

“I LOVE ARLINGTON. I live in Arlington. It’s an amazing city. It has really great people ... That makes me want to give back to them, and the best way I can do that is to do everything I can to show everyone that UTA is Arlington’s team.”

– **Chris Ogden**



Photo: Link Kabadyundi



Photo: Ellman Photography

As the curtain descended on the 2018-2019 college basketball season, two coaches who call Arlington home found themselves, just for a moment, somewhere else. They were at a location known as “the cusp,” right there – 40 minutes away from possibly becoming lead characters in a historic local story.

Forty minutes is how long a college basketball game lasts.

Unless, of course, when you reach “the cusp” and you lose. Those games can last a lot longer.

Chris Ogden and Krista Gerlich coach the men’s and women’s teams, respectively, at the University of Texas at Arlington, and last year both led their teams to highly successful seasons.

Ogden, in his first season at the school, took the team to the Sun Belt Conference tournament championship game; Gerlich guided her squad to a regular-season conference championship and a semifinal berth in the conference tourney.

But the box beside the last date in March on both teams’ Sun Belt schedule was filled with an “L,” as in “a loss,” leaving Ogden and

Gerlich, now in her seventh season at UTA, says she, too, took the defeat in the conference tournament hard. But she didn’t have long to salve her and her team’s wounds. The regular season championship earned the Lady Mavs a berth in the Women’s NIT tournament, and they beat Stephen F. Austin 60-54 at College Park Center in the first round before bowing out to TCU in the second round.

That’s a pretty significant silver lining, one of several that defined UTA’s collective 2018-2019 campaign.

It needs to be noted that Ogden’s team was 3-8 after its first 11 games last season. But, as the coach says, “the team bought in to what were trying to do,” and it finished conference play with a 12-6 record, won its Sun Belt semifinal game and did make the conference tournament final for the second straight year.

The Lady Mavs, meanwhile, racked up a 24-8 record and won a postseason game for the first time in program history. “We had great team chemistry, and when you have great team chemistry, good things happen,” Gerlich says. “Looking back, I’m very proud of what our team was able to accomplish.”

Fast forward to this month, when both Gerlich and Ogden are looking forward – and smiling. Their respective squads will have an excellent blend of experience and youth, both teams have improved their talent level via recruiting, and last year’s success is a foundation on which both coaches will build momentum heading into this year.

Indeed, as Ogden, Gerlich and their squads prepare for new seasons that begin this month, the collective Mavs are optimistic that this could be the year for that aforementioned history making – and are convinced that getting to “the cusp” might actually wind up being a blessing in disguise.

They’re also convinced about something else: Wherever the ride leads, it will be a lot more fun taking Arlington area fans with them. That’s why Gerlich and Ogden have done something that isn’t required in the job description: they’ve invested fully in becoming part of their community – emphasis on the word “fully.” Ogden says the easiest part of that part of his job is the fact that he works in one of the greater cities found anywhere.

“I love Arlington,” he says. “I live in Arlington. It’s an amazing

They coach your HOME TEAM

And UTA’s dynamic duo of Chris Ogden and Krista Gerlich want you to know: They wouldn’t have it any other way

Gerlich to wonder, instead of see, what kind of history might have been made at a school that has advanced to an NCAA tournament just once.

“Yeah, I’m not going to lie to you – that was absolutely heartbreaking,” Ogden says. “You put so much into a season, and to be so close and to fall just short is a gut punch.”



“OUR PLAYERS volunteer at Mission Arlington, participate in community cleanup efforts with local churches, work with children at the Boys & Girls Clubs and at the local YMCA and help feed and clothe the homeless. It’s important to give back to our city.”

– Krista Gerlich

city. It has really great people. So many people welcomed me with open arms from the day I first took the job.”

Notable among those, he says, are Mayor Jeff Williams, Greater Arlington Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Michael Jacobson and Arlington Convention & Visitors Bureau CEO Ron Price. Likewise, charter members of his fan club included UTA President Vistasp Karbhari and Athletic Director Jim Baker.

“From day one, they’ve treated me like family,” he says. “That kind of support makes a coach’s job a whole lot easier. And the people in the city in general and the students, they’ve been nothing but positive. That makes me want to give back to them, and the best way I can do that is to do everything I can to show everyone that UTA is Arlington’s team.”

To that end, he answers practically every call that summons him to speak to local civic groups. He holds practices that are open to the public, something that rarely happens in big-time collegiate programs. He encourages his players to follow his lead and engage and court students and local residents, all of whom could ultimately become fans.

“I tell them all the time that we want the student body and community to come to games, but the best way to ensure that happens is if we become part of the community we live in.”

That’s why his players perform service projects on and off campus, join clubs at the university and invite everyone they meet to take in a game.

“We play a fun brand of basketball, and I encourage our players to tell that to people,” Ogden says. “They’ve been great about engaging those around them. My goal when I came to UTA was to create a program that our community could be proud of. I have a vision – I can imagine 7,000 people in our arena, screaming their heads off. I want to have one of the greatest home court advantages in basketball, and I think that can happen.”

Like her coaching colleague, Gerlich has made it a priority to embrace and engage her community – and to invest in a mission to have the community embrace and engage her team. In fact, she uses virtually the same phraseology. “I want us to be Arlington’s team,” she says.

Not only that, she wants Arlington’s team to be one of which local fans can be especially proud, because of the character they show on and off the court.

As soon as she took the job seven years ago, she set about changing the culture. With what she calls “tremendous support” from university administration, she started recruiting true student athletes, who excelled as much in the classroom as on the court.

During her second year at the school, the Lady Mavs won the Sun Belt Conference Academic Achievement award presented to the school whose players had the highest grade point average in the league.

“As we got better, I said we’re going to try to hang some banners (symbolic of championships), but we’re not just going to be about hanging banners,” she says. “We’re going to be ambassadors for UTA.”

The fruits of that commitment are evidenced by the team winning the Mav Cup the past three years. That’s the honor bestowed upon the group on campus that performs the most exemplary community service and outreach.

Additionally, the players volunteer at Mission Arlington, participate in community cleanup efforts with local churches, work with children at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Tarrant County and at the local branches of the Arlington-Mansfield Area YMCA and help feed and clothe homeless people through a variety of altruistic entities.

Collectively, what Ogden and Gerlich have created is a pair of basketball programs that now mirror the dynamic community in which they play. And that accomplishment represents a banner that will hang in perpetuity. **A**

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