

Centennial Victory!

By Matt Hengey

On October 12, 2023, Kingsway High School Field Hockey Coach Dana Ott celebrated her 100th win with the program. Currently living in Logan Township, the Woolwich native attended Walter Hill School, Kingsway Middle School, and Kingsway High School. *Swedesboro-Woolwich Neighbors* caught up with Dana to ask her about her success and teams.

How long have you been coaching and where/how did you start?

I've coached for 13 years in many avenues. I started coaching at Futures during my playing days at Villanova; I coached at many collegiate summer camps; I coached at the club level at Spirit of USA; and I coached my first high school team in 2011 at Haverford High School in Pa.

I applied to teach at Kingsway in 2012, and I coached the Kingsway freshman program, JV program, and middle school programs from 2012- 2017. I also coached as a graduate assistant at Cabrini University from 2015-2017. When the head coaching position at Kingsway opened, I applied immediately as my heart has always belonged to Kingsway, my alma mater.

How did you come to love the sport of field hockey?

I played roller hockey growing up in boys' leagues, and I always hoped to join a roller hockey team with all girls, but there wasn't enough interest at that time. Around the same time, a high school friend introduced me to the sport of field hockey in her basement, and I was hooked—I couldn't put the stick down! I loved how challenging the individual skill set was, but especially appreciated the team aspect—it was amazing to be a part of all of my field hockey teams from middle school, club, high school, and college. There is no tighter bond than the sisterhood created on a field hockey team.

How would you describe your coaching style and how has it evolved over the years?

When I first took over the Kingsway High School program in 2018, I was more of a motivator. I had to challenge my kids to see the best in themselves and to believe that the dreams and goals we created were attainable. We weren't a Top 20 Team in N.J. in 2018, and I remember my first year of coaching was simply instilling in the players that we have what it takes. I'd post news articles and quotes and do all kinds of motivating things to get the kids to believe in themselves. And by the end of that year, we were in the top 20!

Once the kids believed in themselves, then we built a tougher program with higher expectations. We still balance fun with hard work, but everything comes down to respect. We respect our players and what they do and who they are, and our players respect us—it's one big, authentic family with the same mission.

How have the players changed over the years?

We've always had strong players in our field hockey program, even from my high school years. Back then, it was normal to pick up a stick for the first time in middle school, and then play in high school. But now, the kids all play year-round and they're introduced to the sport at such a young age. The youth program has done a tremendous job growing the game and getting the young players hooked on field hockey that, by the time they're in middle school, a lot of the players are so talented that they could play at the varsity level. When I get them as freshmen on the high school team, the youngsters can make an immediate impact on the program.

Meanwhile, the sophomores, juniors, and seniors continue to evolve and take their game more seriously. They play club year-round, and attend college clinics and personal training sessions, which helps them improve greatly from year to year.



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Finish this sentence: Every season, I'm always pleasantly surprised by...the determination my players show each year. When we set dreams and goals, we can truly reach them and make them happen with a winning attitude and work ethic. My kids have proven this to be true time and time again. The classes before them have set a standard so that, every year, the current squad wants to continue the winning legacy set forth before them while making it their own year of success.

What makes a successful team and what role does the coach play in that success?

A successful team has to buy in. No matter what their past situations have been and what their past coaches have said, we have a mission on our team each year, and the teams that buy-in and believe in that mission and solve problems and work together toward that goal without any hesitation—those are the teams that make it happen.

As a coach, I have the wonderful opportunity to get every player to buy in, which is extremely challenging, but so rewarding. I have players who play for many different clubs and programs, so getting the kids on the same page, playing with our game plan, and gelling are all parts of coaching that I truly love to do and see come together. I never ever want to be complacent in my coaching or take for granted the fact that I get to work with and guide young women in competition. I've always told myself that the moment I forget how important it is to work with these incredible young women, I'll know it's time to hang up my whistle.

What do you attribute your coaching success to?

I truly believe that I'm only as good as the people around me. My Superintendent (Dr. James Lavender), School Administration, Athletic Director (June Cioffi), my assistants and dedicated coaches (Jennie Hara and Erin Bernat) are all top-notch people who have done nothing but support my visions and our team's goals.

I also know that I wouldn't be able to coach and follow my passions if it weren't for my supportive husband, daughter, and family. My husband gives me strength to carry on, especially on the tough days; my daughter is a daily reminder for me that I have the blessed opportunity to guide others' daughters in a sport that means so much to them; my mom is my best friend and biggest cheerleader; my little brother and I love talking hockey and debriefing about the games; my Grandpop loves to hear all of the great coaching stories and reminds me to have fun; and then there's all of my field hockey mentors and friends who helped make this possible.

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What have you learned about yourself through coaching?

I've learned that there's more to this wonderful game than winning. Winning is great, and it's something that we strive to do every day, but there's also a side of me as a coach for these young girls that needs to convey a winning attitude needed to tackle life. We have many conversations about how we handle ourselves and how to tackle different challenges.

It's also important to find a balance. We coach hard and try to challenge our kids daily, but there are times when we reset and take time for the kids to have fun—be kids, let loose, and enjoy the relationships we have within a team.

Winning is awesome, don't get me wrong, but the relationships and memories we create with our teams are everlasting and something I hope each member of our team remembers as they carry on in life.

What have you learned about players through coaching?

I learned that each player is a gift and brings something unique to our program and to our lives.



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Specifically, what makes the Kingsway Field Hockey program the success that it is? There's a lot that goes into the success of Kingsway Field Hockey; it takes a village. There are so many people in the youth league who dedicate their free time to coaching field hockey and spreading the love of the game. The Kingsway Youth President, Danielle Beety, does a great job running the program and introducing the sport to the kids at a young age. Once the kids are hooked and are ready to challenge their game, then we have our amazing parents who dedicate their lives to supporting their kid's field hockey dreams...countless hours, time, and money to provide their kids with the best playing experience they can.



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There is nothing more rewarding than to see kids from our district strive on the high school team. After watching them grow and evolve from their Kingsway youth years to starters on the varsity team, it's very emotional. When I have a player who dedicated their life to field hockey during their youth years, to then put on a high school uniform for the first time, to then to start their first-ever varsity game...it's a special moment to witness and be a part of because we know how important that moment is for them. Again, it truly does take a village! Finish this sentence: If I'm not on the hockey field, you can usually find me...with my daughter, Serafina. I paused my teaching career after 10 years to be with her during these special years, and we're together every day and having a blast.

Outside of field hockey, what are your passions?

I love to spend time with my family, follow my former players' collegiate field hockey teams, run, watch all Philly sports teams and Villanova basketball, play the piano, read, cook new recipes for my family, and I like to spend time at our family's farm.

What else would you like to add?

Kingsway Field Hockey truly wouldn't be where we are at this point without our players, both past and present. Alumni—thank you for all of the grit and love you put into this program; it's something we try to respect and emulate with the current teams. Current players—thank you for your fierce work ethic, for believing in yourself, this team, and your coaches, and for never being satisfied.

We are Kingsway Field Hockey because of everything you give every single day!



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