

## Ep. 105: Empowering Girls through Sport with Dr. Kimberly Clay - Episode Transcript

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Welcome to Her Story of Success, a podcast featuring stories of influential women trailblazers and business leaders who have defined and pursued their own versions of success and fulfillment. We hope these stories, lessons learned and celebrations inspire you to believe in yourself and your own journey a little bit more. I'm Leah Glover Hayes, CEO and podcast host of Her Story of Success women's business and media collective.

In today's episode, I have the honor of interviewing Dr. Kimberly Clay, founder and CEO of Play Like a Girl. If you haven't already heard of Play Like a Girl, they're an incredible non-profit that helps girls learn leadership skills through playing sports, and then empowers them to turn those skills into careers in STEM.

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** It was that connected spirit, the collective power of women coming together, women supporting women, girls supporting girls that really resonated and I think that still remains true today.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Play Like a Girl has impacted more than 25,000 girls and young women around the world and is working to get rid of the gender gap in male-dominated career fields.

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Girls lack confidence around a place for them in sport, over the long term, many of them, because they lack representation.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Dr. Kim was inspired to start Play Like a Girl while working at the CDC, and she's going to share that story and her getting a PhD in Health Education and Promotion. Kimberly is an incredible woman and active member of the Nashville community, serving on board including the YWCA of Nashville, the Nashville Junior League, and Tennessee Girls Collaborative. She's been honored with many awards and we are excited to have her here today.

Thank you, Dr. Kimberly for being with us today.

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Thank you for having me.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Yes. I know you and I have been trying to get this interview scheduled for a few months now, and you have had back-to-back meetings today,

so I'm just really grateful that you took the time to share with us today, just a little bit about your story and starting Play Like a Girl and why we should all get involved.

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Yeah. Well, I love the fact that you are doing this and creating a platform and giving voice to women like myself.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Absolutely. Thank you. Well, let's start for anyone that may not be familiar with Play Like a Girl, who is Play Like a Girl today, and who do you serve?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Play Like a Girl is a local nonprofit here to serve Nashville, to help build the talent pipeline for diversity around gender in the specific area of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. We are a growing and booming city in terms of healthcare and technology. So we want to utilize something that is so unique to the sport experience to help prepare young women for leadership and for success in STEM fields. So we're building the workforce right here at home.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** I love that. And I want to get into why Play Like a Girl, how you got started, but I kinda want to start with your story. Because I love when I was listening and doing some research on you that you didn't actually participate in a lot of sports growing up. And so I want to hear about, what was it like for you growing up? Why, what led you to get a PhD? Share with us a little bit about how you developed, and then we'll talk about like, how that led to you starting Play Like a Girl.

