

MAY 2022

# ART OF ME

VOLUME 10

**SISTERS ON TRACK EDITION**

A NETFLIX ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY

THE IMPACT OF  
**SPORTS**  
ON THE  
LIVES OF  
**WOMEN**

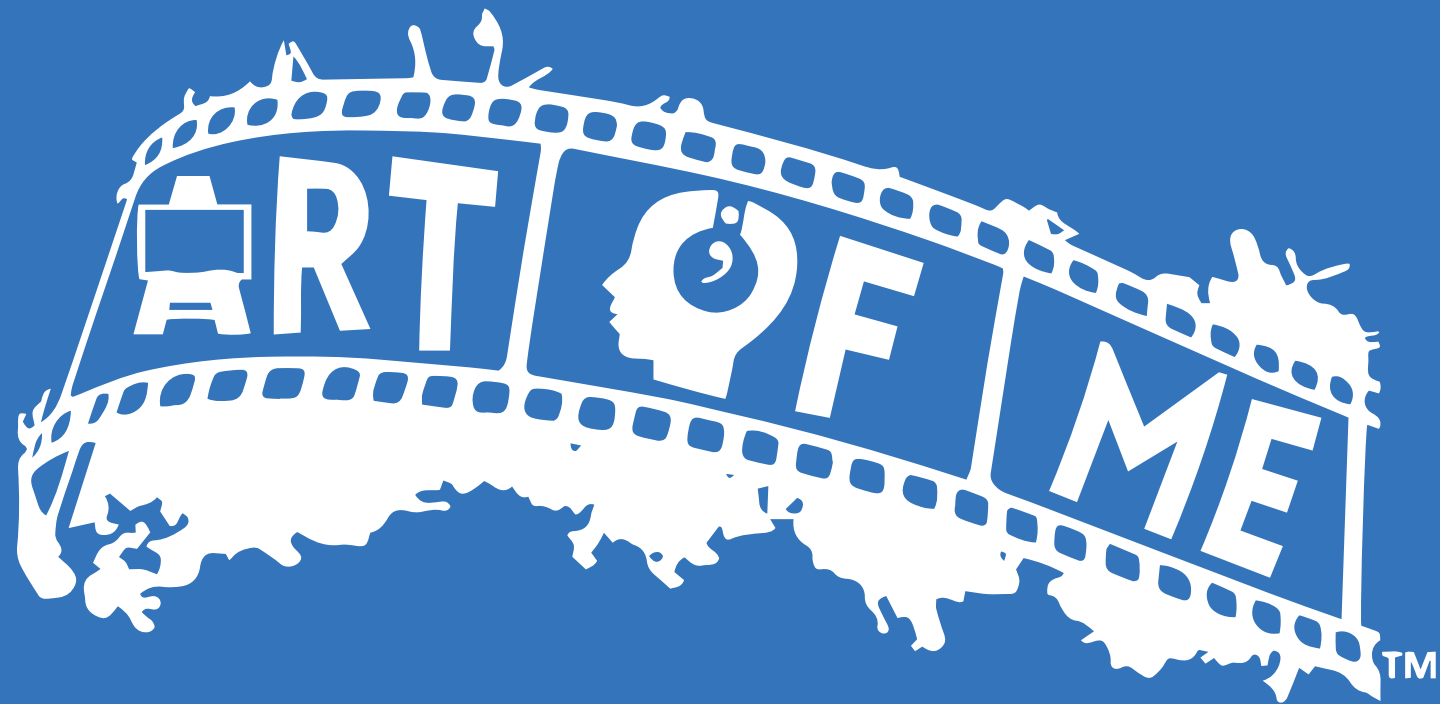
INTERVIEWS WITH  
COACH JEAN BELL  
CHERYL TOUSSANT  
ERICA STANLEY-DOTTIN

STUDENT ATHLETES  
TALK SPORTS + LIFE  
LESSONS ON AND OFF  
THE TRACK/COURT

COLGATE JOURNALS  
WORDS FROM COLGATE  
WOMEN'S GAMES ALUM

SISTERS  
ON TRACK





## ABOUT ART OF ME

### The What

The Art of Me publication is a creative platform for young people to express themselves, unfiltered and to constructively reflect on issues affecting them.

