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Sparks' Lisa Leslie moving on to the next phase of her life

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Even though her goal of a third WNBA championship went unfulfilled before retiring after 13 storied years, center **Lisa Leslie** told reporters after the Sparks were eliminated in the Western Conference finals that her spirits remained high.

"I feel great because I know that every time I stepped out on that court I played as hard as I could," said Leslie, who led the Sparks with 15.4 points per contest despite missing 11 games this season because of a sprained right knee. "I've left everything out there and I did my best. That's all you can do is play your best and try to be the best role model you can, and that's what I've tried to do."

She won four Olympic gold medals, two WNBA championships, three league MVPs and finished her career as the league's all-time leading scorer (6,263 points) and rebounder (3,307). But Leslie, 37, isn't resting on her laurels; she's just gearing up for her next phase in her life.

That will include more time with her husband, Michael Lockwood, and her 2-year-old daughter, Lauren. But it will also include work involving her self-named academy, broadcasting and public speaking.

Said Leslie: "I will stay close to the game because I feel I need to be a part of it."

Lisa Leslie Basketball Academy

Reflecting on her childhood, Leslie fondly recalls how her time with the Olympic Growth Development League solidified her love for basketball.

"I had a chance to go play where there were games set up every weekend," Leslie said. "I would start out at the orange team and if somebody was missing on the blue team, I would play on that game. I played five games in one day because there weren't enough girls and I was like 'Can I play with your team?' "

That's why Leslie wants to set up a similar academy named the Lisa Leslie Basketball Academy.

She hasn't determined the skill levels yet since that depends on how many sign up on her [website](#). She is uncertain what personnel she'll be working with since she's currently in the process of cultivating a coaching staff. But she's set on having a supervisory role for an academy that will be a positive avenue for young girls.

"I want to teach basketball and have an academy where young girls can really learn their skills and also create a traveling team," Leslie said. "I really want for these girls to have a home and really learn. I don't think kids should learn how to play basketball one way and as you get older, the rules keep changing. I really do believe that you can teach kids the same rules we play with as pros and help them to perfect it."

"The biggest part of my academy will be not just basketball, but the life lessons and the things I told you about as far as the person that I am as far as the mindset," she continued. "I think the game is closely correlated to life. You have to work hard. You have to kind of have to be a survivor so to speak. Some people are a little too weak for life. That's why they turn to drugs, alcohol and things that help them not have to face how rough life is sometimes."

Broadcasting

Leslie is also pursuing a broadcasting career while running her academy. Where she ends up is currently unclear, though she has served as an in-studio analyst and color commentator for ESPN's coverage of women's college basketball.

"I have a few interviews set up with different networks," Leslie said. "I really prefer to commentate and do color commentating and in-studio of professional basketball, both men and women. That would be my No. 1 choice."

Public speaking

This avenue is certainly not new to Leslie, who was often deemed the WNBA's ambassador during her 13 years in the league that also included various commercial and public appearances.

Leslie's latest project during her last season with the Sparks was with Right to Play, an international organization that promotes sports in hopes to foster growth in communities around the world.

Leslie said her next project will be with Covidien, which promotes liver cancer awareness. It's a cause that has affected Leslie, whose stepfather, Tom Espinoza, died from the disease on Jan. 15, 2001.

"It was not easy watching someone die and, at the same time, not have the information that we needed," Leslie said. "It just didn't help. We want people to have a concrete place to go for information, and I think this will really help people. I like being a part of causes that help."

A new chapter

Throughout the season, Leslie constantly stressed that she had "no regrets" in her career while reflecting on her final, yet difficult season. She says she'll continue having that positive attitude now that her WNBA career is over.

"I like to do what I'm passionate about," Leslie said. "Then it's easy for me. Trying to do things I'm not passionate about probably won't work out too well. Basketball, I'm passionate about. But I'm probably more passionate about life and people and helping people and giving back and having a positive message to do that."