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Eleanor Frost Snell: A Lifelong Impact

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GREAT COACHES



Ursinus has turned out more than its share of great coaches, among them college coaches, secondary school coaches and volunteer coaches. Many have made national news; most recently Debbie Ryan, 1975, coach of the University of Virginia women's basketball team, made the NCAA playoffs in March. Many others have been featured in the media, such as national title winner Beth Anders, 1973, and Sue Day Stahl, 1966, coaches at Old Dominion University; and as a U.S. Olympic coach, Vonnie Gros, 1957, who retired from Ursinus last year. But it was Eleanor Frost Snell who started the legacy. Here, Shillingford reflects on Snell. On the next page, Ellen Cosgrove 1995, former captain of the women's basketball team, interviews Ryan, as a tribute to all of our great coaches.

ELEANOR FROST SNELL: A LIFELONG IMPACT

By Jenefer Shillingford, 1954, current Eleanor Frost Snell Chair of Physical Education

It is hard to put into words the impact that Eleanor Snell had on so many of us during our college years and in the professional years that followed. All of us who are a part of the "Snell's Belles" legacy can tell wonderful "Snell" stories. I had a good fortune and joy to continue to work with Miss Snell for five years following my graduation from Ursinus. Thus I had the high privilege of being both her student and her colleague, although in many ways I was always a student. In the field of coaching, she had the most amazing "game sense." She was able always to look at the other team and make necessary adjustments or see where her own team had stumbled. She understood and taught basic skills, but her knowledge of the game and sense of spatial awareness was the best that I have ever encountered.

She was a most human woman. She loved to drive fast and could well have been an outstanding race driver if she had not been a superb coach. She drove blue Packards and was more than a little disappointed when they stopped making them. Once when I was the assistant basketball coach at Ursinus we drove to East Stroudsburg. Eleanor drove to New Jersey instead of getting on the Northeast Extension, so I arrived with one half of the team. I stalled until they mentioned that we would have to forfeit or start the game. I looked at co-captain Vonnie Gros (who later became the coach of the U.S. field hockey team that captured a bronze medal in 1984) and said, "I don't care how you do it, but please have more points on the board than East Stroudsburg when she comes." Eleanor and the rest of the team arrived at half time and we were leading by one point. I have always liked Vonnie.

In 40 years of coaching, Eleanor Snell never had a losing season and compiled an overall record of 674 wins, 194 losses, and 42 ties. Twenty-five of her students were named to the

U.S. Field Hockey Team. In fact, during Miss Snell's career, Ursinus produced more All-American field hockey stars than any other college or university. During one ten year period of softball coaching, her teams lost but one game. But records are often made to be broken and her legacy became her influence on all whom she encountered in the field of women's athletics.

Of the revolution in women's sports, Miss Snell said, "Women athletes are better than they used to be. Basketball was the most drastic change," she related. "It went from a relatively confined women's game to one which made you work hard. There used to be very stringent rules as far as defense and changes in the rules of dribbling. Sports are more demanding today with longer seasons," she added, speaking of the difficulty in filling coaching positions. Sportsmanship was expected and demanded. A split infinitive or misspelled word was as much in need of correction as a loose swing of the bat. Her legacy rests with the hundreds of women she coached and taught who carried forth her precepts and beliefs.

But Ursinus graduates can not be provincial for Eleanor Frost Snell belongs to a rich tradition of outstanding leaders in women's athletics, not just to Ursinus. These women have given to each of us a torch, which now we pass to you and others in your generation.

To the undergraduate participants of the Conference, I ask you to take the challenge and become a part of the legacy.

"Really great coaches accept mistakes, because they know that players who never make mistakes are ones who never take risks. Great coaches know that really great players never make the same mistake twice."

— Donna Lopiano, at the Snell Symposium



Jen Shillingford, a 1954 graduate of Ursinus College, was a member of the U.S. Field Hockey Team, a member of the board of directors of the U.S. Field Hockey Association, and the President of the Philadelphia Association for Intercollegiate in physical education and sociology from Temple University and was director of the Ursinus College Alumni Association and Chair of the Snell Fund raising committee. In 1986 she won the Distinguished Alumna Award at Ursinus College and received an honorary doctor of Science in 1993. At Bryn Mawr College, where she was Director of Physical Education and field hockey coach, she received the Lindback Award for Excellence in Teaching, and in 1994 was named Regional Administrator of the Year, National Association of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators.