

“USA Paralympic team member Katie Holloway

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (Oct. 4, 2011) – U.S. Women’s Sitting Volleyball Team player Katie Holloway will make her reality TV debut on Sunday (Oct. 9) on ABC’s Extreme Makeover: Home Edition. The show will air at 8 p.m. ET (check local listings).

Holloway’s athletic and life accomplishments attracted the show’s producers, who asked her to be an inspiring role model to a 10-year-old hero who lost her left leg and a kidney while saving her little sister from an oncoming pick-up truck.

“The producers of the show called the U.S. Paralympic offices and they referred them to me,” said Holloway, 25, who is from Lake Stevens, Wash and is one of the resident sitting volleyball athletes at the University of Central Oklahoma. “To be honest, I was nervous to meet her at first but when we were introduced she immediately gave me a hug.”

In February 2011, in Madison, Ga., then 9-year-old, Anaiah Rucker and younger sister Camry, six, were crossing the street to get to their school bus when the unthinkable happened. In a selfless and successful effort to save her sister’s life, Anaiah let go of her sister’s hand and took the blow of the approaching truck after pushing her sister out of harm’s way.

From their family porch, the girls’ mother, Andrea, watched the horrifying event and rushed to her daughter’s motionless side. Soon after, school-bus driver Loretta performed CPR on the breathless body, saving Anaiah’s life.

The impact broke Anaiah’s neck, injured her spleen and one of her kidneys and broke both of her legs. Doctors had to remove her kidney and amputate her left leg above the knee. Anaiah was given a prosthetic leg and alternates between her wheelchair and a walker to get around.

When asked by NBC Today Show co-anchor Ann Curry why she did what she did, Anaiah replied, “because she is my sister.”

“Both Anaiah and Camry are amazing little girls,” Holloway said. “Their maturity and acceptance of the circumstance inspired me when I was sent there to inspire them.”

It took five surgeries and six weeks before Anaiah was able to head back to her house; a house that would soon be torn down and built back up to better her new needs and to continue her love for basketball.

“I was asked by the builders for my input about the concrete for the basketball court at first,” Holloway said. “I think they were pleasantly surprised by my knowledge of the disability, sports and the needs that Anaiah would have.”

“I was able to give a lot more feedback and my spot on the show went from just visiting the family in their vacation getaway in Disney to a full guest appearance throughout the entire shooting of the episode.”

Holloway was the perfect fit for the job of ‘inspirational voice.’ The 6-foot-4 former Division I women’s basketball standout and 2008 Paralympic sitting volleyball silver medalist was born without a fibula in her right leg and had her foot amputated as a baby. She plays basketball with a prosthetic leg. She is also a member of the University of Central Oklahoma residence program.

“The whole experience helped me grow as a person because I realized early in the taping that I would be a lifetime mentor to Anaiah,” Holloway said. “Her attitude and maturity made the decision to take on that responsibility easy for me. It was a new chapter in my life. All of a sudden I had this weight on my shoulders to guide this young girl and I was OK with that because I wanted and still want life to be as easy as possible for her.”

Holloway’s athletic resume is a true testament that hard work, dedication and overcoming adversity are possible no matter what cards you are or aren’t dealt.

Prior to her sitting volleyball career, Holloway was a standout basketball player at Cal State Northridge as the two-time Big West Conference Sixth Women of the Year. Holloway remains as the only female amputee to compete on a Division I collegiate basketball team.

“Off camera, Anaiah and I were able to talk a lot and share stories, Holloway said. “She is so positive and loves basketball and is willing to do what she has to do to be able to play. She won’t be in that wheelchair forever so she not only knows that she can play wheelchair basketball but she can also play standing basketball.”

Joining Holloway as the episode’s special guest was NBA superstar Dwight Howard of the Orlando Magic.

“Dwight and I did all of the basketball scenes together,” Holloway said. “Anaiah, Dwight and I got to shoot around on camera for a while, dictating the conversation and interaction ourselves. We put Dwight in my basketball wheelchair and played half the time in the chairs and then half the time standing.”

It has been three months since the taping of the show and the relationship between Anaiah and her family and Holloway has been enduring. Holloway makes sure that she is available for both Anaiah and her family.

“When I was being driven to the airport, Anaiah’s grandmother asked me questions about young girl stuff,” Holloway said. “She asked about the struggles Anaiah may face growing up and what everyday life obstacles I found myself lost in when I was her age.”

With the episode a wrap, Holloway is excited to see it on television and see what her friends and family say about it. She also hopes that it may inspire those kids watching who might be going through a similar situation.

“My disability was the best thing that ever happened to me and I want everyone going through something like this to know that it will be a journey, but one that they are not on alone.”