

COACH IN THE CORNER

WOMEN IN SPORT EDITION-INTERVIEW SERIES



Women in Sport Edition





Mary Ashe- West Waterford AC

Events: West Waterford A.C. Juvenile Club. I coach the 10-12 year olds

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?

Munster Schools decided to hold events for girls starting with cross country in Feb 1970. In Dec 1969 just before the Christmas holidays our PE teacher took our year group over to a nearby field and ran us round it. She told the first six that they would be the school team and told us to start training over the holidays. I was sixth that day and I joined a local athletic club Northern A.C. as my brother was already a member. I ran in the Munster schools cross country that year and finished second on the team but did not progress any further but I was bitten by the athletics bug. The following year I was back again and qualified for my first schools All Ireland and the next year I finished 3rd in the All Ireland Schools cross country. Cork had very strong county teams in those years and I was a scoring member of many Cork All Ireland winning teams. Cross Country is still my first love. I also became involved in administration at a young age attending my first Cork County Board meeting as a fifteen year old. Fifty years on from that first race I'm still involved at schools and club level as a coach and administrator.



Who or what has helped you as a coach?

My first coach was Brian Stack who is now a well known goldsmith and jeweller in West Kerry. I got a chance to attend the British Summer School of Athletics in Loughborough College in the mid 70's and this gave me the basic skills to coach all events. The Bears Club and the Young Athletes Course in Gormanstown were also great learning experiences as was the Summer School of Athletics which I attended on several occasions. When I acted as team manager to the Irish Schools team I learned a lot about mentoring young athletes from Bro John Dooley. I learned a lot about organising events from the late Sean Nyhan.

What is your coaching philosophy?

Athletics is a sport for all ability levels and not just those with championship potential. The life skills learned and friendships forged through participation in sport are as, or more, important than medals and all those who turn up at training deserve the chance to develop those skills regardless of their physical ability. I think the fact I was a PE teacher influences my coaching experience and I love to work with lots of youngsters at the grassroots level rather than a few elite athletes. I also believe young athletes should try all the different events and each year we run a club championship that involves running jumping and throwing.

What keeps you involved in athletics?

Working with the 10-12 year olds keeps me young at heart and I miss their energy during this lockdown. West Waterford A.C. is a great club and I enjoy very much being part of it. Everyone involved is athlete focused and there is a great camaraderie among the coaches, athletes, officials and parents. I also enjoyed organising and officiating at Munster and All Ireland schools events.

Any stand out coaching highlights or memories ?

I really enjoyed working with the Schools Cross Country teams at numerous SIAB internationals for over two decades. The two occasions when my school won the overall Junior Girl trophy at the Irish Schools Track and Field were certainly memorable days as was being in Lille in France on the July day in 2011 when Kate Veale won the world championships. Though retired now from school I was also present on the sidelines last March when Lucy Holmes won Ard Scoil na nDéise first All Ireland Schools Cross Country title. Closer to home the day my daughter Eadaoin who I was coaching in the discus won the Munster Schools Title and later finished 2nd in the Tailteann Games. Our club athletes have had many success at National level but I still get a great kick out of cross country days at County and Munster Championships when athletes who started off hardly able to run 800m but stuck with the training, find themselves scoring on club teams and winning their first county or Munster medals. Their smiles and boost in self confidence would melt the hardest heart.



Advice for newcomers..

“Don't wait to be asked, just get stuck in and learn as you go along. Take as many coaching courses as you can, you will always learn new things from the other participants.

Listen to your athletes and talk to other coaches at every opportunity. Share your experiences and learn from others.”





What do female coaches bring to coaching?

Patience.

Empathy with the athletes and a holistic approach to the overall development of young athletes.



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