got you in his hands, no matter what the circumstances.’”

All the injuries she sustained over the years revealed a silver lin-







LEFT: SWEAT (FAR LEFT) AND KERRI WALSH JENNINGS VOLLEY WITH JOY STUBBE AT THE 2019 FIVB BEACH VOLLEYBALL WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS IN HAMBURG, GERMANY.

BELOW: SWEAT COMPETING WITH TEAM USA IN THE 2016 OLYMPIC GAMES IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL.



"When Brooke retired from indoor [play] and decided to transition to beach, she really put our program on the map—especially how fast the success came for her at the beach. Brooke was always the most prepared person on the floor. She was a woman playing with girls. She always had a much higher level of understanding the game."

—DANNY MAHY, FORMER FGCU ASSISTANT VOLLEYBALL COACH

ing—she's back home surrounded by her family in Florida, where she can watch her nieces and nephews grow. Her sister, Holly, recently had another baby and Sweat became an aunt for the third time.

Now Sweat's days consist of going to X3 Performance and Physical Therapy in Fort Myers as she's still rehabbing from recent knee surgery. She does therapy, workouts, and what they call "prehab" for preventing further injury. She and Nick and her parents have separate homes on the same 30 acres of land in Estero; Holly and her family also have a home here. Of course, Brooke and Nick have their own beach volleyball court at home where they often do drills—most of the time for fun. They attend Summit Church in Estero and enjoy attending sporting events at FGCU.

One of their favorite pastimes is venturing to the Naples Pier, where Nick likes to arrange pickup volleyball games. Brooke's ideal Saturday involves a stop at Fe-

lipe's Taqueria in Naples for tacos or dinner at Sea Salt on Third Street South.

Still, Sweat misses her sport and is far from ready to give it up. "I want to rehab and get my knee back to where if I want to play, I can compete at the highest level," she says. "That's where my mind is right now. I want to compete for more."

Her goal is to be back and ready to play sometime in October. "We'll see. I always say one thing, and God's got other plans," Sweat says. "I'd still like to play on the world tour and travel around and play domestically here in the U.S. in the [Association of Volleyball Professionals, the premier U.S. pro beach volleyball league]. My goal is to get healthy enough to do that."

Sweat looks forward to whatever the future holds. "Volleyball doesn't define me," she says. "It's just a platform I use to share my face, and I think however [life] happens, it happens that way for a reason." ◀◀