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** You know, I agree, origin story is so important where we all start. It's actually even a principle that we teach at Play Like a Girl. It's the first principle we introduced to the girls around knowing where you're going. It's critical in order to get to where you say you want to be. For me, I grew up in rural Mississippi, where at the time there were not a lot of sports, specifically for girls, but also for girls of color. In my small hometown, there is still today, literally a Black park and a white park in town. And I didn't have the opportunity to play sport because there were limited sports available through that park, and even through my middle and high school. In fact, I think by the time I graduated, we maybe had, for Black girls, basketball and track and field. And that was it. Now there is soccer and I think I may have seen a girl of color, maybe not Black because it's diversified a little bit, but I may have seen a girl of color on the softball team. There may even be a volleyball team now. But there were very specific roles for not only girls, but also ethnic and racial groups as well. So for me, my experience was limited to outdoor play at home and, you know, playground play in my earlier years in lower grades. But as I continued to matriculate and grow older, I was drawn more to music and the arts and academics and all of that, which explains probably how I landed two master's degrees and a PhD.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Yes, I love it. And one of the things that you talk about with Play Like a Girl and what sports can do, is about building confidence and situational confidence, right? When you find yourself in a difficult situation, I think sometimes playing sports and going through the things you do teaches you how to develop confidence. So I'm curious, where would you say you developed your confidence in yourself as a woman in business and what you're doing? How did that develop for you?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Home, number one. I grew up in a very loving home. My mom and dad remained married until my dad's death, about five years ago. So 49 years of marriage. So I had two great examples at home. And so much of our life was grounded in community service, namely through our church. So I did a lot of work in the church. I learned how to speak and present, you know, do all of the things right. That a lot of kids are afraid to do in middle and high school. By high school, I actually had my own column in the Mississippi Clarion ledger, which is our state paper, because writing was a strength of mine. And I spoke well and could do all of the orations and, you know, just all of the things, right. But it really started in the church. I first saw my mom serve in the community, serving through our church. She would require all of us as her kids, there were five of us, to also serve and give and do. And because my gift area happened to be in the arts, I was a pianist, so eventually I became the church pianist and I think innate to and built into a lot of the roles that I took on and, and served through my church, I continually built confidence, but also developed leadership skills that turned out to be transferrable for me, but also defined some of my career choices as well, because I went on to pursue a mass communication degree for undergraduate.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Wow. How did you go from the mass communication to having the PhD in health? What was the path for you going from this one undergrad degree to two master's and a PhD? Do you just love school or learning or what is that?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** No. So like so many young women and men, I was discovering, right? Trying to figure out what I wanted to do, who I wanted to be in life. At the time that I was pursuing my undergraduate degree was, you know, at the height of Oprah. So my life goal was, you know, I was going to be the next Oprah, which is why I pursued the degree in mass comm. And once I got there, a very intelligent and wise professor said to me, "We retire in these jobs in front of the camera. So I would highly suggest you consider a job behind the camera on the other side. Think about PR or writing or, you know, some other role, even on the technical side of running cameras." And so I opted the PR route for my degree. I continued to write for local New Orleans papers, as well. I went to Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans, but during that

time it was also high pressure time for my family. My brother, who was about seven years old, had been diagnosed with cancer, was a patient at St. Jude. My dad, who was a military veteran, Vietnam veteran in particular, he worked in a local factory, which printed magazines, some of our national magazines, like TIME and some of those, but my mom was a school teacher, and they had maxed all of their finances, you know, there was no money to send me to school. So in my search for scholarship funds, there was an opportunity to do a summer program as an intern out in Portland, Oregon with the U.S. Department of Energy in health communication. And it was the first time I'd ever even considered healthcare and my space of communication. So that internship led to so much more. I studied abroad, I came back, experienced what I often call reverse culture shock, not really knowing how to acclimate or reacclimate to life in America after being in such a service driven society for about a year. And decided to stay around in New Orleans and work with my local church, which was led by a husband and wife who had done their masters of social work at Tulane. And so I decided to do a masters of social work thinking, you know, that would be the area to bridge my service with everything else. And along the way, there was an opportunity to dual degree major in public health, they were introducing a new dual degree program with the school of public health. And that's where I actually found my home. I fell in love with public health. The health communication stuff started to make sense because I'd done this internship. And then lo and behold, two and a half years later, CDC comes calling and recruited me into my first position at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** That's incredible. So you were working while you were going to school and like forming what you wanted to do, or figuring out like what that path was really going to look like?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Not during my academic semesters, only during the summer and typically on specialized internship programs, like the one out in Portland, Oregon.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Very nice. I love that. Hope anybody here is like that's in college is like, those internships can lead to something so incredible. Right? You think that you're just going to go and like learn certain pieces, but you're like, "Oh, I actually really care about public health." So I think that's going to lead us into, really when and how you started Play Like a Girl, because you were working for the CDC. Tell us what it is that you saw. What was the gap? What was the lack? What was it that was needed that you said, "I need to create something to address this?" What was that?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** So my time at CDC was spent as a public health analyst or program officer where I pretty much managed million dollar projects that the

government was funding across the United States. And at that time, there was a real focus on racial, ethnic health disparities. So there were projects being funded at the state level across the U.S., and then there were major university projects as well. So it happened that I came from a university project into my position at CDC. The project I worked on at Tulane and Xavier in New Orleans was around diabetes prevention. So that was kind of my first entry into this particular work. Once I got to CDC, I worked in the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, which spans everything from diabetes to heart disease and cancer and everything in between. And so I got to really see health and health disparities from a different perspective in the actual work environment. And so in doing this work, I would travel to communities that we were funding, and I got to see firsthand what I knew growing up in rural Mississippi, you know, people were not able to access — even today, you know, during COVID — people aren't able to access equal healthcare, right? Equal quality healthcare. It's one of the constant conversations we're having with our parents, my husband and I, we're both from rural, Mississippi, different parts of the state, but there are huge limitations around access for them having stayed at home as opposed to the life that we live in larger, more metropolitan cities, and also being more highly educated, having access to greater wealth. And the fact that my husband is a triple board certified physician. He's a pediatric cardiac intensivist who also runs a medical division. So, you know, there are just so many factors that makes our experience different. And so I was always keenly aware of that. And once I got to CDC, now was overseeing these programs, I came to the knowledge that there were more people than just folks in my small, rural community who were experiencing that. So fast forward, you know, my husband is training and finishes medical school. It's time for residency. So I took the opportunity to go back to school at that point and pursue my PhD. And so Play Like a Girl actually came about as a classroom project. It was not, it wasn't an intentional, like set out to develop an organization, never intended to even live this long. I started it as a classroom project. My area of research was cancer prevention and control. And in the state of Alabama at the time, there was an influx of young women being diagnosed with cervical and breast cancer, which were my two areas. And so I created this event, this community event to educate and also screen women. So educating mothers and daughters, and once we get them into a space where, you know, we have their attention, we educate and we also screen them for risk factors. And that's how we started. And when I had moved on and was, you know, back in Georgia running the state of Georgia's health cancer prevention program, then went on to a faculty position at Georgia, volunteers were still keeping this alive.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Wow. So you had already left. So this program was literally going without you.

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Exactly. So about six years, we existed on the shoulders of volunteers who were running it themselves. I'd come in and do media, write checks and be the spokesperson, but volunteers were the ones who were responsible and today, 16 years later, we're largely still run by volunteers like myself.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Wow. That is incredible. And so what did it look like to get started? So I know you said that it was a class project, right? For your PhD, but what is it that drove people to believe in this? Like what was the mission? Why did people latch on and get involved, and so many volunteers keep this alive?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Yeah, so I think initially in the first several years it was the format. Everything we did was what we called at that time edutainment. It was a healthy dose of education and entertainment. So we were commissioning stage plays. We were hosting conferences and concerts. And so that was our hook. Right? We would do these entertainment-focused events that would garner large audiences. So our audience typically was about 1300 women and girls for three events a year. And beyond format, I think it was shared experience. Once moms and daughters got into this space and were able to connect with other women, it was that connected spirit, the collective power of women coming together, you know, women supporting women, girls supporting girls that really resonated. And I think that still remains true today in the work that we do, but it was in 2014-15, really, when things shifted for us. We moved beyond just a health focus, leveraging the physical activity built into sport for health to more thinking more broadly about sport as a catalyst, right? For girls over the lifespan and the door opener to opportunity and lifelong success. And that was the moment when ESPN became aware of what we were doing, brought us into the fold of the ESPN brand and the athlete event that they host each year, just for elite athletes and their, you know, agents and managers and all of that. That was the revolutionary moment. That's when everything changed because when the worldwide sport media platform says to you, your work is valuable in this space around sport, you start to think about and see yourself differently. And so that was honestly, I think the turning point for Play Like a Girl.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** And then what did your role look like during that change? Like when did you come on and take the reins and say, okay, I'm gonna start working on this and be the CEO. What did that look like?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** So I actually came on full-time in July, I can tell you the exact day, July 10th, 2010. It was the last day I received a paycheck. I came on as the CEO, taking

all responsibility for transitioning the organization from a three-time-a-year event into regular, ongoing day-to-day programming. We took programming into schools and afterschool and, you know, have since evolved even beyond that, we now run afterschool programs, summer spring break, and fall break camps. We run in the midst of the pandemic virtual mentoring programs for our girls. We've also taken programming abroad to Africa, the Caribbean, and have a chapter at a university, Queens University in Canada. So all of that in 10 years is what I was able to do by one, leaving my job to answer what I believe is my calling to do this work full time.