### The How

We support young people in identifying their voice through various forms of art (storytelling, filmmaking, photography, music, etc.).

### The Changemakers

Follow us on our journey on this platform as we collaboratively identify resources to find the space and place to create positive social change.

VOLUME 10 | MAY 2022

# ART OF ME

SISTERS ON TRACK EDITION

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# SISTERS ON TRACK

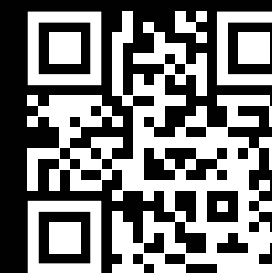
A NETFLIX ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY

## ABOUT THE FILM

*Sisters on Track* follows the three Sheppard sisters, Tai (12), Rainn (11) and Brooke (10) from the 2016 media storm that propels them into the national spotlight, when all three are chosen to be the Sports Illustrated Kids of the Year, into their final years of Junior High. The film offers a rare intimate glimpse into a tight-knit Brooklyn family's journey to recover from trauma and tragedy moving away from their life in a shelter.



“Running Track propels girls and women into academia and purpose with Colgate Women’s Games.”



SISTERSONTRACK.COM

# TRACK LIFE

## THE IMPACT OF SPORTS ON THE LIVES OF WOMEN

By Chanda Bynum  
chanda@artofme.org

**Chanda:** Can you all go around and introduce yourself?

**Erica:** I am Erica Stanley-Dottin, I am actually a social impact producer on the film *Sisters on Track*. Social impact production is what happens when the movie is done. It's the way to use the themes and the subject matter in the film, to create programs, raise money and other things inside of our own community and outside of our community. I've been working with another great team and these lovely women who you will meet in a second for almost close to a year now, just using *Sisters on Track* and after it premiered on Netflix to do screenings. And we've done a lot of events and really cool things, bringing folks together to talk about the film and talk about how we can all make changes and how we can meet more Coach Jean's and meet more coach Cheryl Toussaint's and figure out how the film itself can be an impetus for change.

**Coach Bell:** Hi, my name is Jean Bell. I'm the head coach of Jeuness Track Club, which is an all-girls track club in Brooklyn, New York. I'm obviously in the film *Sisters on Track*, which followed my team for about four years and culminated into the film on Netflix. I'm also an attorney and an administrative law judge. I started the team in 1985 and have been coaching ever since.

**Cheryl:** Hi, my name is Cheryl Toussaint. I'm a native of Brooklyn, New York. I was a member of a track team which got me involved in sports. And that's how I came to know Coach Jean and Erica, we all competed for a team out of Brooklyn called the Atoms Track Club. I am the meet director of the Colgate Women's Games. I'm a graduate of New York University.



“Art of Me” Lead Writer Chanda Bynum chats with Coach Jean Bell of Jeuness Track Club, Cheryl Toussaint, Meet Director for Colgate Women's Games and Erica Stanley-Dottin, Social Impact Producer for *Sisters on Track*

I was also a member of the 1972 Olympic team that competed in Munich, where I won a silver medal there. And my life's work outside of sports and the Colgate Women's Games is that I was an entrepreneur for some 20 odd years. I founded Tousse Running Apparel, which was a brand of racing apparel that was custom designed for track and field athletes, starting out with women, of course, first, and then for all athletes that we marketed and sold across the country to teams and schools there. So I've been involved in track in a whole bunch of different ways.

**Chanda:** Cheryl, do you got some leggings left? Because I can use some! (Laughs)

**Cheryl:** I actually don't do it anymore. I'm totally immersed in my work with the Colgate Women's Games, but I can point you in the right direction.

