

West End

Neighbors

AN EXCLUSIVE MAGAZINE FOR THE RESIDENTS OF WESTERN SHAWNEE & LENEXA



**KERRY & QUINN AUSTIN:
FATHER-DAUGHTER COACHING DUO
FULFILL THEIR VOLLEYBALL DREAMS**

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Cover Photo by Tracy Spisak, Gallery Portraiture



Driveway Dreams Come True for Father-Daughter Coaching Team

By Nikki Swartz | Photos by Tracy Spisak, Gallery Portraiture

Kerry and Quinn Austin used to spend hours upon hours in their driveway playing volleyball. Quinn started playing at 10 years old and quickly fell in love with the sport. Her dad, wanting to support his daughter's passion, encouraged her every step of the way. During those makeshift practice sessions, they talked about coaching a team together one day – “driveway dreams” – as Kerry calls those talks.

“We were out there for an hour or an hour and a half, even in the snow, and we'd work,” Kerry said. “And then we'd take a break and stand in the driveway and say ‘ok, someday let's coach together. That would be so much fun.’ And it went from coaching together to starting our own club someday.”

Ten years later, those seemingly fanciful dreams – imagined as a father and daughter practiced bumps,

sets and spikes in their driveway – have become reality. Their club, VooDoo Volleyball, is part of the Heart of America Region in the USA Volleyball organization. After starting their own club in 2018 and achieving that first driveway dream, their next dream is coming to fruition now. This month, as the club enters its eighth season, Kerry and Quinn are opening the doors to their very own volleyball facility in Overland Park, Kansas, and inviting the community to check out VooDoo Volleyball.

A New Passion

Quinn's love for volleyball, combined with Kerry's love for his daughter, sparked a strong bond between father and daughter that has only grown and strengthened over the years.

Quinn started playing volleyball in a rec league, and she wanted to try to play club. At that time, she said you had to know someone to get into club volleyball. She



and her dad made contacts, and she got a chance to try out. She played for a 12-year-old team at age 10 and just fell in love with the sport.

"I mean, goodbye basketball, goodbye softball, goodbye everything," she said. Kerry told her she couldn't possibly play volleyball for 12 months out of the year, but Quinn had fallen hard and decided that volleyball was the only sport she wanted to play.

"I tried doing the multi-sport thing for one season, and I wanted to take the next step and get more competitive in volleyball," she said. "I dropped all other sports and just focused on volleyball, and I couldn't get enough."

Quinn's best friend's sister and her mom were her first coaches. She loved playing with friends and experiencing the camaraderie and the cheers. Kerry saw how passionate his daughter was about this new sport and wanted to support her. He would go outside with Quinn every night after her regular practices throughout the week and practice with her some more. It didn't matter what the weather was - they even went out and played in the snow.

Kerry said he noticed something about the volleyball community right away. There were no screaming coaches, no one was angry; the players, coaches and referees smiled, and the fans were happy. "I thought, 'this is what I want my daughter involved in.' And we had to learn," he said. "She learned, and then she taught me in our driveway sessions."

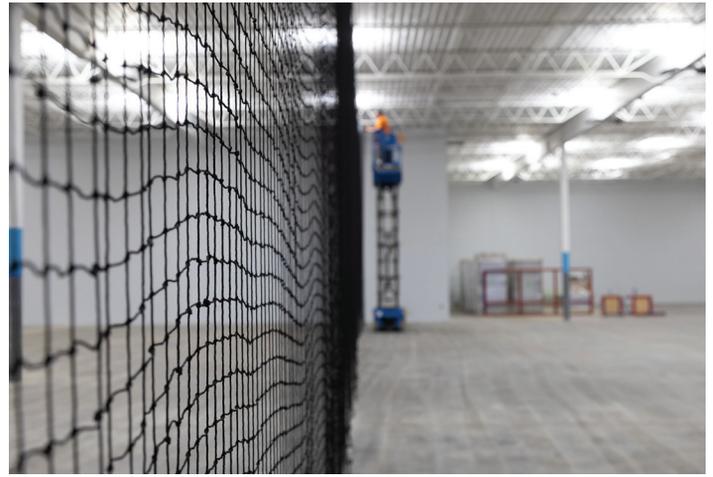
The Beginning of VooDoo Volleyball

Kerry was "in," and he and Quinn started making big plans. According to Quinn, they weren't going to start a club until she got out of college. But they actually opened their club, dubbed "VooDoo Volleyball" in 2018, when she was a sophomore in college. Since then, Quinn has juggled volleyball and school and has earned two degrees. In fact, this season is her first not being in school and also coaching or playing volleyball. She just completed her master's in research psychology and mental health. Along the way, she helped create a mental health program for the Kansas City Royals' scout youth teams.