And so for the most of that time, I've done it alone. Just before COVID we were able to finally bring on our first paid staff person, Hannah Pike, who is my assistant and extraordinary of everything else Play Like a Girl. So she does everything too. Yeah. So we both, you know, between the two of us, and again, that's still a collective amazing volunteers from board members to mentors, to, you know, women who pitch in on one-time events or specialized skills, specific needs that we have. We still are run by volunteers and most people don't even recognize or even realize that it's just the two of us in the day-to-day.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** I was shocked for sure. When I found I was like, what you did all that yourself?

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**Leah Glover Hayes:** I wore this shirt for you, I'm wearing my Wonder Woman shirt underneath the blazer because Dr. Kim is a wonder woman in Nashville, so many

women look up to you. And I would love to hear since this transition to really focusing on using sport to teach transferable skills of confidence and competition, to focus on STEM, I'd love to hear some of the success stories that you have seen that this program has been able to achieve.

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Yeah. So one, it's not been a long time that we've been doing the STEM piece of this. We introduced STEM in 2016. That was after an ESPN and Ernst and Young study, which showed that 94% of women in the C-suite played sport. 56% of them played through college. For us, that was also a defining statistic, in that it really drove us to connect our work to an academic outcome. STEM happens to be a set of disciplines that opens the door for higher earning potential for women. Still not equal just like sport, just like everything else, but for underrepresented minorities, and for women and girls in particular, it presents the opportunity to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and economic inequity for those populations of individuals. And so, we thought these disciplines, these fields would be the best fit for the work that we do. In addition, there was research, you know, that showed that while girls drop out at twice the rate of boys from sport participation as they transition into high school, the same is true for STEM. Girls tend to drop out or lose interest in STEM subjects, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics as they're going into that pivotal high school transition.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Why is that? Why is there such a correlation between dropping out of both sport and more STEM-related academia?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** So one is, I don't know necessarily that the two are correlated in the same way, but very similar, right? So for girls, research from the women's sports foundation, the Gatorade girls sports research, basically shows that girls lack confidence around a place for them in sport over the term. Many of them, because they lack representation, don't see a future for themselves in sport. Bad coaching is often an issue for girls, coaching that is not gender sensitive presents a problem for girls as well. And then also this drive for students to focus or to specialize in a given sport, for travel sport, it gets to be too much too soon for a lot of kids and they burn out. So there are a number of factors that inform a girl's decision to drop out of sport at that moment. For the STEM interest piece, that too was multifaceted. For girls, representation shows up again, confidence shows up again, but that is also rooted in societal norms, gender stereotypes, and simple things like messaging, right? The types of toys that parents purchased their daughters, as opposed to their sons early in life, defining, you know, what types of toys you play with also have relation to what types of careers you see as possible or appropriate for you based upon gender. So there are multiple overlapping factors for the loss of interest and dropout in sport, as

with STEM. While they aren't necessarily traveling together, they traveled parallel to one another. And that's what we recognized.

