

COACH IN THE CORNER

WOMEN IN SPORT EDITION-INTERVIEW SERIES



Women in Sport Edition





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Groups: LoughreaAC, St Brigids College, Connacht Academy/Development Squad & AIT Jumpers

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 became involved in Athletics at about the age of 13. I was born in England of Irish parents who had emigrated in the 50's and I attended Catholic Primary School. We had a sports day every year and I used to win the sprint or egg and spoon race and the man that came into start said I should go up to the local athletics club. So I went up to the club, Thurrock Harriers thinking I was the best sprinter to find out there were 3 girls better than me but I did run on the relay. I tried long jump but there was a girl better than me, then I did combined events it was a pentathlon then with 200m not 800m but my club mate won the British championships under 15 and I was 4th. I moved into high jump and I became Essex schools champion breaking the record at the time and going onto the English Schools and finishing 6th with 1.56m and the winner jumping 1.78m Anne Gilson, Bournemouth!. That was the start and I just carried on



Who or what has helped you as a coach?

As a coach I have been helped along the way by all the people who took time and effort with me from my first coach Jack Gray RIP who was actually a soccer coach but his daughter did athletics and Geraldine was the good long jumper in the club. He had a fantastic eye for detail with no coaching papers in athletics but he worked with everyone regardless of their ability we all got the same time. Through to when I went to college in Sheffield and I was lucky to work with Wilf Paish RIP and Selwyn Roberts who kept on encouraging me along the way. To when I arrived in Ireland and had the good fortune to meet up with Sean Naughton of Nenagh Olympic and was invited to join his training group. I have watched all these coaches and they were always interested in the athlete and trying to help them to improve and Sean still tries to help me to this day. The ethos has come through in that club with Denis Finnerty and Martin O'Grady always on hand to give advice or to chat with you over a problem and it is lovely to talk about ideas and training methods with your fellow coaches.



What is your coaching philosophy?

My coaching philosophy has always been to get every athlete or child to **reach their full potential**. That can vary for the different athletes from a large number most athletes will come through at a young age 5 years through an athletics or summer camp or others join the athletics club. Some you see in a school PE lesson and the joy I get when someone achieves a technique or skill that they have not been able to do before is great. You do not get many athletics that will go on and become European or World champion but it is lovely to see someone you started with at 11 years old go on and win a gold medal at the World championships and you started that athlete off. Plenty of athletes will become County and Provincial medals and more will go on and win All Ireland medals or even represent Ireland at school, club or university level. I am happy to see athletes improving and then when I feel I have done as much as I can for that athlete then to put them in contact with another coach who can bring them onto another level.



What keeps you involved in athletics?

I am just passionate about athletics both as still being a competitor in Masters Athletics but also working with a wide range of athletes of all abilities. Also instilling the basic fundamental movements in athletes knowing that even if they do not participate in our sport that whatever sport they do go and play that I have helped that athlete to become more efficient.

Athletics is my drug but it is a healthy one I hope.



Advice for newcomers..

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My advice to new female coaches would be to just go and learn the ropes in your club you **have a good mentor** that you can **go and ask questions.**

Never be afraid to ask questions and gut instinct is good to have. Knowledge is a very powerful tool, but in the wrong hands it can be very dangerous.

A lot of practices come back full circle.

Quality training must be prioritized, not quantity, it is very important especially with young athletes.

A coach can never stop learning you will always pick up something new, and use other sports as well they have some interesting ideas.

Talk to your athletes and get feedback from them that is very important.

Keep being enthusiastic and enjoy what you are doing as that makes it so much easier.

Coaching is a process and it takes time for the athletes to develop.

They all develop at different rates so **be patient and be prepared** to wait and you will reap success eventually.

It is not all about winning medals, achievement can mean different things to different athletes so ask them what they want to achieve and help them **set realistic goals.**

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WHAT DO FEMALE COACHES BRING TO COACHING?

Female coaches have in general a very caring nature, they are hard workers and they look out for all the athletes in their group. A lot of the female coaches I have worked with are looking for information and advice as

generally they have started in the club set up when their own children have started or they are young teachers who have been drafted in from schools to get involved with the Athletics Programme.

Women are good listeners in general and this is very useful in training situations as problems can be solved early as the situation can be diffused if necessary. Good luck it can be a long road but it is a very rewarding one and there will be highs and lows but if we all stick together we will work through the issues and learn from our mistakes. Trial and error are part and parcel of coaching do not be afraid to try out new ideas or stick to ones that work for you and your athlete.



ANY STAND OUT COACHING MEMORIES?

I have had a lot over the years but three big ones come to mind. The first would have been my own daughter Melissa. She had won County and Connacht club and schools titles all the way up from 14 years but she had never succeeded at All Ireland level and in her last year in juveniles she won a silver medal in the Girls under 19 Javelin and she was delighted.

Second, was seeing Olive Loughnane get her gold medal in 10km walk in Amsterdam knowing she had trained with me 11-20yrs and I had started her walking career in Midland League in Tullamore as a 17 year old.

Brendan Lynch after his car breaking down on motorway driving down from Santry to collect him and his mum and with 20 minutes to spare he won the Tailteann Games triple Jump and got selected for the Irish Schools team..



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By Sam Barnes