**Chanda:** I appreciate that. I'll get the details! Yeah, we all need a pair of leggings or something! You know what, one thing that I will say listening to all of you talk is that everything that you all are involved with is involved in helping other people. Before we even jump into talking about the film, I wanted to ask you all, what communities would you consider yourself being a part of, whether it be race, or location, or culture, or language? What would you say you identify as your community?

**Cheryl:** Well, for me, I identify as being part of a global sports community. And I say that because once you're an athlete, you kind of connect on a very high level with any athlete in any sport. And, you know, I tried to look at myself as being a part of the greatest sports community, because sports and athletes are really true ambassadors in so many ways. Because when athletes actually are in the forefront, and they're doing their thing, they're reflecting the sentiments of so many people who support them in their work. So we tend to be ambassadors. When we step out front, although we're individuals, we are representing our community, we're representing our race, we're representing the people we work with, you know, so I kind of take that high approach, because I feel like it's really the life that I've lived.

**Erica:** That's a great question. Cheryl, what you just said is really powerful, because I think being part of the global sports community is something that has so many different legs, you know? I think, for me, as a lifelong athlete still running, still competing and doing different things, and that has sort of morphed my life and my career, even, into being affected by the people that I've come in contact with, none of it was necessarily planned. But I think being an athlete, being in sports as a child, and having the access and the mentors that I had set me up, it's a wild thing to just now realize that later in life all of those things that were happening along the way set me up for what I'm doing now. It's really powerful. I feel super lucky. But also I understand now, what it means to mentor. What it means to bring people along. What it means to give back. So I consider myself an athlete, who now is taking that and figuring out how to affect the change with the next generation. Everything that I do is really about what's going to happen next for all kids.

**Coach Bell:** I consider myself an African American woman that grew up in Brooklyn, New York, specifically Bedford Stuyvesant. And that's where I do a lot of my outside work, not my real work that pays me, but my outside work with the girls on the team I've been

doing for these past 37 years. So, my community is Brooklyn and the girls in Brooklyn, and most of them are African American, but some aren't. And that's my community of people.

**Chanda:** Listening to you all now talking about your communities and the people you're impacting, I want to know if anybody could speak on how you've seen this film impact the girls in New York? What has been the biggest thing that has stuck out to you when you understand “Wow, we really created something that has changed lives?”

**Coach Bell:** Well, I didn't realize how big the film was and how it would impact people. I get emails from people, not just in our community, and in the US, but all over the world, from Brazil, from Spain, from France, from Africa, from Colorado, from Florida. Women all over have reached out to me saying how the film has impacted them and inspired them and made them think about when they were children in sports, or even if they weren't, and how it resonated with them in so many ways. So, I think that it's had a great impact on so many women and so many girls, and I think that's great. And I try to get back to each and every one of these people and thank them for not only enjoying the film, but you know, bringing the story into their own lives.

**Erica:** I wasn't part of the actual production. So, I came on afterwards, which is a different thing. But it's interesting to see that they've been working on this for five years. So, it was like so much a part of their lives, and then it was done. And then here we come. And it's kind of like, you know, Jean even says now all the time, she's like, “Oh my God this film,” like she can't believe sometimes that it's like this big deal. In my own network of people, of friends, family, you know, colleagues, it's always an inspiring story. And on every level. I mean, we're talking about kids who obviously love it and see themselves in the Sheppard girls. And then parents who see themselves there, and coaches and folks that work with kids.





# TRACK LIFE

And even myself, the first time I saw it, I wasn't shocked, because it was so much of my own life personally, professionally, in there. I was impacted immediately. And I know it has a ripple effect on everybody else.