Your last question was about success stories. And honestly, for me, it's a full circle moment. This year I hired one of my very first middle-school students as an intern. She's a college intern. Hannah Selders is her name. She was one of our first students in Dallas, Texas. She started our program in the fourth grade. So, you know, when I talk about kind of the window, right? Things for the STEM piece started a little bit later, but our first afterschool program was funded by Hall of Famer, NFL player, Emmett Smith, and his family in Dallas. And Hannah was able to participate in our program through her school. She has since gone on to high school and now college and is returning as a college intern leading our, what we call our Steam Team brand ambassadors. So we have college women representing each discipline within STEM and STEAM. And she happens to be the, A, the arts on the team. And they are responsible this year for helping us kind of, I guess, age ourselves back a little bit. I'm 45 now, I have a college student of my own, so I don't quite speak the same language. And so we've hired Hannah and her team of STEAM ambassadors to help us connect with our middle school girls in relevant and timely ways that make sense for them on social media and the like. So for me, one, I have seen girls now pursue more jobs and careers in those fields because they now see more of themselves there. Representation is getting better. It hasn't arrived at where we needed to be. So that's one thing. I think, in the work that we are doing both on the sport and the STEM side, I want to believe increased commitment, especially on the corporate side to diversity, equity and inclusion. So, you know, right now we are negotiating some pretty major national partnerships in that space that allow us to bridge the two worlds of STEM and sport together, to truly leverage the collective power of women alongside some male allies on the corporate side as well, to continue to do the work that we're doing with our girls, but it has been a process of years. And even now, the partners we're working with, I really appreciate the honesty and transparency that they have not arrived. And that they don't assume Play Like a Girl to be their answer, but it's a first step at really trying to find ways, meaningful, impactful ways to move them forward in the direction of their goals of reaching gender parity at some point in the closer near future. And so I think that that for me is the growth and the success and the change that we've all been looking for. We've still got a long way to go.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** I love that you're having this conversation with men and how men can get involved and having allies understanding the importance of it. And I don't know that I've met a woman that didn't have a male champion in some capacity. And so I'd like for you to share, what has some of the men that have stepped up and said, "We are supporting this," whether it be through ESPN or a pro

sports team, like what are some of the men that have stepped up and really said, "We're going to push this forward. We see the value." And maybe why did they get involved?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** One, I've had some amazing men in my corner. Of course my own father who was not here to see where I am today, but he is the reason I am where I am, doing what I'm doing, because he, knowing that he didn't necessarily have the bank account to fund it. He supported me and he pushed me towards my dreams. And so that was especially important because it gave me, when you go back to that question about confidence, it gave me the confidence and permission to pursue and chase my dreams, and certainly to answer my calling. My husband would be the next one. My husband has financed my dream for the last 16 years. He's the one, you know, if you pull the books and look at, you know, who's giving the most, it's been loss of income to our family, it's office space in my house. It's you know, the three car garage, the attic above it is Play Like a Girl storage. It's moving all of the boxes and showing up at all of the events. And for the first time in 16 years, I get to share him and I get to share the stage with him at our women's leadership summit in about two weeks. And it's on this very subject, male allies and the importance of men showing up for women. I've always thought it was important for us to celebrate the girl dads in our program, but also the male allies who are ensuring that we're at the table, ensuring that we're actually called by our names with "Dr." in front of them, just like their male counterparts, ensuring that we're part of the conversation, that our views are respected, that we're given equal and fair play opportunity. And so Mark has been a huge part of that. Another man in my life, Jesse Lovejoy, who is the head of San Francisco 49ers Museum and the 49ers EDU Academy, which is a STEM education program, he's been my other male ally. I go to him as my mentor and my colleague in this work. But again, he is safe space for me to share ideas and get feedback and also support me. So we've done a lot of work together in this space in the recent several years. He's also acted as a connector, bringing me into new spaces and new relationships, new partnerships that would benefit Play Like a Girl and myself. But, you know, as an organization, Play Like a Girl is the national charity of the NFL Players Association for the second time this year. So right now we're actually releasing some videos of NFL players who are verbalizing and sharing their own commitment and amplifying our message on social media. So that's an immediate, you know, example of, of how we're working and being supported by men, both on the corporate and on the sports side of things, entertainment as well. So men have long been supporters of Play Like a Girl, of me as an individual, and of our work and the girls that we serve. And I'd say it starts with the fathers in many of those girls' lives, like it did in mine. And it shows up, you know, in the boardroom with men who are

