

The female side of early onset Alzheimer's

She's only 59 and when she reported a few months ago that she had early onset Alzheimer's **it not only shocked the sports world but shocked everyone who knows her. In basketball there are only two winning coaches that draw the ultimate of respect, and there isn't a professional male basketball player that doesn't know who Pat Summitt is.**

For 38 years Pat Summitt has been head coach of the University of Tennessee's Lady Vol's team. The team's record is 1098 wins, only 208 losses, 8 major championships and numerous regional triumphs.

Back in January she announced her diagnosis of early onset Alzheimer's and today she officially announced she would be stepping down as head coach.

Pat's accomplishments have had an incredible impact on college level women's sports not just as players but as affirming their right to play with allocated funds. Under the Congressional legislation of Title IX, receipt of federal money required non-discriminatory distribution, including that of athletic programs for women. It may not seem like a big deal today, but in the 1970's it was a major threat to funding college and university male athletic programs.

It is clearly understood by health officials that **we have already entered into a world health crisis of Alzheimer's disease.** However, the common misperception is to associate it only with the elderly and to a result of an aging brain.

Actually early onset Alzheimer's disease **occurs in 10% of the Alzheimer's population under the age of 60 and as early as 30,** and in some cases is hereditary.

Unfortunately, women incur a higher incidence of Alzheimer's. This may be due to living longer than men, and other possible health indicators related to heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.

Pat Summitt may have left coaching, but continues to open new territory. Her foundation will work to raise funds for Alzheimer's research and family support, and President Obama will award her the Medal of Freedom later this year for her contributions.

You can link to my earlier post *The Women of Alzheimer's Series* – the gutsy Pat Summitt to learn more and view her video.

Source:

Pat Summitt's Signature: Success and Dignity by LYNN ZINSER, New York Times <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/20/sports/ncaabaske tball/pat-summitts-signature-success-and-dignity.html>