**Cheryl:** Likewise, when I watched it, literally every time, it brings tears to my eyes simply because there's some part in that film that everybody can relate to personally, and to watch the transformation, if you will, of the Sheppard sisters in particular, but the entire team and the effort on the part of Jean and all of her coaching staff, I mean, the dedication that they put into it. To actually be able to witness it from a film's perspective, even though I knew the story, but to see how it unfolded and all of the effort that goes behind being a coach and a mentor and how it does really have an impact. And it's been the strength of her program and others like it. It's just so refreshing to see, because it's a real thing, and it's really changing lives.

**Chanda:** In the film I saw people trying to help the Sheppard sisters' mother. I wanted to talk about women, community, and how we naturally do that with each other. We are always like, how can I help? How do you feel *Sisters on Track* challenges the minimized and traditional roles of women? How does the movie show all the ways that all the women in the film are connected?

**Cheryl:** I feel like it shows the power that women have to uplift other women. And it shows the power of not just coaching and mentorship, but the film itself puts women out there front and center for other people to see and appreciate the coaching, and the development, and the teaching, and the lessons and all of the disciplines that come out of being a part of the sport. Obviously, it's not just about running track, I mean, you see these young girls go out and then do some amazing things with their lives. And that's the essence, that's the purpose of all of it. And it's just nice to see it in a film that there's such a strong sisterhood, such a strong womanhood going on, and it feeds itself. Other people want to attach to that, and men watch it and then see, wow, this is pretty deep. The program that we're all involved with now is the Colgate Women's Games, that's the same type of effort. It's all about women. Women, for the most part, run it, and you know, we all have and see the benefits of uplifting each other and how it actually encourages us all to do better.

**Erica:** I love that the film also focuses specifically on Black women and girls and all of the things that we all know are a big part of our lives. Everyday things like hair, getting dressed up, watching the girls go to their dance, meeting the hairdresser who's close to the mom, and just like all the different relationships that are a part of my life too. And not just the obvious ones like the teachers at school, but also the community that was built around them, starting with Coach Jean, Coach Karel and Jeuness. I love watching that, and I still can't really get enough of it, because it really is love. I love to see that on film as well because it's not a subject matter that we are privileged enough to have out there.

**Coach Bell:** The team was set up as a means of empowering young girls, not just making them physically stronger on the track, but mentally tough so that it plays out in later areas of their lives. And in order to do that, we have to have powerful women who dedicate themselves to the team. All of my coaches, we all volunteer, and we're all there every day, day in and day out year after year. And we're there for the girls, and not just the girls though, sometimes we have to jump in and help the parents, because the parents are struggling, or the parents need to find a new job, or need some counseling on child rearing. But the whole premise of the team is to build strong women and a community of women. The girls will one day be women, and they get to see that there are strong women here who are leading this community. And even the fathers that we have want their daughters to be involved in this because they want their daughters to grow up to be strong women, and so, they support us also in any way. And so, it pays off in the end.

**Chanda:** I think one of the points in the documentary that stood out to me was when you, Coach Jean, were reading the story to the young girls about a Black character who was going to be in an all white space and like, trying to mute themselves a little bit so that people didn't feel like they were ghetto. For Black women, that's an ongoing battle for the rest of your life. And if somebody should help you navigate these spaces. In recent media news, lots of athletes who go to the Olympics such as track star, Sha'Carri Richardson, gymnast Simone Biles, and recently the skater Kamila Valieva all had pressures around being athletes. What are your thoughts on women competing in sports and managing their mental health, managing their expectations, and having healthy competition? And how do we see that in Colgate?

