

**By U.S. Sen. LAMAR ALEXANDER
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This (past) week, the University of Tennessee, where I was once president, announced that our basketball coach, Pat Summitt, is stepping down after 38 years in that position and, shortly after, President Obama announced that Summitt had been awarded our nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Women's college basketball will never be the same without Pat Summitt and women's college basketball would never be what it is today if it weren't for Pat Summitt.

She did far more than win eight NCAA championships and more games than any other coach in college basketball – she changed the game, she changed the lives of the young women she coached, and we all hope her efforts to fight Alzheimer's and find a cure will change many more lives. That's the kind of inspiration over her 38 years at UT that earned her the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

There will be much said about her winning record and it's an astonishing accomplishment: 1,098 wins in basketball, more than any other coach--man or woman--in the sport; 8 National Championships in the Southeastern Conference; 32 Southeastern Conference titles; 31 straight trips to the NCAA tournament.

But the statistic that I always valued most, especially when I was president of the University, was every single one of Pat Summitt's athletes who have completed their eligibility with her have graduated from the University of Tennessee—that's over 38 years.

It's hard for people outside of Tennessee to understand how much Pat Summitt has become a part of the lives of so many citizens in our state. She actually was asked by the university to take over the basketball program when she was in her early 20s. It was in 1974. Back then, many women's basketball games were played with three women on one end and three women on the other end—the offense and the defense. She changed all that in a big-time way.

When I say that women's college basketball wouldn't be the same without her, I really mean that. Almost every women's coach in America would attest to the fact that Pat Summitt has played an important either model or personal role in their development. Even before big games, she would have the opposing team and the opposing coach over to her house in Knoxville.

She always had time for community events in Knoxville, despite her busy schedule as such a winning coach. She is a terrific person individually and a great model. She really taught many of us in Tennessee the game of women's college basketball. And she was so up front and personal in her discussion of these extraordinary athletes she had, and what their pluses were and what the things were that they had to work on, that we all felt we not only knew her, we knew the athletes as well.

I've enjoyed watching Pat Summitt's teams for many, many years. I made a point to watch three of her games in person this year in Knoxville because I feared that this might be her last season.

I'm sure she'll be as accomplished in the next stage of her life as she has been in the last 38 years.