



Kate Markgraf: A True Soccer Mom Living the Dream
Local Olympic Women's National Soccer player

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By Ginny McCullough



I had the pleasure of talking with Kate Markgraf the other day. I was amazed at what she has accomplished in her life, both as a mom and as a professional women's soccer player. She currently plays as a defender for the Chicago Red Stars. This is her first year with the Chicago Red Stars as she was pregnant with twins last season. Carson and Xavier are now six months old. She also has a 3 1/2 year old son Keegan. How does she do it?

Kate was born in Pontiac, Michigan to Ronald and Patricia Sobrero and has three older brothers. She moved around all over the place as a child but went to high school in Michigan. She received a Science Business Major: Platform for Environmental, Pharmaceutical and Patent Law from Notre Dame. She was just about to start down the career path of her major but received the call that she had made the US Women's National Soccer Team, so her pharmaceutical career pathway was on hold.

She decided to see where soccer would lead her. Kate played in three Olympics and three World Cups – receiving a silver medal from the 2000 Olympics and two gold medals from 2004 and 2008. In 1999, US Women's Soccer team won the World Cup which had the largest crowd ever to watch a women's sporting event with 40 million viewers. Upon asking her if the crowds interfered with her concentration of the game, she replied, "I never really saw the crowd when I was playing. It is pretty amazing, but I never noticed the crowd until only after the game. Then I heard the crowd roaring. You just play – you just do it!" She laughed.

She met and married Chris Markgraf after a blind date in Boston. "A buddy that I went to school with worked with him. He played soccer at Providence College. We were married soon after on Halloween in 2001. Since I wanted to celebrate Halloween and stay in my dress as long as possible, after the ceremony and at the reception, we dressed in costumes. I was an angel and Chris was SpongeBob Squarepants. It was fun!"

I asked Kate if they had anything funny that they have shared over the last six and a half years. She replied, "Our life! That is pretty entertaining. One great thing about Chris is that he lives in the moment and doesn't worry about things or possible stressors that lead to nothing. He lives in the moment so it is an adventure. One time, Chris showed up at one of my games as Superman carrying a sign at the game that said 'Sobrero is my Superhero'. My team said "Oh my goodness – Sobs (Kate's nickname) and I put my head down." She laughed.

As a child, Kate loved playing soccer and wanted to play in the Olympics but in 1980, women's soccer wasn't a professional sport or even a sport at the Olympics, but she continued to play as though the option existed. She just played because she loved it. Her parents encouraged her to do whatever she

wanted to do. They didn't tell her that women's soccer wasn't an Olympic sport. "I think that they were thinking college scholarships and I was thinking Olympics." said Kate.

When asked when she first thought that she wanted to be a professional soccer player, Kate replied, "I just didn't really think about it. I didn't know that the Olympics wasn't available for women's soccer at the time. I just really wanted to play soccer. I didn't know that there was a paycheck at the end. I lived off my parents for the first two years until I was 23. When we won the World Cup, the Federation had to start paying us so I could then live on my own." I commented that it must feel amazing to actually achieve those lofty goals, to which Kate replied, "It didn't really feel like I achieved my goal until we won the first Olympics in 2000 but my goals kept changing. You just put your head down and you keep moving forward and don't really feel the full impact of it. This is just what I do. This is my job."

Curious, I wanted to know what it takes to become a professional women's soccer player. Kate responded very matter-of-factly, "It takes an incredible amount of time. I would play by myself for hours kicking the ball off my garage door and a belief in something – not of myself. Some need that belief in themselves, but that's not for me. I had a low self-confidence and didn't think that I could play at that level. Parents need to just keep their kids involved and get them out to play. The more you think about it the more depressed you get. Go out there and just do it and have fun. You can't control a lot of what happens. Just go outside and do it. Everything today seems to be performance based but you can't think about it. If you want to do it, you will work hard to do it." She mentioned that you can't think about what you did wrong, just keep playing and it will fix itself.

I asked Kate what we can do as WSC to help promote and support the sport of women's soccer as the women's professional league as it is relatively still new, she replied, "Many women are now getting a great opportunity to play soccer that was never there before but sadly, not many give back or want to get involved to help support its growth. We need your help so support women's soccer and watch a professional women's soccer game. Women's soccer truly needs your support as women watching other women play sports – ours happens to be soccer."

I pondered on our own WSC and how we have grown exponentially over the years from 19 members to now, with our 10th year anniversary this year, to well over 1800 registered WSC members. When we started the club, there was no opportunity for us to play soccer. There is now! Thank you Kate for having the dream and to continue your passion to play the sport of soccer that we all love to play even though you had a low self-confidence! You are an inspiration to all of us in the WSC! You can play soccer at the highest level and be a mom of three as well! You are living the dream! You go girl! Another amazing woman who plays soccer! Kate, if you are ever inclined, and if you ever want to play in the WSC, you would be MORE than welcome!

The Chicago Red Stars play at Toyota Park in Chicago– which is not far from Milwaukee. We are hoping to put a fun WSC bus road trip together to support Kate, the Chicago Red Stars and watch a game or two! Stay tuned for more details on that one!