making decisions about where women will be within companies, you know, how we will advance women's sports, all of those things that truly matter to all of us.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** I love that. I want to talk about the cool thing that happened this fall with the Vanderbilt woman's soccer player becoming the first woman to play in an SEC game. It was Vanderbilt, it's in Nashville, you're in Nashville and she gave a massive shout out to Play Like a Girl. Can you tell us about that experience for Play Like a Girl?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Yeah, one, it was not something we expected. I had never spoken to Sarah Fuller at the time, we've spent, actually spent probably a few minutes together in terms of conversations. We DM probably more than we do anything else. And she's actually been a guest mentor for our girls this last semester as well. So the relationship is deepening because of her decision to share her platform with us. But I was traveling. I was actually headed back from my home in Dallas to my home here in Nashville, where we had spent Thanksgiving, and I got a text message from one of our board members and I brushed it off and kept moving. Cause I had no clue what she was talking about. And by the time I got off the airplane at BNA, it was crazy house, right? So I finally caught up and had like a whole list of media to do, was able to catch my breath probably that Tuesday, and truly get a sense of, you know, what this was, why we were the ones chosen. And I just have to say that it was just a selfless act of her paying it forward, not even realizing even herself, the platform or the ripple effect that it would create for both herself and for Play Like a Girl.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Yeah, it was incredible. That's how I, I mean, I feel like I had heard about Play Like a Girl for a while, but that was such a pivotal time, because you have this woman that has broken a glass ceiling and then she's bringing you along with her. And I just get cold chills, because that's what this is about. It's about when you reach a level, who are you bringing alongside you? Who are you helping also get there? How are you making it bigger? Well, opening up the table, bringing more chairs, you know, like busting out the leaves of the table. You know what I mean? And so that's one of the reasons I have this podcast and it's so exciting to see that in action.

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** And I have to say that, you know, I truly believe as women, it's not a choice. It's like an obligation. Like it's what we have to do for one another, which is why I am thoroughly enjoying our ability to give back and pay it forward through mentoring during this moment of COVID, because it truly allows us to draw on the strength and the expertise and knowledge of other women and provide them the platform to do just that. Although with our mentoring program, these are women

reaching back from, you know, where they are in career, back to girls in middle school. Well, we're doing the same thing with our women's leadership summit in a couple of weeks, we've embedded the opportunity for women to bid in our executive auction on an opportunity to sit down and meet with and get feedback from, you know, women and men across various levels of career, be it C-suite executives to elite athletes and entertainers on their journeys and things that they would share from, you know, just simple tips to actual skills that they see as important for jobs. And even for life. One of the most exciting ones we've had in the past. And that we're hoping to announce soon is Mark Cuban, you know, donated time as well. To be able to sit with a billionaire investor and get his reaction to your business idea, or to just get feedback about a myriad of topics, like you don't get that opportunity that often, if ever. And so that's what we're leveraging our platform and our connections as an organization to bring those opportunities to adult women who will be attending and participating in our sessions.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** I want to talk a little bit about what the girls are learning through this program. And I know one of the things that you talk about a lot is competition and self-worth, and self-confidence, and I know that there's the mentor, and I love that you have this mentorship program with this summit, but with the girls. And so I want to talk a little bit about how, when you have competition, like in sports, how that translates into self-worth, self-confidence and self-esteem, and that process of learning it through sport. I played sports growing up so I can see how, like, losing, right? Like, being able to like, lose and get over it right? And move forward.

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** So one, we have what we call our 10 Play Like a Girl principles, and you just nailed one of them, which is turn your failure into success, right? It's using failure as a fuel. It's learning what I call the bounce back, resiliency, learning how to fail and accepting failure as necessary to success, because it is. So that's one of our core, core principles that we teach at Play Like a Girl.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** So what does that look like in how you're teaching the girls that, because even in business, we hear that all the time, right? Like fail forward. You have to fail to get to success. But when you're in a moment of failure, how are you teaching the girls to like, understand that that's part of it and move forward and not go into this like downward spiral.