Kerry had been a corporate fleet manager and retired at 55 years old. When he retired, his plan was to fish and golf, but plans changed. "That's what I was going to do. But I've not fished once, and for the last two years, I've maybe played two rounds of golf," he said. "Volleyball is a 12-month job every year."

Notably, this year marks Kerry's 51st in coaching, and he is delighted that he gets to continue doing so alongside his daughter. They've always had a great working relationship and balance each other well. But there are times when they bump heads as well as volleyballs.

"Most of the time, it's really wonderful," Kerry said of working with Quinn. "I mean, we really do work well together and



get along really well. Even if we disagree, we can figure out the right compromise or the right way to do it for the girls or the long-term vision of the club."

Quinn said one of the secrets of their partnership is to keep it professional on the court.

"I call him 'Kerry' when we're in ball mode, but then we get in the car and it's back to 'dad,'" she said. "We've got business mode and then when we get in the car after open gym or whatever we can get back into everything outside of volleyball."

The Home Team

Kerry and Quinn have a supportive team off the court. Jacque, Kerry's wife and Quinn's mom, has always encouraged her husband and daughter. She works for Oracle but her part-time job is as VooDoo Volleyball's biggest fan. Quinn said when she and her dad get stuck on a decision, Jacque is the tie-breaking vote.

Kerry and Jacque have two older sons - Drew and Cameron - who are off creating their own lives in the Waldo and Olathe areas, respectively. They graduated from Shawnee Mission East, and Quinn attended Shawnee Mission South after the family moved.

"We're very fortunate that we still have a really strong family bond," Kerry said. "We get together a couple times a month as a family."

He said the boys would do anything to help out, even though they are both focusing on their own families now. "They are not into volleyball at all," he laughed. "I keep telling them, because they're both tall, that we could have really used them as players."

A Premier Volleyball Culture and Family

VooDoo Volleyball is a big, close family as well, and that's by design. Kerry explained that he and Quinn wanted their club to be "not a premier factory but a premier culture."



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“There are clubs that will chew up a girl for everything – even at 13 years old. It will use her up and then throw her away and get the next new thing,” Kerry said. “I think that’s the case in every sport, and that’s terrible. We are family. We go to the girls’ concerts and their school events outside of volleyball, and they know we care more about them than just volleyball.”

Kerry and Quinn strive to teach their players, who come from all over the KC area, life skills as well as volleyball skills.

“My most successful year of volleyball, when we had the most wins and I learned the most with the most talented coaches, I was miserable,” Quinn recalled. “A coach pitted my teammates against each other, and it was not a super fun situation. We wanted to create an environment where our girls can learn and really improve, but where it is also a family, and so we say we’re the VooDoo family. Once you’re in the club, you are part of this family.”

She said getting into the family depends on the “three As,” which guide their recruiting: attitude, ability and attendance.

“Attitude is our most important skill that we look at,” Quinn said. “I will take a girl that maybe is less developed but is a great teammate over the strongest player in the gym who doesn’t care to shake hands or high five. We look at, Are the parents supportive? Are they invested in their girls’ learning? And we really push the attitude, the good attitude.”

VooDoo Volleyball players are girls who range in age from age 12 to 18. Tryouts are coming up on July 12-13 this year. Kerry said VooDoo, like many other area clubs, does not currently have a boys’ program because the demand is just not there right now. But it’s something they are looking at for the future because the interest is growing, according to Quinn.

The best recruiting tool, Kerry said, is how their teams act at tournaments and games.

“The players, the coaches and the parents in the stands are having fun, they’re being respectful, and they’re having success a lot of times,” Quinn explained. “We literally have parents email us and say, ‘We saw you guys at a tournament, and we want our daughter to be involved in that environment.’”

You can’t miss the VooDoo crew at tournaments. While some clubs have basic, forgettable names, VooDoo stands out with an unconventional name and logo, which is a little hand-drawn stick Voodoo figure whose head is a volleyball. Their first logo was green and cartoonish and resembled Jim Carrey’s green, distorted face in “The Mask” movie. They said they outgrew that and needed a more grown-up logo. Enter one of their player’s dads. He heard them talking about rebranding and the next day, his wife sent pictures of his drawings on napkins at their dining room table. The little Voodoo doll with a volleyball head stuck. But people still wonder if there’s a deeper meaning.

“I want to get on record that we liked the alliteration of ‘VooDoo Volleyball’ – it just sounded good together. There’s nothing occult going on, but we are actually asked about that on a regular basis,” Kerry said.

In fact, when Kerry went to register the club for the first time, the regional director asked him if he was sure he wanted to keep that name. He told Kerry it might scare off young kids.

“You would be surprised at how many people need to get that cleared up before they move forward. Our name makes us stand out, but it’s a constant thing trying to explain it. We’re not into the occult. We’re a good Catholic family,” Kerry laughed. “It’s just so crazy. It’s just fun. People are way too serious.”

A Permanent Home Court

Another constant issue has been finding courts to rent and practice on. Since the club has existed, Kerry and Quinn have consistently struggled to find court time in the area. The bigger they grew, the worse the problem became. Every club shares this struggle, but Kerry and Quinn grew tired of

the continuous battle and stress each season. "We have a responsibility for 130 families, and we couldn't guarantee that we had a spot. That caused a lot of sleepless nights," Kerry said.

When their previous practice location, Homefield, went up for sale, VooDoo Volleyball was homeless. So they decided to find a stable, permanent location and home for the club. They found a former warehouse space at 75th and I-35 that's "20 minutes from everywhere," Kerry said. Because VooDoo Volleyball players hail from all over the KC metro, including Lee's Summit, North Kansas City and Olathe, they needed a location accessible to all. Over the past nine months, Kerry and Quinn have been busy overseeing the transformation of the space into their new volleyball home, which will feature five courts, two bathrooms and three banks of lockers. Ahead of their July 9 open house, they can hardly contain their excitement.

"It's a volleyball-only facility," Quinn explained. "At other gyms we've been to, they have to have five different sets of lines on the ground for basketball and whatever else. Because we are a volleyball-exclusive gym, we can have one set of lines and do things that other clubs cannot."

For example, in their new facility, they are able to turn all the lights face up so that they're not shining down in players' faces when they look up for the ball. The all-encompassing facility also features speed and agility and strength training, along with a player's lounge and a film room, so players can watch game film onsite.

"We wanted it to feel like a home away from home for the girls and where they can hang out before or after practice when their mom needs to run an errand," Quinn explained.

Kerry said a volleyball-specific facility is a big deal and will elevate VooDoo Volleyball.

"There are not many clubs, even among the giant clubs, that have their own facility - everybody rents from someone," he said. "I only know of two other clubs that have their own building in the area, out of about 100."

Kerry and Quinn are keeping things simple for now. They aren't hiring a staff at present, opting to handle everything themselves. They are hiring qualified coaches, however, so the club can continue growing. The father-daughter coaching team signed a 10-year lease, so coaches and players will have a home for a decade and possibly longer.

"We are in control of our own growth at the speed that we want, as opposed to that being controlled by the court time that we can get," Quinn said. "That's nice. It's all about the players. The girls are going to have their own lockers and all those things, but they will also have a home and a place that is theirs."

Quinn is gearing up for the new facility and the new season, in which she will coach two teams, one each of younger and

older girls. She loves to see the progress between the two age groups, and that is the reason for everything she and her dad do.

"I love getting to work with younger girls and seeing these 'aha' moments, when they've been working so hard and putting in the time and it finally clicks," she said. And then on the other end of the spectrum, getting to work with the older girls, teaching those advanced skills and getting to see their progress to get ready for college. We have girls who are actively being recruited by Division 1 schools."

Kerry said he considers the players his granddaughters. "I have 130 granddaughters, and that's where my feelings are," he said. "We care about them - you get attached. They're important to us as individuals, we watch them grow up and are there for them at every stage."

"We do not intend to be the biggest club in the region or anything like that," he added. "We just want to keep doing things the right way, for the right reasons, and be the best club in the area."

As the new doors to VooDoo Volleyball open this month, Kerry and Quinn reflect on how far they have come from those driveway practices. "Our biggest dream was having our own place - so we've fulfilled those driveway dreams," Kerry said.

