

COACH IN THE CORNER

WOMEN IN SPORT EDITION-INTERVIEW SERIES



Women in Sport Edition





Perri Williams-St Senan's AC

Events: middle distance, hurdles, throws and walks

Coach in the Corner- The Women in Sport Edition aims to recognise the contribution, commitment and dedication of some of our female role models and leaders. The unparalleled commitment given by these women must be recognised and celebrated, because without them, we would have no athletics. Over the next number of weeks, we will showcase some of the most influential coaches who have made enormous impacts on their local, provincial and national communities.

We hope this interview series will encourage more females to get involved, create an understanding of the pathways that exist for personal development and highlight the opportunities the sport can give us!

How did you get involved in athletics?

I have been involved in athletics on a continuous basis since I was u12. So that is a pretty long time. My Dad formed St Senans AC and I joined the club back then as an u12 athlete. I just went to athletics because Dad was the coach and I liked the company of the girls in my age group. Getting to my first All-Ireland as a 12 year old to me was a fluke. And the following year was another fluke. I never considered myself a good athlete. Looking back now – I was very hard on myself. I had the notion that to be good was to win. To do less was to fail.

I raced right through my juvenile years medalling in Leinster championships in 800m, 1500m and cross country – getting in the top 6 at Nationals but no medals. Finally when I was under 17 I got my first national medal – a gold. Then of course I wanted more – several more medals followed from that first one and lots of national records too. And then came the International races; world cups, GP, Worlds and Olympics. It was a long way from being a fluke qualifying for my first All-Ireland Cross Country age12.

I coached my first athlete when I was 18. I was already racing internationally and helped my Dad out when I was home at the weekends. By the time I was 23 and training for the Olympics I had already coached a few national champions, along with coaching athletes to European and world juniors. Upon returning to Ireland 15 years ago I got involved with my local club again – and have been there since.



Who or what has helped you as a coach?

Personal Adversity- I raced through rheumatoid arthritis – often with crippling pain. I was diagnosed around age 20 but in hindsight, I probably had it since I was 13. This made me tough. Made me fight harder, go beyond the threshold and prove that no matter what adversities life throws you – you can still achieve. If I made the Olympics with what I had, then others can do it too. As a coach, I believe that every person who joins St Senans AC is capable of achieving. No matter what adversity life throws to them. Mental strength is one of the most important assets for achieving in athletics. From the moment an athlete comes into my group I seek to develop this mental strength.

Mental strength and confidence are coupled together. It is not all about winning – it is about being strong and believing in yourself. I don't do negativity.

Networking is paramount. There is so much you can learn from chatting to other coaches – learning from their experiences. Being in the south of the country, unfortunately I do not have the time to travel to many of the workshops and higher level coaching courses, so instead I network. I spent 10 years living in the USA and as an athlete and a coach I had the opportunity to network with athletes and coaches in Athletics and other sports. Some of the greatest coaches I encountered in the US could often be the most humbling and unassuming individuals. Always willing to learn, to listen and to grow. My Dublin years I was coached by Jim Kilty of DCH. He introduced me to more advanced skills. Things like lactic thresholds, and more scientific concepts – allowing me to research these today for my own athletes.

Coaches entered my life and it was their people skills, **empathy and willingness to help that attached me.** People like Michael Gregan (Tramore AC), Joe Kelly (Brow Rangers) and Liam Kealy. In London Irish, there was PJ Fagan and Mick Lyons and the British National Coach Ray Hall – who travelled 2 hours through busy London traffic to take my sessions at the track in Battersy Park. These coaches have no fancy badges or certificates. What they have is experience from the grass roots to the International level. They do not see coaching as a personal gain. They were just **willing to help all in the name of their love for athletics and the athlete who loved athletics.**

My background in Athletics has been a tremendous asset. From doing every event as a juvenile to being able to transition into the senior ranks. I learnt from my ability to **work with other like-minded people.** People who want to achieve. To this day – I start this collaborative effort for my older juveniles – introducing them to multi club training sessions, where they can mingle with other like-minded people. This positive framework will help them transition to senior level.

Coaching Philosophy

- **There is no such thing as “I can’t”, I won’t and I am not able”.** If you dream it – you can achieve it. It is the first thing teach my athletes. My goals for each athlete are individual and personal to them.
- **Enjoy your early juvenile years,** try all events practise age appropriate training and success will follow as you get older.
- **Hard work pays off.** I don’t care if the athlete is someone who tries hard but does not make a podium – if they are willing to work hard and listen, their big day will come.
- **Build confidence and be mentally tough.** You need to work with the individual personalities and they need to trust you. Building trust in you as a coach, helps to build an athletes confidence. Nurturing will encourage personal growth.



“Advice for newcomers..

Network. Be humble and always be willing to learn.

If you open your mind there are endless possibilities and opportunities that will come your way.

Don't let anyone intimidate you.



WHAT KEEPS YOU INVOLVED?

My love for the sport. It is part of me. *It* gives me a great buzz. I love the journey athletics takes me on. It is a personal journey – both rewarding and fulfilling in many ways. I want to give back to the sport, the endless years of happiness and fulfilment that it gave me.

I get a great feeling when I see an athlete achieve their goals – be it at county, national or international level. There is nothing that gives me more pleasure than seeing the happy faces when that goal has been achieved. My own son is now doing athletics and through him getting internationals the travel has started again.

Now that is a good feeling too.





The Importance of female coaches

Female coaches bring more empathy to coaching. Sport can be tough and sometimes the female touch is needed.

Someone to be able to chat to and listen to. It is especially important for female athletes from 17 upwards. Often they respond better to female coaches.

You know the saying – behind every great man, there is an even greater woman.

No point in always being in the shadows – make your voice heard.



If you would like to highlight any of your female coaches as role models for this interview series, please contact lillyannohora@athleticsireland.ie