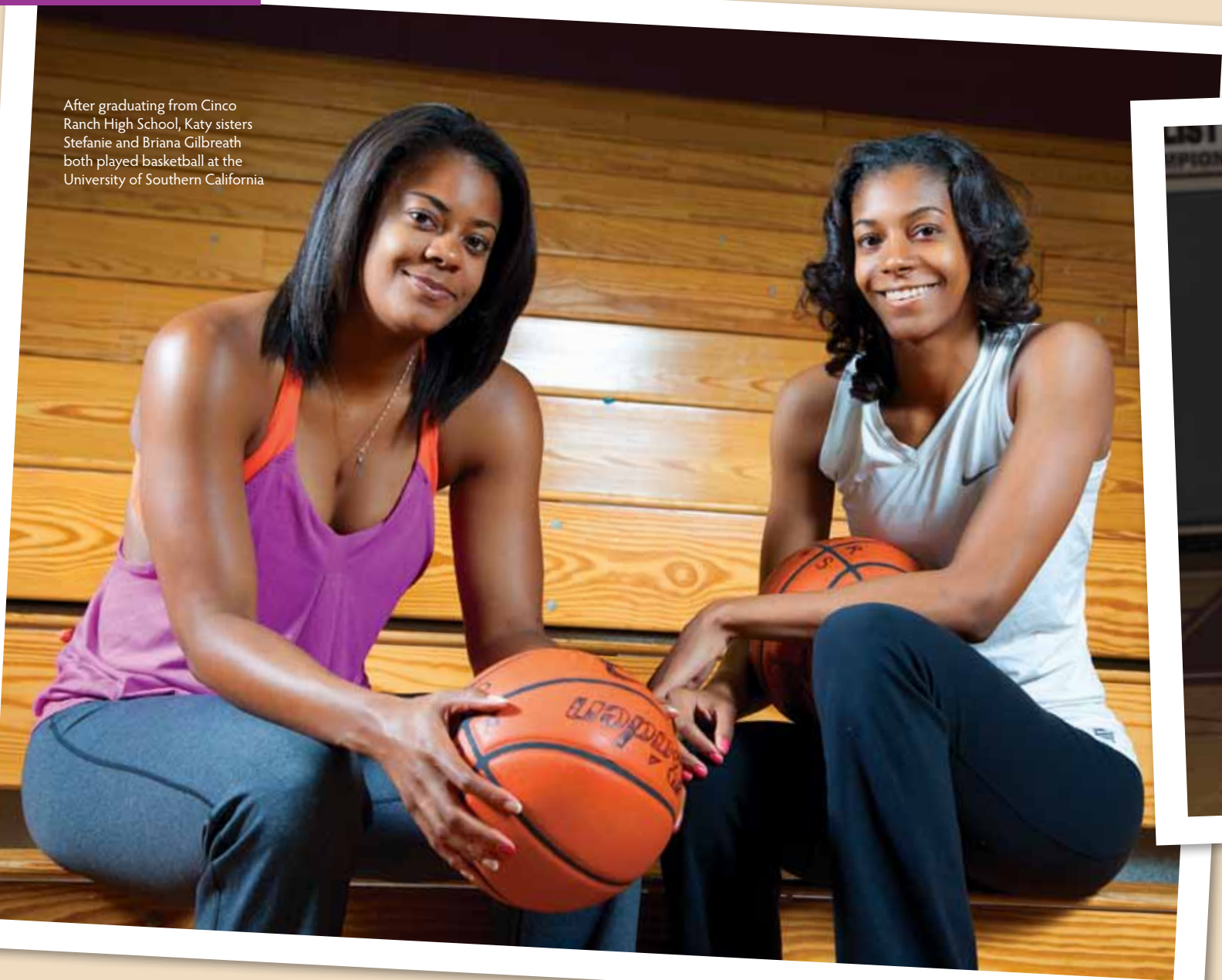


After graduating from Cinco Ranch High School, Katy sisters Stefanie and Briana Gilbreath both played basketball at the University of Southern California



Sisters Sharing **Hoops and Dreams**

Katy basketball players Stefanie and Briana Gilbreath slam dunk their way to success around the world

Written by Meagan Clanahan | Photography by Jason Lehecka



Stefanie supported Briana during her experience with the 2012 WNBA draft and hopes to participate in the 2013 draft



Briana recently signed a short-term contract to play for the WNBA Phoenix Mercury

If Katy born and bred, the Gilbreath sisters share everything, from a love of clothes and perfectly manicured nails to a passion for basketball. Just 18 months apart and both standing 6'1" tall, Briana and Stefanie Gilbreath are often mistaken for twins rather than sisters, something they embrace. Briana recently participated in the 2012 WNBA draft and has current plans to play on an international professional team. After studying to earn a master's degree, Stefanie hopes to earn a spot in the 2013 WNBA draft.

