

Nikki McCray-Penson

December 17, 1971 - July 7, 2023

Nikki Kesangane McCray- Penson was born on Dec. 17th 1971 in Collierville Tn and went to her heavenly home to be with our Lord and Savior on Friday July 7th  2023. She was preceded in death by her mother Sally Coleman and father Bobby Albright.

At an early age she accepted Christ as her personal savior at St Marks M.B. Church in Collierville Tn, and enjoyed singing and leading songs in the choir.  She was asked to sing the National Anthem at games throughout her career.

Nikki was a legend in the world of Women’s Basketball and she will forever be in our hearts. She was a great basketball player, coach, and friend, but more than that she prided herself on being a wife to Thomas and an amazing mother to Thomas Nikson. Whether she was playing or coaching she embodied a Champions heart and a winning spirit to succeed and be the best.

After a decorated career at Collierville High School she became a two-time SEC Player of the Year at Tennessee in 1994 and 1995.  She led Tennessee to three SEC regular-season championships, two SEC Tournament titles and a 1995 Final Four appearance in her four-year career. Nikki graduated from the University of Tennessee with a Sports Management Degree in 1995.  She was a two-time All-American and was inducted into the National Federation of State High School Associations Hall of Fame in 2015 and the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame in 2022. She was a three-time WNBA All-Star and a two-time Olympic gold medalist. She was inducted into the Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame in 2012.  She has a park in Collierville Tn named after her.

She spent 16 years coaching after her playing career. Her coaching career began in 2006 at Western Kentucky, where she spent two seasons. She was hired by Staley at South Carolina and stayed there from 2008-17, helping lead the Gamecocks to their first NCAA championship in her final season. Her two head-coaching stops were at Old Dominion (2017-20) and Mississippi State (2020-21). She spent  her last season as an assistant  coach at Rutgers.

Nikki loved life and spending time with her two Thomas’s. She was down to earth and a true plain Jane, she liked neutral colors and nothing too flashy. She liked hot fries and had no problem sending them back if they weren’t the temp she desired. She loved Christmas in Louisville Tn in her log cabin decorating her tree by herself as every ornament was strategically placed around the tree. She made the best Christmas breakfast and loved seeing everyone open their gifts. She wanted everyone around her to feel special and not just her family but her teammates and the young ladies she recruited to play on her teams. She had a special genuine touch with players, their families and those she worked with. She will be remembered as a special woman, an amazing coach and a great friend.

Nikki leaves to cherish her life memories a devoted husband and caregiver whom she called Honey- Thomas L. Penson and son Thomas Nikson. Grandmother: Bertha Anderson, Mother in Law: Dorothy Penson, Stepfather: James Coleman, Sisters: Christy (Preston) Howard and Jennifer Coleman of Collierville, Tn Brothers: James D.( Coco) Coleman of Collierville Tn and Anthony ( Monica) Albright of Knoxville Tn., Devin Albright from Orlando Florida, and Ronnie Albright. Sister in Law: Labrina(Charles) Harris of Chattanooga Tn. Nieces and Nephews: John Wesley, Dorian, Ayanna, Taylor, Caleb, Jaylen, Christian, Alonna, Ryleigh and Zoie. Aunts: Savannah Payne, Emma McGowan, Versie Bolden Brown, Melvina Ray Torrance, Diane McCray, Clara (George) Brown, Vernita (Mike) Brook and Uncles: Sidney (Minnie) McCray, Roy (Virginia) McCray, Vantrice Cohen, Jerry(Joyce) Rosser, James (Evelyn)Rosser, a host of Special cousins, friends and relatives in the McCray, Rosser/Albright, and Penson families that was touched by Nikki’s presence.

Nikki’s services will be at 2:00 pm on Saturday July 15th at Mt. Olive Baptist Church 1601 Dandridge Ave. Knoxville, TN Visitation will be 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm with service to follow. In lieu of flowers, please send a donation to the Kay Yow Cancer Fund www.kayyow.com in memory of Nikki. Final arrangements entrusted to Foothills Funeral Home. www.foothillsfh.com

To send a flower arrangement or to plant trees in memory of **Nikki McCray-Penson**, please [click here to visit our Sympathy Store](https://www.foothillsfh.com/obituary/nikki-mccray-penson/flowers?campaign=obituaryInline-flowers-textLink-obitText).

SERVICES

**Visitation**

Saturday, July 15, 2023  
*1:00 PM - 2:00 PM*

*Mt. Olive Baptist Church- Knoxville*  
1601 Dandridge Avenue  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37915