

Longford Sports Partnership



#WomenInSportTIRE



Sports Profile

#LongfordSportsWomen



Leslie Finnan

Women in Sport Longford

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As part of Women in Sport Week we have started our series on LONGFORD SPORTS WOMEN which will continue for March. Today we talk to Leslie Finnan. Leslie has been the backbone of Longford Athletics Club for a number of years and is a person who selflessly gives her time doing what ever is needed to make sure everyone else is looked after and has the opportunity take part in their sport. Club sport couldn't survive or thrive without women like Leslie.



Tell us a little about your background in Sport?

I moved to Ireland 23 years ago after I met my husband while we were both working in Zambia. I know everyone in America says they are Irish but both of my maternal grandparents were born in Donegal so my roots are genuine! I grew up in Armonk, New York and enjoyed all the usual childhood activities like ballet, Irish dancing and music lessons when I was in primary school.

I went to a very small secondary school and sports were encouraged so I played on the field hockey, soccer and basketball teams. I was definitely not the most skilled athlete but I do remember we all tried hard in every game and laughed a lot in the car rides home. For me friends play such an important role and I really enjoyed the social side just as much as competing. I drifted away from sport during college, becoming a spectator and not a participant and then I spent many years working in Africa, getting married and having my family. In the last few years I enjoy walking and together with my husband and oldest daughter we completed the 36km Sligo Camino two summers ago.

Once we built our home and settled in Ardagh I got involved in sport again from a different perspective as a parent of five children. I volunteered with our GAA Club to help with first aid and then got very involved with local and county Community Games for ten years. After my area Ardagh\Moydow\Glen won the Healthy Events Award in 2013 I went to work as a Development Officer in the National Office in Athlone for a few years. The best part was going into schools and explaining all the events that the children could take part in.

What is your involved in sport now?

In 2012 two of my children joined Longford Athletics Club and I started as a parent volunteer, then became a committee member and went on to do an Athletics Ireland coaching course and several workshops in high jump and turbo javelin. There was a committed group working to revitalise the Club and it really grew quickly over the next five years. I have juggled a few roles- Juvenile PRO, Childrens' Officer and Competition Secretary as well spending every Friday evening as juvenile coach mainly with the 9-12 year old age groups. The kids are so energetic after a long week at school; they keep me laughing every week as we go through the basics of Run-Jump-Throw.

Every year I have been involved with organising the Club's two primary school events - cross country in September and the relay races in the spring, as well as assisting Longford Sports Partnership with the Annual Indoor Sportshall Athletics. It is all worth it when you see a child cross the finish line with their school friends shouting encouragement or when a new talent is discovered after trying the standing long jump or foam javelin throw. These school events have grown in popularity with 250 children representing 16 national schools taking part in the 2019 cross country and 502 children (95 teams) representing 13 national schools running in the relay races in 2018. I think everyone involved with the Club took great satisfaction in providing these opportunities in athletics for children in Longford.

What has been involved in sport given you?

It was an honour to receive the Club Volunteer Award at the 2018 Ganly's Longford Sports Star Awards. It was nice to have recognition for all the time I put in on the computer at home doing competition entries and writing up results to promote the Club and the juvenile athletes' achievements for the newspaper and the Club website.

At the end of the year I write up a summary of all the competitions for the juvenile athletes and this leads on to planning the annual Awards ceremony which celebrates all the achievements each year. This really is such an enjoyable event where they get to shine.



What have been some of your proudest moments in sport?

Honestly being involved with Longford AC over the last 10 years there are far too many to list! It has been an absolute pleasure to be involved as 3 of our teenage athletes progressed from Connacht to National to European Championships which is really phenomenal for such a small Club in Longford. They are gaining valuable experience and are now teaching us!

If I had to name two standout achievements that give me great pride it would be:

Cian McPhillips is getting a lot of well-deserved recognition at the moment after his first senior European Championships but the moment that stands out for me was in 2018 when he won National Gold in both the U17 Indoor 800m and 1500m, setting a new Championship Best Performance in each distance and achieving the qualifying standards in both events for the European Athletics Youth Championships in Gyor, Hungary that summer. For both of those races on back-to-back weekends Cian had to run in the heats in the morning in order to get through to the final that same afternoon where he blasted the field in both distances.

Nelvin Appiah clearing 2.05m in the U19 Boys High Jump at the Athletics Ireland National Indoor Championships, then going on to win Gold at the All-Ireland Schools Championships at the height of 2.10m and being selected for Team Ireland at the 2019 European Games in Belarus. The photographs of the high jump competition in Dinamo Stadium were spectacular!

What advice would give other women or girls thinking about getting involved in sport?

I think almost all sports offer a number of coaching courses starting at foundation level and increasing in technical finesse which help you to gain knowledge and confidence. It is really important (and time consuming!) to keep adding to your knowledge of child protection, first aid/injury prevention and nutrition. In athletics once you become involved in competition at Provincial level there is good support from other Clubs and coaches with squad training to build on what you are doing at Club level.

There are some good opportunities for teenage student athletes during Transition Year to see what coaching is about, experiencing the organisation involved in training sessions and how to run events.

