



Holdsclaw's film continues to inspire

Ex-Lady Vols star vocal on mental health

October 8, 2016

By Dan Fleser

dan.fleser@knoxnews.com

Chamique Holdsclaw took a seat on stage at the University of Tennessee's Cox Auditorium Monday night. She had a microphone in hand and some hard-earned advice in mind.

The setting was within walking distance of Thompson-Boling Arena, where Holdsclaw scored 3,025 career points and became a four-time women's basketball All-American from 1995-99. She was a world away, though, in her new role as an advocate for mental health awareness.

She spoke with conviction to a gathering that included Lady Vols coach Holly Warlick and several current players. She also interjected moments of personal candor. "I never thought this would be my life, never, never in a million years," she told the crowd.

Holdsclaw spoke and answered questions after a showing of the film "Mind/Game: The Unquiet Journey of Chamique Holdsclaw." The documentary chronicles Holdsclaw's struggles with her mental health. She was diagnosed with clinical depression and attempted suicide in 2006.

In November of 2012, about six months after filming began, Holdsclaw was arrested for allegedly smashing the windows of her former girlfriend's Range Rover. Then-WNBA player Jennifer Lacy identified herself as Holdsclaw's ex-girlfriend and said Holdsclaw fired a gunshot at the SUV after breaking the windows.

In June of 2013, Holdsclaw pleaded guilty to two counts of aggravated assault and was sentenced to three years' probation rather than jail time.

The incident resulted in Holdsclaw being diagnosed with bipolar disorder. It also made the film, which nearly was derailed, more gripping.

“It showed how serious mental illness, generally and in her case, is,” said filmmaker Rick Goldsmith.

Unlike last fall, when the film played the Knoxville Film Festival, Goldsmith attended Monday’s showing and fielded questions with Holdsclaw afterward. See *HOLDSCLAW*, 8C

Goldsmith has had his own travels with the film, showing it to a gathering of sports psychologists in Montana and a group of hospital trainees in New York, to name two far-flung audiences and venues.

He was invited to a church conference in Memphis addressing suicide in the black church after a parishioner committed suicide. The showing there coincided with Dylann Roof, a white man, opening fire in a historic black church in Charleston, S.C., on June 17, 2015, killing nine people during a Bible study.

“It was an astounding setting,” Goldsmith said.

A more typical movie gathering is drawn by Holdsclaw’s celebrity, which includes an Olympic Gold Medal and multiple WNBA tours of duty. Once there, Goldsmith has observed the crowd being struck by the different view of her.

“There’s something about her presence, her presentation,” Goldsmith said. He said Holdsclaw’s down-to-earth nature and her empathy at these events are empowering. He said the question-and-answer sessions often have inspired people to speak of their own struggles or those afflicting family members.

In describing another Holdsclaw quality, Goldsmith was recalling the player that helped lead Tennessee to three national championships.

“I’ve never gotten the feeling she ever gets nervous about a presentation,” he said. Holdsclaw noted an “eerie” feeling about Monday’s appearance because it was her first in Knoxville since the death of Lady Vols coaching legend Pat Summitt. She died on June 28 after a five-year battle with Alzheimer’s disease.

Holdsclaw visited her former coach after the film showing here last year. According to a post on Holdsclaw’s Facebook page, the two shared some laughs and Summitt told her “you should come more often.”

The correlation between Holdsclaw’s mental health advocacy and Summitt’s public struggle with Alzheimer’s wasn’t lost on Warlick.

“I definitely think they both see a benefit in putting it out there and helping others,” Warlick said.

Holdslaw implored Monday’s crowd to “try anything” in terms of seeking help. She lauded the benefits of proper nutrition and meditation.

“It changed my life, sitting in the stillness,” she said. “It quiets my mind.”

Holdslaw quantified her journey by telling the attendees: “It took me about 10 years of my adulthood to figure it out.”

Afterward, in a quiet moment, Holdslaw conceded, “I don’t know if I want to be considered a face of mental health.”

She then continued with stories of her travels as an advocate. She remembered vividly being pursued after an appearance several years ago in Branson, Mo., by a mother whose son had committed suicide. Holdslaw said the woman told her: “Don’t ever stop what you’re doing.”

At such moments, what Holdslaw might want seems secondary to another concession. “I feel needed,” she said.

Dan Fleser covers Tennessee women’s basketball. Follow him at [Twitter.com/fleserKNS](https://twitter.com/fleserKNS)