**Cheryl:** Sports in general, but track and field in particular, since it's the thing I know the best of, you know, hands down it's one of the great equalizers. It's unmatched in the physical health and mental health benefits that it has to offer. So, whether you become an Olympian or not, there are so many benefits that you acquire over the course of your career in the sport, that you still benefit in huge ways. Like Jean said, it pays dividends in the future for you. All of the girls that were members of her team, and many who don't have teams, and who don't know how to even get involved on a team. I'll mention the Colgate Women's Games simply because that's how Brooke, Rainn, and Tai discovered track and met Coach Bell. And there's so many girls out there like that that would benefit from just having the experience of competing in sports. While I am many things to many people, sports and being involved in sports changed my life. It taught me how to compete, it taught me how to believe in my ability to achieve on and off the track. And that builds self-esteem. So it's a win-win, just being involved in sports. But as far as the Colgate Women's Games, the broader conversation about being involved in sports is that this is an opportunity. The Colgate Women's Games is the longest running amateur developmental track and field series for girls and women in the United States. And it's been around for 40 odd years. It provides a platform where any young girl, whether she's competed on a team, whether she's looking for a team, whether she's just looking to go out and understand what it's all about, maybe make friends, that's a place where she can enter. There's events for everybody, whether you like to run, jump, or throw. It's totally free. And it's something that most of the girls that come through the program find such a connection with.

Going back to the womanhood and the sisterhood thing, that is something that you feel, as soon as you walk in the door, the camaraderie. We accept girls from first grade all the way through college and beyond. We have women who are 30 and beyond and older that compete in the competition. And you know, it's just amazing to see how just being in the environment of the Colgate Women's Games, it inspires coaches, it inspires athletes, it inspires the officials, the parents. It's an amazing event, and it's coming up soon. Before we end the show, I have to put in a call to action for anybody that's listening to come out, because we have an event coming up in April registration is March 1. Go to [www.colgatewomensgames.com](http://www.colgatewomensgames.com). I don't want to forget to tell your listeners that this is out there. It's going to be happening very soon. March 1st, they can go online to the website I just gave you to complete an entry form. It's free, it's fun, it's empowering. And March 19th, that's our registration day. All this information is on the website. And on weekends in April, we have the competition, and it all takes place in New York. So, I just want to make sure that your listeners know that even if there's not a team in your area or group that you can seek out to find programs like Jeuness Track Club and what Coach Jean Bell has done for so many young ladies, you can always find a way to make the connection at the Colgate Women's Games.



# WORDS

THAT INSPIRE WOMEN  
TO BE THEIR BEST!

N R J J B L S T R S A M F B I  
 O V U H E F G E R T A G L M E  
 I S F N L D S A H O K C A R T  
 T T A F I T J L M M P E V O L  
 A R I G E B E U O E Q P A S J  
 C O T A V T N T L N S Y U Z Z  
 I P H E E S I E G I R L S S S  
 D S S R E V V E M O J R M L C  
 E O M U A M V I T O L U R I S  
 D G N T V O I S W Q W I W Z S  
 U G I U L A I E T A G L O C M  
 Q O H F Y H E G E M P O W E R  
 N Z C Q X I I X T J O N C J X  
 A B D W U X Z M W U V Y R U P  
 Q A F R I E N D S H I P R G N

WORDSEARCH

ATHLETE  
 DEDICATION  
 FRIENDSHIP  
 GIRLS  
 LOVE  
 MOTIVATION  
 SPORTS  
 WOMEN

BELIEVE  
 EMPOWER  
 FUTURE  
 GIRLS  
 LOVE  
 REST  
 SUPPORT

COLGATE  
 FAITH  
 GAMES  
 HISTORY  
 MEET  
 RUN  
 TRACK



TRACK  
LIFE

# INTERVIEW WITH MADISON BASKETBALL PLAYER

**Madison:** I am 14 years old, I'm in eighth grade, and I play basketball, cheerleader and dance.

**Chanda:** Okay, and what position do you play in basketball?

**Madison:** I'm a guard.

**Chanda:** How long have you been playing basketball?

**Madison:** This is my first year playing basketball, like, full out.

**Chanda:** Okay. And then how long have you done cheerleading and dance?

**Madison:** I've been doing cheer since fifth. And this is my first year doing dance as well. So like last Thursday was my first day again.

**Chanda:** That's exciting that you kind of got to new sports that you're into. Let's talk a little bit about basketball. Why did you choose to start playing basketball?

**Madison:** It's this man named Mr. Garner, and he's a coach for boys' basketball. And he's been telling me, "Keep going with your dribbling and stuff like that. You have all the basics down." And he told me I could be a really good basketball player. But I felt like I wasn't ready, or I wasn't confident enough to play. So when I heard this year that girls' basketball was coming up, I was like, why not? Give myself a chance. And let's do something new and play basketball which is out of my comfort zone.

**Chanda:** Do you feel like your family and friends support you in the sport?

**Madison:** Oh, yeah, definitely. Definitely. My dad was so excited when I told him that I was trying out for basketball. He said I got all the athletic genes from him. So he was pretty excited.

**Chanda:** Do you feel like having a good relationship with all your teammates is important when it comes to winning games?

**Madison:** Of course because communication is really key alongside the plan for the game. Because if you don't know what the play is, or you don't know what's going on, again, you

have to communicate with your teammates so they can know what to do, just for a simple play. Good communication with your teammates is really key to winning or having a good game.

**Chanda:** Yeah. Do you feel it was hard at first for you to understand how basketball worked?

**Madison:** Definitely. Sometimes I didn't understand the play my coach would teach me. He would break it down, and I would still not end up understanding. But I feel like now that I'm playing, I feel like it's a really easy thing to get down. Don't overthink it too much.

**Chanda:** Do you feel like while you were learning to understand the plays and everything like that, did you ever get frustrated? And then how did you work through that frustration?

**Madison:** Yes. So when I attempt a bucket or so close to a shot and not make it, I would get down a little bit and not be upset. I'd feel like "Man, I could have had that shot. It was so easy and I missed it." But my mom always tells me that you don't always have to put yourself down. When you don't make a shot or you miss a shot, you can just go on because you'll always have a lot of opportunities in the game to make more shots. So if you miss that shot, then that's fine. At least you tried it.

**Chanda:** How do you prepare for a game? Do you ever get nervous? And if you do, how do you shake the jitters off?

**Madison:** My first ever game, I felt like I was nervous. But at the same time all you have to do is have fun, you know? Feel confident. Even if you're not that confident, try to convince yourself that you're confident and that you'll do good. I'll just speak to myself. Like, "It's okay. Whether you lose, have a fair game, or a good game, just have fun." Working with your teammates can also be fun. Just enjoy the experience. I learn something new every game.

**Chanda:** Do you feel like you've run into competitive people on the other teams? And how do you deal with those attitudes?

**Madison:** Oh, yes. My last game was a mess. This one girl on the other team... she was really, really competitive. And she got in my head, I can't lie. And I was pretty upset about it. And I had to sit out for a little bit because it was getting to be too much. You know, every game or most of the games, somebody will try to talk to you to get in your head. But it's crazy because we won the game. You should be prepared for at least one to be competitive, but I'm not. I don't talk like I'm competitive, I show I'm competitive, you know?

**Chanda:** What do you feel sportsmanship is?

**Madison:** Good sportsmanship? You can have some games where you can talk trash to other teams, but you got to show what you're really about in the game. You can't just talk all the talk and not walk the walk. You gotta own up to what you're really about or own up what you said and play a fair game.

**Chanda:** Do you feel that sports helps you to handle disappointment in life better too?

**Madison:** I feel like it plays an okay role in that. If you lose the game, then that means you're disappointed because you want your team to win and go to the championship. So that's kind of a disappointment to you and your team and the people who support you. They're like, "I thought Madison had the game in the bag," and "I thought she was gonna score this many points or the team is gonna win this game." So it's kind of disappointing, and losing, and it can help you learn how to deal with disappointment in your outside life.

