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St. Croix Native is First Woman of Color to be Appointed Dartmouth College's Executive Associate Athletic Director for Varsity Sports

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Donna Bellot **March 19, 2020**

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Kristene Kelly, a St. Croix native, has been appointed Dartmouth College's Executive Associate Athletic Director for Varsity Sports By. KRISTINE KELLY

ST. CROIX — While titles like the one above are becoming more commonplace with women of color being accepted and appointed to positions long held and mostly dominated by men, something significant sets this one apart. Kristene Kelly is indeed a woman of color; however, more significantly so, she is a woman of color born and raised in U.S. Virgin Islands.

Her appointment as the first woman of color and of Caribbean descent in a position that has traditionally and vastly been held by men, and is highly likely to be celebrated — especially by

women of the U.S. Virgin Islands and women of Caribbean lineage.

Born to parents Christina and Neville Brathwaite, Kelly hails from a family of educators. One of her sisters—Ginitta Richards—recently retired as the principal of the St Croix Educational Complex High School, while yet another—Andrea Brathwaite—is still a teacher at the same school. “Education has been something that has been big in my family for years and years ...” she said.

To emphasize the significance of her new position, one must understand that as the Executive Assoc. AD for varsity sports at an Ivy League University, Ms. Kelly is responsible for overseeing the daily operations of any and everything varsity sports related; which includes overseeing 37 athletic sports teams and over 100 coaches and other staff.

The Consortium sat with Kelly to learn a little more about her and to get her perspective on what it was like for her to accomplish such a historical feat. During the interview Kelly exuded a confident, amiable, and humble demeanor.

First, we asked her how her island upbringing has helped throughout her career, and Kelly stressed both the importance of family, and being able to grow up in a close-knit community.

“The one thing I love about growing up in St. Croix is you weren’t just x-y-z’s daughter, you were everybody’s daughter, and everyone looked out for each other. Whether that was just in a regular social setting, or that was in an academic setting, whether that was in a professional work environment, everyone looked out for each other and I think that that entire level of community or that sense of community... I felt like I have taken that through every aspect of my life into everything that I do; ensuring that I’ve created an environment where people feel supported and feel there is a sense of community.”

When asked how she felt about being the first woman of color to be appointed to the position, Kelly said that at first, she hadn’t realized the magnitude of her appointment, saying:

“You always work hard, and you don’t always look for accolades or pats on the back for doing anything, but you also recognized that you stand on a lot of people’s shoulders, and a lot of people will be standing on your shoulders as well. So, I know that if I do a good job in this role, then hopefully people coming after me won’t have such a hard time getting employment in certain positions that are so dominated by men. So, for me I understand it is a blessing, I am grateful for the opportunity; and I just want to continue to not only make my parents proud, but my Virgin Islands folks proud, and any other woman or black person that comes after me as well.”

Finally, to the women of the Virgin Islands, Kelly says that women should never be afraid to step outside of their comfort zone, and more so, they should never be afraid to ask for help.

“I’m an island girl through and through, I never forget about my heritage and where I’m from, but...I also live in New Hampshire... Sometimes you have to step outside and really broaden your horizons and gain those experiences and you never know what would come from that. So, what I would say to the people in the Virgin Islands, one there’s nothing wrong with being in St Croix, or the Virgin Islands as a whole, but, depending on what you want to do particularly like what I do, you have to step outside of your comfort zone.”

Additionally, Kelly said that it is also important to ask for help and be willing to help others whenever the opportunity presents itself.

“Don’t be afraid to ask for help. There are people out there, reach out to them. You know I would love to help any student that I possibly can... If I could help anyone, I would love to help them, as long as they are willing to work hard because again it’s not easy. It’s not something that’s just going to happen...you have to work, and you have to work hard and that’s something that I would advise any student, particularly young women of the Virgin Islands.”

Her accomplishments should be a testament that there are no barriers to what women of color—and more so women of Caribbean lineage—can achieve.

Kelly is a graduate of the St. Croix Central High School, but she also spent time at the St. Patrick’s School and St Joseph’s Catholic High School. Kelly attended the Johnson C. Smith University and obtained her graduate degree from the University of Tennessee.