

From Athlete to Leader - How Two Women of Color combined their strengths to transform lives in Underserved Communities

athLEDA Foundation launches to transform athletes into effective STEM leaders by converting skills on the field of play to skills for the professional world.

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[/EINPresswire.com/](https://EINPresswire.com/) -- When a professional or Olympic-level athlete experiences a debilitating injury or other unforeseen life circumstance that forces them out of their sport, transitioning to a different life direction can seem unimaginable. Yet many college athletes face this challenge, particularly in under-served communities of color, and that's the reason why Jelanna Olivera and Tracey Hathaway founded the [athLEDA Foundation](#), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to transform athletes into effective STEM leaders by converting skills on the field of play to skills useful in the professional world.



Tracey Hathaway and Jelanna Olivera at NCAA HQ

On Feb. 6th, this women-led team in partnership with the NCAA officially launched a new athLEDA platform by unveiling ARISE, an NCAA HBCU STEM MENTORSHIP simultaneously at three Historically Black US Colleges & Universities (HBCUs): Florida A&M, Grambling State in Louisiana and Claflin University in South Carolina.

Olivera's passion to start athLEDA was born in May 2020 when she saw her son's dream to become a professional football player abruptly end after suffering severe head trauma. As she witnessed her son's challenges of transitioning to a world outside of sports, she realized a structure was needed to help mentor and guide young athletes like her son who find themselves at the same crossroads.

As she reached out to her own professional contacts in business and technology, Olivera began building a team to bring her vision to life. She partnered with large corporations, such as Sony and Salesforce, who provided mentors and their networks to help young athletes learn how



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Dee Dee Merritt, Executive Director of NCAA Leadership Development

various emerging industries thrive in a post pandemic world.

Along the journey, Olivera met who is now her life partner, Tracey Hathaway, a former Division I student athlete who was among the first of two Black women in her university to receive a full athletic scholarship. Hathaway went on to coach women’s basketball at the collegiate level and rose to athletic leadership within several university systems, eventually becoming an Athletic Director. Though times have changed, the opportunities for women, particularly Women of Color have not. Thus, Hathaway dedicated her PhD research to a study of intersectionality. Her research exposes the lack of support mechanisms for Black Women

student athletes and ironically she was introduced to Olivera by a close mentor of hers.

Olivera and Hathaway founded athLEDA to support the diversity and inclusion of all athletes on their journey to greatness. According to the data from the National Collegiate Athletic Association, less than 1% of all Division I Black and Brown Student Athletes are exposed to STEM opportunities. 86% of all Division I fully scholarship student athletes come from families living below the poverty line. Based on this research, Olivera and Hathaway along with the NCAA created an intentional focus on HBCU student athletes naming their success beyond sport. Through guided experiences where 77% of the executive mentors come from a STEM background, the athLEDA platform enables young minds to confidently navigate a transition from student athlete to emerging leader.

Olivera and Hathaway also partnered with Denise DiSano, CEO of enCappture, a mobile app tech firm where the athLEDA app came to life. The app enables NCAA student athletes to interact with live mentors through a series of bite-sized pieces of micro-learning where guided mentoring can mold a young growth mind-set.

Olivera found the mobile app to be “a game changer.” She says, “our Gen Z student athletes are competing all over the country, the athLEDA app allows us to meet them where they are.”

Dee Dee Merritt, Executive Director of NCAA Leadership Development says, “NCAA Leadership Development is proud and excited to partner with athLEDA to bring student athletes this opportunity that marries both a guided curriculum and mentorship support together. We bring a wonderful opportunity for student athletes to learn and grow professionally.”

One of the student athletes tapped to help build the athLEDA platform, Juvia Davis, Senior, D-1 Women's Softball at Indiana University, says, “athLEDA in one word is revolutionary. It has been an honor and privilege to work behind the scenes building the app as a content creator and as a

product of true impact for Women of Color.”

MORE ABOUT athLEDA

The athLEDA Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization intentionally focused on mentoring diverse, student athletes from our most vulnerable communities. Their mission is to build the next generation of high performing leaders by empowering them to achieve through action. AthLEDA established its roots in Los Angeles, incorporated in the Midwest, and has now expanded nationally with headquarters in Boston. For more info: <https://www.athleda.org/>

ABOUT NCAA Leadership Development

NCAA Leadership Development serves to educate and empower student athletes, coaches and athletic administrators through transformative experiences that develop strong, effective leaders, cultivate an inclusive community and enhance the college sports landscape.

ABOUT Jelanna Olivera & Tracey Hathaway

As a woman of Color, Jelanna enables her experience in Management Consulting, Healthcare, and Change Management to create a space that empowers innovation with measured impact. Her previous organizational tenure includes Ernst & Young, KPMG, and Eli Lilly and Company. Jelanna also holds a Master’s degree in Information Systems from the Kelley School of Business, located in Bloomington, Indiana. Tracey Hathaway is in the final stages of completing her dissertation on the experience of the Black Woman College Athlete through the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her first-hand experience in collegiate athletics while serving on several NCAA committees has become the driving force of research encompassing the mission of the foundation. Tracey and Jelanna now share a life together near Boston, Massachusetts where they enjoy hiking, kayaking, and gardening all while raising the youngest of five grown children.

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