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Yeah, it looks different for everyone. So again, because we have mentors paired with girls, our mentors are sharing their own personal failures, mostly in career, but some life failures as well, and sharing the lessons that are attached to those failures. One, what did they learn? And two, how did they turn what they

learned into a launch pad into doing it differently if they had the opportunity to do it again? And if they didn't, now how does it inform their mentorship of the girls? So every mentoring relationship looks different because every mentor brings a different experience, but we just kicked off with our Meet Your Mentor session. And it was an exercise where we pitted our mentors against the mentees, and a simple technology activity within Zoom, utilizing a function of Zoom, that's called the billboard. Just to show, one, a skill that we needed to teach everybody because once they go into their mentoring circles, they'll be using these functions within Zoom, which are new, so we wanted folks to become familiar. There was the assumption that the young people, the mentees, right? That they would win this competition because they're younger, you know, they know the technology, they're savvy in that regard, but there was loss by the mentees to the mentors. And so that was a live moment where we were able to drive home that point, right? About failure, the necessity of failure in this example, for them to acquire the skills necessary, to now go back and perfect and polish and be able to adequately and effectively utilize this tool over the course of the next 12 weeks.

The other more recent example that we've used with the girls is that of Serena and Naomi, you know, at the Australian Open. I think there are so many levels of lessons that can be learned from that game, how it was played, and then also how it was won. Was there a loser? Yeah, on paper and in numbers in terms of how many matches and games were won, but there truly were no losers, because Serena now gets to see her full circle moment right on the court in front of her. And Naomi operates like a true champion sportsman would, a true elite athlete, in celebrating Serena for opening the door and creating the path for her to be able to now play her and win. And so there is nothing better, I think, than those two examples of how you can take real life examples of situations of failure and teach the principle to girls in ways that they can relate and make sense of it and then apply it in their lives. And, you know, I've mentioned the summit a couple of times, we've actually built into the summit an opportunity for every woman to be trained as a mentor, we've partnered with Dove and their self-esteem project. So we actually have a Dove self-esteem educator, Dre Brown, who is coming to train everyone. And on the last hour of the summit, our girls will join and women will be able to apply everything that they've gained throughout the day and everything they learned in that self-esteem training in actual one-on-one sessions mentoring middle school and high school girls.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** I am excited to go through that training myself. So it's going to be amazing. And I wanted to give you a chance to, just for anyone listening, any woman, I'm inspired, we're all inspired. What is the best way to get connected to Play Like a Girl? What's the best way for us to volunteer or make sure, like, do we need to check

with our local schools and see if Play Like a Girl is in this school? Like, what are some of the things that we can do to say, "Hey, I want to get more involved. And I want to make sure that the girls in my community have access to this program."

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** I love that you mentioned the school piece. So we have a partnership with five of the Metro Nashville Public Schools, which is where and how we do a lot of our intervention with the girls. But yes, that is actually the perfect place to start. Between your school, middle school in particular, closest proximity to you, or if you have a child in the middle school, but also your job. So if women are in companies that have women's networks or employee resource groups, those are great places to start where we can engage employee volunteers by, you know, signing folks up as volunteers and mentoring in those schools that we identify. But going back to the schools, a great place to start a new program, because we're not in all 34 middle schools. I think it's about 34 across Metro Schools. We're in five of them. So there's so much more to be done, so many more schools where we need to have programming. So, yes, I would encourage, if you speak to a PSA or PTA leader, a school principal, you know, a counselor within your school, that's a great way to get started and bring Play Like a Girl into that environment. Even if it's just to do an assembly or a camp or something, it's a way to build a relationship toward more long-term programming.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** I love that. We've been talking a lot, especially this year about mentorship. I have a thing where I talk on the four types of mentorship, you know, traditional mentorship, passive mentorship, peer mentorship, and then mentoring others. And that's one of the things I'm really big on, is we so often, even as business women, we're always looking for our mentor, right? Who's going to mentor us, and that's so important for sure. We all need mentors, but gosh, I have found so much value in mentoring others, and taking that opportunity and that time. And, and we all know this, like when you give you are the one that receives, right? Like when you're mentoring others, there's so much more that you gain back, because sometimes what you share with a mentee is exactly what you need to hear, right? Like how often have I sat there and worked with a mentee and been reminded of my own worth of my own value. And so I just encourage anyone if, you know, if Play Like a Girl is not in your area and there's not a way for you to volunteer. Find an organization that is in your community that you can get involved with. I just spoke at my local high school to the business class, and it was so fun and it, you know, it's funny. I remember, you know, when you get out of high school, it was always a dream of mine. I don't know why. I'm like you, I come from a super tiny town in the middle of nowhere, but it was always a dream of mine to come back and speak to the high school. And when I did, I kind of sloughed it off, like "Oh yeah, it's not that big of a deal." And I was like, you