**Chanda:** What do you feel is more important, basketball or your grades?

**Madison:** Sports can distract you from doing your best in class or school. You could be worried about playing your next game but also not finishing your math quiz on Tuesday. At the end of the day, your grades are more important. Our bodies can do amazing things in sports, but we also can hurt ourselves. And so we do need to have a backup plan.

**Chanda:** Do you feel like you'll be using basketball or dance or cheer to get scholarships to go to school?

**Madison:** Yeah, I guess especially basketball because I'm left handed. I think Stephen Curry is a left handed basketball player, too. I feel like I could use my left hand as an advantage. Even if I could be ambidextrous with both of my hands, that would really take me places. My dad was telling me about how good I could be with my left and how some people won't be prepared for me to be dribbling with my left and it could help me win games.



**When you miss a shot, you can just go on because you'll always have opportunities in the game to make more shots. So if you miss that shot, then that's fine. At least you tried it.**



**It takes practice and patience to master things. And always put your mind to what you want to do. Even if it's little. Always put your mind to it.**

**Chanda:** That is a good skill to have. Do you feel like you are going to choose a career in basketball? Or do you want to study something else in school?

**Madison:** I feel like I would probably try to push myself to more options than just basketball. Or I'll probably try to have a career and basketball. I feel like you should always want to have your options open, and you shouldn't just limit yourself to one thing. I really want to study medicine. Even though I don't really like that type of stuff. But I feel like I could get out of that mindset and really put my mind to it, because I watch a lot of hospital shows, like Chicago Med and all that stuff. I watch them to study what they do. I feel like I already have a little information going into studying medicine because of those shows.

**Chanda:** Lastly, what would you say to girls that are in sports competing like you? If you could say one thing to them? What would you say?

**Madison:** I feel like that you always should have fun and not take everything too seriously. The first game, you know, it takes time. It's not an overnight process. It takes practice and patience to master things. And always put your mind to what you want to do. Even if it's little. Even if it's just solving a math problem. Always put your mind to it. Don't always doubt yourself and push yourself further. So you could have a better understanding of what you want to do. Don't limit yourself on what you're doing.



## WHAT'S YOUR SUPERWOMAN POWER?

How do you prefer to show you care for others?

- I compliment them for who they are every chance I get.
- Where's the merch?! I'll take 12!
- I create art for them.

What mood do you feel when presented with a challenge?

- Excited to take on the world!
- Focused. I need a plan.
- Motivated to challenge myself.

What is your favorite way to express yourself?

- Sports all the way! I love challenging my body.
- Singing and dancing! Performing is a community experience!
- Journaling. Quiet time is the best time!

What do you do when you feel unmotivated?

- Call up my girls! They always cheer me up!
- Self-care day! Where did I put those facemasks I bought last week?
- Watch motivational TikTok videos. Online communities help me not to feel alone.

How do you want to change the world?

- Bring people together from all different cultures and backgrounds.
- Bring awareness to the things that need to change in our society.
- Supply resources for those less fortunate.
- All of the above!

**Answer Key:** (Same answer for every question)

You are an all around caring, important and beautiful human being! You aim to use your strengths and talents to change the world and help others! You are determined, helpful and kind! Your light is unique to you and no one can take that from you! You are a person that has a specific purpose on this earth that only you can carry out! You are still figuring things out day by day, as we all are, but make no mistake, YOU ARE NEEDED. You are LOVED. Keep workin' it girl! We see you!



## Colgate Journal Entry



When I grew up, there were no organized sports in my community, but I loved to run. My brother began a small track club in the Catholic school where my sister and I attended and we ran there for several years. We discovered the "Atoms Track Club of Brooklyn," an organized club for young women in our teens and continued our track careers there. (I later became the coach of that Catholic school team for 10 years.)