Growing up a Gilbreath

The Gilbreath family tree is rich with athletic prowess. Both of the girls' parents, Wardell and Audrey, are former athletes. In the 1970s, Wardell earned his claim to fame as one of the nation's top sprinters. In addition to passing on their competitive genes, the Gilbreaths raised their girls to love God, value education, and always dream big. "Beyond just basketball, we wanted our girls to know the value of hard work," Audrey shares. "Anything worth having is worth working hard for."

That is a family motto the girls took to heart and carried with them through their years of Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball and competing on the Cinco Ranch High School Cougars basketball team. As it became evident the sisters had a bright future in women's basketball, Wardell and Audrey sprung for WNBA season tickets to Houston Comets games. Those games inspired them to dream of the big leagues, with Briana always returning home thinking, "I want to be on that court one day."

Top Recruit

Self-admittedly, the older Gilbreath, Stefanie, is a jokester who likes to play around and have a good time. But, according to her sister, she's also incredibly dedicated and hard-working. That perseverance and dedication has been continually tested, as Stefanie has undergone four surgeries for anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tears. A standout guard and forward who started all but one game at CRHS from 2004 to 2007, she nabbed multiple awards, including the prestigious McDonald's High School All-American, which led her to become one of the nation's top recruits.

In true Gilbreath sister fashion, Stefanie and Briana both decided to attend the University of Southern California. After playing together for so many years with AAU teams and during their CRHS careers, they couldn't imagine being apart during their college years.

All-American Athlete

Ironically, Briana, as the younger of the two, is considered the caretaker, always looking after their friends and family and possessing a love for cooking. Her passionate heart extends to the court. "You have to love to play to get past the injuries and put your best forward," she shares. "I know that if I am resting, my competitors are training, and that motivates me to continue putting in the time to get better, get stronger." Like her elder sister, she was a top player at CRHS, also capturing the McDonald's All-American award, along with being a four-time all district player. In her years at USC from 2008 to 2012, she continued to collect multiple accolades and awards. In 2012, she earned her way into the WNBA draft.

WNBA Draft Pick and Beyond

This past April, Briana entered the draft for an opportunity to play at the highest level of women's basketball. Her parents and grandmother were glued to the TV in Katy, while Briana and Stefanie anxiously waited in Los Angeles.

When Briana's name appeared across the TV screen not once, but twice, confirming she was drafted in the third round to the Washington Mystics, their family in Katy immediately gave them a call. "All you could hear was Briana screaming with her sister," recalls Audrey. "We were all screaming here. It was an amazing night." Briana attended a two-week training camp with the Mystics, in which she was unfortunately released from the team. However, her desire to play at the professional level has only been strengthened.

Staying Connected

Briana quickly bounced back from that initial setback. While searching for an international team to play on, she was picked up by the WNBA Phoenix Mercury for a short-term contract. It will mark the first time in years that the sisters will live in separate states, playing on two different teams. Stefanie will attend New Mexico State University with a goal of attaining a master's degree and entering the WNBA draft in 2013. "I am so proud of Briana to be where she is and just thank goodness for Skype," says Stefanie.

The sisters look forward to when they will reunite in their hometown of Katy. "The community has been such a support to us - the people, our coaches, the great hospitality," says Briana. "Everyone is family here." **KM**



MEAGAN CLANAHAN is a Katy wife and mother of wonderfully crazy twin toddlers. She loves to freelance in her "free" time and share the stories of inspirational Katy families.



Briana Basics

- 2012 USC graduate with a major in human performance and a minor in health promotions and nutrition
- Pregame routine includes reading her Bible, eating pasta, listening to music, and praying

- Began a Christian organization at USC called Fresh Face, with a regular Bible study

- While in Los Angeles, volunteered regularly at organizations like the Boys & Girls Club

- Wants to start a community center for women 15 to 23 years old, inspiring the less fortunate to attend higher education institutions



Stefanie Stats

- 2012 USC graduate with a major in human performance
- Pregame routine includes eating a spoonful of yellow mustard

- Enjoys mentoring relationships and participated in several programs in the Los Angeles area, speaking to young women about education and sports

- Would like to always stay involved in sports, either in sports administration or sports medicine

