

Debbie Decker was named the executive director of athletics for Katy ISD in 2012



Katy ISD Athletics' **BIGGEST FAN**

Debbie Decker, athletic director for Katy ISD, is part of a growing trend of women working in this male-dominated position

Written by Ryley Rush

Thirty years ago, athletic director Ken Purcell took the time to visit each of his Allen, Texas high school teams and instill four words in the athletes that comprised them: pride, poise, class, and discipline. A teenage Debbie Decker was one of those athletes, and Coach Purcell's words and presence stuck with her.

Photo by Jason Lehecka

"I already knew that what I wanted to do for a living was to be a teacher and a coach," Decker remembers. She also thought that being a "coach of coaches" like Ken Purcell would be neat, too. Now five years into her tenure as athletic director of Katy ISD, Decker is doing just that, and the legacy of those four words are infused in her own leadership.

Pride

It's safe to say that no one is a bigger fan of Katy ISD high school athletics than Decker. She and her staff take every possible opportunity to be physically present on campus, cheering at games, and offering support at events.

In Decker's 12 years at the helm, Katy ISD has accrued ten state championships. Such significant and consistent accomplishments do not come without skilled direction, but Decker defers credit to the students and coaches that, by her account, made them happen.

"Debbie is someone that has what I call high 'count-on-ability,'" says former Katy ISD Superintendent Alton Frailey, who hired Decker as athletic director. "There are folks you hold accountable, and there are folks you count on. She was a person I could count on from the start. I have never for a second regretted hiring her for that position."

Class

It's no secret that the small world of high school athletic directors is overwhelmingly male. If you expect Decker to dwell on such separation though, think again because she is too busy getting the job done.

"She's a trailblazer, especially in this state," Frailey states. "It's a very high-profile position and our programs have continued to grow and be of even higher quality because of her as a professional and simply as a quality person. Texas has a reputation: good old boys and football. But she hangs in there with the best and the toughest. She's solid."



Photo by Maria DiPetta

Decker has worked hard and sacrificed a lot to get where she is today



Decker and her mom enjoy watching the games together



Photo by Jason Lehecka

Decker makes it a point to attend as many sports-related events as possible

Poise

When asked about a typical day, Decker turned to her schedule and began reading. Administrative appointments, coordinator meetings, game reviews, preparation for summer camps and schedule, coach and campus evaluations, a formal luncheon, end of season reviews, construction projects to check up on, and upcoming swim and wrestling meets are rattled off in a span of seconds with a calm that defies the jam-packed calendar.

Decker has family in the area and enjoys spending as much time as possible with her nieces and nephews, and she could be forgiven for being stressed. Instead, Decker balances her full life with unflagging grace and professionalism.

Discipline

Decker, too, acknowledges her uniqueness as a woman in her role; but it is hard work, not gender, that she sees as the central attribute of her career thus far.

"I don't necessarily view myself as a 'female trailblazer,'" Decker chuckles. "I've always felt like I've been able to progress through my career through jobs well done, not because of my gender."

"I see myself as someone who has worked very, very hard to get to where I am. I've had to sacrifice a lot of things and I don't just want to influence women and girls. I want to make an impact on all of our students and coaches. I want to help them follow their dreams and goals and get to the next step in their lives, and I don't look at that as a gender-specific deal." **KM**