know what? To those kids, it is a big deal. And it were just reminded me, of what is it that when we were little girls. And I'm sure you had this big dream of being a PhD, and then once you got it, you discounted yourself. Do you still do that? Do you find yourself still discounting yourself? And how do you deal with that?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Yeah, you know, I think we all at moments have a tendency to go back to negative self-talk, you know, whatever thing gets you there. For me, it's the struggle of running a nonprofit. There are few people who understand what it takes to do this. And especially when you're doing it with no pay and no staff, and you know, it has its challenges. But for me, my faith drives everything I do. I have to always regulate ego, which for me means "edging God out." So I try to remain focused on who called me to the work. He's gonna provide. He's gonna sustain and create every resource. My daily prayer is "God raise up somebody who will use their ability, their influence, and their resource to bless me." And I cannot tell you, God never fails to deliver every single time. So for me, yes, it's crazy to believe, but I actually have three of my own mentees beyond Play Like a Girl. I still give back because I believe that it is my duty, my service, my call and my responsibility, and that's what I have to do. And it is my way of paying my rent on earth.

I am occupying valuable space. And so in order to continue and to continue to be blessed, I believe in the spiritual principle of reciprocity, that what you put out comes back, that you plant and someday there will be a harvest. And there've been many moments in my life where I know that I've reaped the harvest, and then there's some things I'm still waiting on the harvest. And so sometimes, yeah, I start to talk myself out of continuing to, to till the land and the things that I have planted, but I continue to do it because I know I'm called to do it. It's my purpose. And for me, I don't feel like I have a real choice in it.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** That's so beautiful. And I just can see how God is just going to increase, like whatever you planted. I love that you can sow and work really hard, and you can till the field and do all the things. And then He gets to choose to over bless you and really make a blessing out of what you've done. So I'm excited to continue to see you grow and blossom.

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** In fact, scripture says that blessings will chase you down and overtake you. And that's what I'm believing God for, that blessings that chase and overtake, and not just for me, but to every person connected to me, every person connected to Play Like a Girl that has sacrificed, that has supported, has donated, that is my daily prayer for every person that has touched my vision and my calling to

this work, that God's grace, his bountiful blessings will chase you down. And overtake you.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Ooh, I'm going to receive that. That is beautiful. Oh my gosh. Well, you are a light to this world, to this earth and to all that, that know you. So I'd love for you to share where can we find you and Play Like a Girl?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Yeah, the quickest, easiest place. Of course, social media on all of our platforms. We are I Play Like a Girl and then our web address is very similar, it's IPlayLikeaGirl.org

**Leah Glover Hayes:** And then how do you define success today?

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Success today is really defined by how you serve.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** It's beautiful. Well, you have been a blessing to me. I'm sure to the woman listening is so much more inspired, and I look forward to continuing a beautiful relationship and mentorship with Play Like a Girl. Thank you, Dr. Kim.

**Dr. Kimberly Clay:** Thank you so much.

**Leah Glover Hayes:** Thanks for tuning in! At Her Story of Success, we are on a mission to help women-business owners, leaders and professionals build your tribe and reach your next level of success by connecting you to one another, equipping you with resources and empowering you along your journey. We would love for you to be a part of our tribe and further this mission by sharing this podcast with a friend or co-worker you want to help succeed.. And you can stay up to date with all of our episodes, blogs and events by signing up for our newsletter at [Herstoryofsuccess.com](http://Herstoryofsuccess.com).

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