Sonya and Dell Curry have three children - daughter Sydel, a volleyball player like her mother, and sons Stephen and Seth, who followed their father's footsteps into basketball.

By Ann Killion

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Sonya Curry's day will begin in Durham, N.C., with a 9:30 a.m. graduation ceremony at Duke University for her son Seth, her first child to earn a college degree. It will continue with a celebratory family lunch and finish at Seth's apartment, where the family will watch her older son's team play in a critical Game 4 for the Warriors against the San Antonio Spurs.
Just a slightly intense and emotional Mother's Day.

"She's going to lose her mind," Stephen Curry predicted. "Lots of emotions."

And he said that before Sonya was aware she'd have renewed worries about her older son's fragile ankle.

The story of Stephen Curry always begins with his father Dell, a great shooter both at Virginia Tech and in the NBA who passed along his skills to his older son.

But that leaves out half the story, as anyone who has watched one of either Seth's or Stephen's games and seen the animated, attractive woman in the stands seated next to Dell can attest.

"She's a strong woman," Stephen said of his mother. "Growing up in an NBA household, with my dad being on the road a lot, she did a great job with me and my siblings. She deserves a lot of credit for how we turned out."

And she deserves a share of credit for the athletic ability of her children: Stephen, currently the hottest name in the NBA; Seth, who helped lead Duke to the Elite Eight and is eligible for this year's NBA draft; and Sydel, who graduates next month from high school and heads to Elon University, where she will play volleyball. Sonya was a three-sport athlete in high school and played volleyball at Virginia Tech.

"A lot of people say whatever defensive abilities I have, I get from her," Stephen said. "My toughness and grittiness."
Stephen Curry also played football and baseball as a kid.
When Stephen was in middle school and was a poor runner, his mother put him through a two-week boot camp in the backyard, doing plyometrics and working on his form.

"I hated it," he said. "But it taught me work ethic."

'Not an ugly girl'

Sonya was a 5-foot-3 volleyball player at Virginia Tech. According to her best friend and college roommate, Michelle Bain-Brink, the volleyball team was very popular in those days, in large part because of Sonya.

"She was not an ugly girl," Bain-Brink said.

Among her legions of fans was Dell Curry, the Hokies' athletic star. They fell in love, got married and began raising a family as Dell launched his NBA career.

Recently Warriors coach Mark Jackson joked that people who are calling Stephen Curry an emerging star are "late to the hospital. That baby has already been born." But when Stephen Curry was actually born on March 14, 1988, his parents were careful to hold no expectations about his athletic career.
Stephen Curry, shown above at age 19 with his mom, Sonya, says he got his toughness from his mother, who was a college volleyball player at Virginia Tech.

"We decided early that we wouldn't focus on that with our kids," Sonya said. "I watched so many other children of players, young boys who just thought this life was automatically expected and then didn't know what else to do. From the beginning, ours knew that was Daddy's job. I tried to keep it normal and grounded."

The Curry children had no doubt about the order of priorities: faith, family, academics and then everything else, including sports. Though everyone in the family is competitive - Bain-Brink gets the giggles remembering how Sonya would scold her for not abiding by the rules of Uno when playing with the children - they tried to keep their
competitiveness in perspective.

"Sports is a big part of our family, but not priority No. 1," Stephen said. "Plenty of times I was disciplined for not taking care of things in the classroom or around the house, and the punishment was that I couldn't practice or play."

Sonya was the disciplinarian. The night before Stephen's first middle school game, he purposely didn't do the dishes as expected. He wasn't allowed to play in the next day's game.

"We knew there were values other than my dad's fame or what sports could bring because it wasn't a guarantee that me and my brother would take up the family business," Stephen said.

**Hard words to bear**

The taunts of "soft" that Stephen heard from the Denver Nuggets started in high school. Sonya ached to protect her son.

"He was such a late bloomer," she said. "He didn't look the part. We heard the negative comments: He's not big enough, he can't dunk. Even now, there's always a 'But ... .'"

At one travel-team tournament in Las Vegas, Division I coaches filled the small high school gym where Stephen's team was playing. North Carolina's coach, Duke's Mike Krzyzewski, Bob McKillop from Davidson. Stephen felt the pressure of following in his father's footsteps. But he had a bad game and came back to the hotel room dejected, feeling he'd ruined his chances.

"Did I mess up?" he asked his mother.

"My heart just broke," Sonya said. "It was a learning lesson for me as a parent, to just back up and let it be."

Stephen remembers that day.
"She told me to keep my head up and keep working, that I might not see it now but that someone is watching how I handle the situation," Stephen said. "She said to be patient and keep my eyes open and it will be clear as day where I'm supposed to be. Those were the best words I could hear at the time."

He ended up at Davidson, a prestigious academic school but not exactly a path to the NBA. When McKillop offered a scholarship and Stephen accepted it, Sonya told McKillop, "We'll work on getting him beefed up." McKillop looked her in the eye and said, "I'll take him just the way he is."

"That's when the tears started," Sonya said.

_Schooled in confidence_

Dell Curry is often credited as the source of Stephen's on-court confidence and cool. But the roots may also be in his childhood education.

When Stephen was in first grade, his mother started a Montessori school. For the next several years, Stephen and his siblings went to work every morning with their mother. The Montessori method teaches independence and accountability.

"If you hit a roadblock, don't be discouraged," Sonya said. "It provides a sense of who you are. That life throws you challenges and you need to figure it out."

Stephen attributes much of his self-confidence to that early education.

"It is pretty special," he said. "It teaches you how to work through something."

Stephen was Sonya's overachieving son, the one who liked to get his homework done early. But Seth is the first to graduate, because Stephen left Davidson early for the NBA. However, he continues - with the encouragement of his mother - to work toward his degree in the summers.

Sonya became something of an Internet sensation during Duke's NCAA Tournament run. At her children's high school games she volunteered to keep the stats, knowing it
would prevent her from yelling and getting too worked up during games. But released from the scorebook, she cheers and dances unabashedly, and the television cameras love to find her in the stands. Some sites call her, among other things, "basketball's most famous mom." There are GIFs of her celebrating.

Stephen, who of course never saw her in the stands during his own games, gets a kick out of it.

"They show my dad with his stoic face and my mom tearing up and yelling and screaming," he said. "It's cool."

Mom is always the one bubbling over with emotions. This Mother's Day may be a record-breaker.

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