

A History

Around the Course and Down the Track with "Doc"

A Conversation with

Kathy Brion - Eldorado - NMTCCCA Executive Board

and

Laci Lockwood - East Mountain - NMTCCCA Board Secretary

"Reflections on the History of and Coaching Women's Track"

Doc: Who were your early mentors in women's track? Why? Do you have a mentor today?

Kathy: As for mentors, the list is long. I had the opportunity to compete at the U.S. Youth Games in Washington D.C. in 1972-74. We had amazing coaches, such as Brooks Johnson (Head Coach), Archie Owens, and Sam MacIlwain. We also had Olympians Esther Stroy and Lacy O'Neil work with us age groupers on occasion; they were an inspiration to all of us young girls. My first high school coach Karen Ruder is the one who encouraged me to try out for the Youth Games and told me in no uncertain terms – "To be the best, you need to train and run with the best." In 1972, she took a small group of track girls to the '72 Olympic Trials to watch women like Esther Stroy, Lacy O'Neil, and Kathy Hammond compete. I was awestruck at the level these women competed and set my own goals at that point to do everything I could to reach this competitive level myself.

Today, I am blessed with many successful coaches who I work around, such as, Matt Henry, Kenny Henry, Adam Kedge, and Sheryl Clemmer. These coaches have always impressed me with their knowledge, integrity, and standards that they hold their athletes to and the success they have had over the years.

Laci: My early mentor in track and field, regardless of gender, is Bob Jackson. Of course, he is my father. My whole life I have grown up in the world of coaching. He has taught me to coach with compassion and to get my athletes to work for me by building relationships. In our household, we are in a consistent state of mentoring and discussion on how to best assist our athletes. The mentoring on most days goes both ways. Interestingly enough, I denied my first coaching job for 3 months prior to finally accepting the head position to the Lady Bears of Estancia in track and field. I worked at Estancia as the Technology Specialist. Coach Mike Drapper asked me continually for 3 months; until one day, I called my dad and told him that Coach Drapper wanted me to coach the girls. He told me, "Laci, it is time for you to grow up and do the job you were born to do. It is time for you to stop being selfish and help those girls." I have never regretted a single moment.

Doc: Who do you consider the early pioneers of women's track? and what obstacles blocked their way?

Kathy: The early women in track that captivated me were Chi Chang, Kathy Hammond, Robin Campbell, and Esther Story.

The obstacles they may have had to overcome were financial aid, scholarships, and having to “prove” themselves to be taken seriously in the sport. These women continued to work toward their goals they championed for themselves and set standards for the rest of us to set ours goals and strive to achieve them.

Laci: That is a very hard question; in my life, I have never seen a time when girls were not afforded the opportunity to run. I feel like the early pioneers were numerous and worked in ways that have been often taken for granted by those who have grown accustomed to equal and fair opportunities for girls. I am thankful for Marilyn Sepulveda who put forth so much effort ensuring that the girls of New Mexico had equal opportunities for participation in track and field. One of my most cherished medals and racing memories in high school comes from the Marilyn Sepulveda Meet. There was nothing like getting to go up to UNM from Hobbs on the first Monday of the qualifying season to get the chance to race and qualify for the state meet against the best.

I believe what blocked the progress of the early pioneers in women’s track and field was the idea that only boys had the correct amount of physical strength to run. In my mind, the early pioneers and early athletes had to endure large amounts

of ridicule from every aspect while proving that the female runner was just as capable of running success as their male counterparts.

Doc: What were the prejudices women suffered in athletics and have they been eliminated?

Kathy: Some of the prejudices were that we were not capable of certain events. In high school, our longest event was the 800. Many people thought that females could not withstand the training that it would take for longer events. In spite of these prejudices, the young female athletes and their coaches continued to strive to demonstrate that they could compete well in all events.

Laci: I think that one of the prejudices that the female runner has suffered is the media's emphasis on the male runner. I believe the media did not see the interest in covering the female runner because we were not as fast or had a story to tell. For the media to embrace the female runner and tell the runner's story is still a hard concept for some media sources to grasp. Runners in general are sold short of the prime media spots because we are generally humble and know that our sport is understood. It is much easier for the media to cover sports that draw crowds and large amounts of money over the deeds of the special runner.

I think that the prejudices that the female runner faces are still evident in the media; however, recent advancements in social media have allowed the female runner to be able to advocate for themselves.

Doc: Do we have women who fill the leadership needs in track and why don't more women go in to coaching track?

Kathy: Today, there are a number of very successful and knowledgeable women in track and field. These women continue to inspire and lead young female athletes to the highest levels of competitive success both in life and track.

It is still a "man's" world and I know that women are still not given the same opportunities in coaching as men are. Women are expected to perform the duties of wives and mothers and this is often times very conflictual with the duties and responsibilities of coaching. I just hope there will continue to be strong and committed women who will pursue the coaching positions that have such an important and dramatic impression on young female athletes.

Laci: For me, the ultimate female leader in NM track is Tove Shere at Santa Fe Prep. Tove is an amazing leader and her dedication to her athletes is unrivaled. I have been able to watch Tove coach in so many circumstances, the good, bad, and ugly. Tove stands true to her passion. Not only does she motivate her own athletes to go harder, she also encourages other teams' athletes to do the same. Once upon

at time, I lost a State Track Meet by 1 point to SF Prep, which was the hardest loss ever for me and my girls. With reflection and time, that loss became most important. From Tove, I learned that it is anyone's race; and as coaches, we have to teach our athletes to win and lose with grace and courage. The athletes follow and find their love from track and field from you. Thank you Tove for teaching the ladies in track and field how to be better at what they do!

I have seen more women entering the coaching realm of track and field in recent years. However, very few schools are adopting the method of reaching out to strong females becoming the head coaches of teams. I think we see many of the great women coaches in the state of New Mexico as actually specialty coaches. The jumps, hurdles, and throws in track and field do showcase many strong female coaches. Another reason the female coaches are not always the head coach is if we are the specialty coaches, we can really focus on the athletes that will lead to their ultimate success, without having to do all the head coaching responsibilities. In New Mexico, every female coach I have met is extremely passionate about her area of expertise; and their athletes show up and put forth 100% for them.

Doc: What do you hope your legacy will be in the history of track and field in "The Land of Enchantment?"

Kathy: I would hope I would leave behind a legacy that demonstrates I was a coach of integrity, honesty, and had the character of always striving to do the right thing for my athletes, my team, and for the girls of track and field. I have given everything I could over the last 30 years and I hope this will be recognized when I finally step away from coaching.

Laci: I love that I am a New Mexico native and have been able to share my running career success with the people of New Mexico. I have always made an effort to make sure I have represented in a positive manner. I choose to be an Aggie so I could give back to the state that has given so many opportunities to me. I have chosen to coach in the State of New Mexico to give a few young ladies the experience I was so fortunate to receive through my participation in NMAA sponsored championship events. Money can not buy the feeling of achievement that you have when you stand on top of that podium.

When people look back at my coaching career, I hope they reflect on a girl who made her own dreams come true and then passed that gift to many. I hope people fondly remember the championships and champions who have come from my program, not the coach who made them. Ultimately, I hope the athletes who were coached by me remember the love, dedication, and hard work that made them better people. My legacy lives in the lives of my athletes who grow up to be strong, self-determined, successful ladies, Mothers, wives, and leaders in their communities. If I never receive another coaching award, that is fine; I have never

done this job for my own benefit. It has always been for the girls who became who they are today because they got to run for me.

We thank Kathy and Laci for their thoughts and service to the sport of Track and Field in “The Land of Enchantment.”

Dr. David “Doc” Helm

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