As part of the Atoms Track Club, we quickly realized that we were part of a special and spectacular group of women who came out of the impoverished neighborhood where we lived and went on to Olympic glory. We were inspired by our coach, Fred Thompson, a fierce and dedicated individual who coached the club for many years as well as coaching Olympic teams. I was proud to be part of that team and the coach who, in 1975, conceived the idea of the "Colgate Women's Games" a

# COACH JEAN BELL

I am Jean Jones Bell, the head coach of Jeuness Track Club. I founded the team in 1985 in order to give the young girls in my community (Bed-stuy, Brooklyn) the same opportunity that I had to participate in track and field, through club sports.

series of free track meets for women and girls in New York City, sponsored by the Colgate-Palmolive company. That series continues to run each year to this day.

I initially funded Jeuness Track Club through my own funds, and as the team grew, we raised money for uniforms and meet fees from small fundraising efforts. We insist on a toughness of mind and spirit, a willingness to beat the odds, and a bond of sisterhood that is unbroken. We give much to the girls, and as a result, we receive so much back.

Now, there is the film, *Sisters on Track*, which documents a small group of girls, in a minute amount of time, that is part of a larger and longer history of the club. I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to be a part of it all, because maybe this is my real legacy and I'm proud of it.



“

**I've had a multitude of victories both on and off the track, and even with those girls who I could not help, there is still a special bond between me and them.**

# INTERVIEW WITH J' MARIANNA

## TRACK RUNNER

**J'Marianna:** I'm J'Marianna, I'm 13 years old, and I run track.

**Chanda:** How long have you been running track?

**J'Marianna:** Last year I started running track at my school with our eighth grade teacher.

**Chanda:** What made you pick track as the sport to try?

**J'Marianna:** I always wanted to do track but I really didn't have time to. When the eighth grade teacher asked if I wanted to do it I said yeah, because I wanted to try something new.

**Chanda:** So when you first started off track what was the hardest part about learning the sport?

**J'Marianna:** It really wasn't hard. Mostly what we had to do was run laps. That part was a lot.



**I wanted to quit sometimes. But when I had some races, I wanted to try different tracks. I wanted to see what would happen if I kept trying.**



**Chanda:** When first learning about how many laps you had to run, did it make you want to quit or did it make you want to try harder?

**J'Marianna:** I wanted to quit sometimes. But when I had some races, I wanted to try different tracks. I wanted to see what would happen if I kept trying.

**Chanda:** What is the most fun part about track? What do you look forward to when you go to practice?

**J'Marianna:** At practice I see most of my friends there. It makes things fun. We like to joke around with each other.

**Chanda:** Do you feel like track has helped your confidence as a person?

**J'Marianna:** At first, it was like, I was deciding if I wanted to do track. But now that I'm doing it, I can do other things, too. Things that I didn't know I could do before. Like hair. I like to do hair, and I want to do my friends' hair.

**Chanda:** Do you have anything you would like to say for those helping you get better at track?

**J'Marianna:** I will say thank you to Ms. Kroski because she ran track for years. So for her to help me and my teammates, I would say thank you. I started off trying to go so fast so I had to go slower. I most definitely work on my speed.

**Chanda:** Do you feel like track is about beating everybody and making it to the front line? Or is it more than that?

**J'Marianna:** So personally, I do track for fun and for a thrill. I feel like if you really want to beat somebody then that's fine, but I just like to run. I hope everyone gets a chance to win.

## Colgate Journal Entry

# KHARYN ETHRIDGE

My name is Kharyn Ethridge, and I'm a 25 year old athlete, intern, and mentee. Born and raised in Queens, NY, I've always had dreams of being a professional athlete and a positive influence on those around me.

Despite my neighborhood and circumstances, with the guidance of my mother and Jeuness, I was given the resources and opportunities to do whatever I set my mind to. My mother, Syreeta Miller, who is now a coach and mentor, ran for Jeuness TC and put me on the team at a young age as well. As a Jeuness TC alumni and ongoing competitor at the Colgate Women's Games, I'm honored to be living proof of the impact mentorship, education, and athletics can have on a growing child. For me the film was a reenactment of my entire life. Growing up on the team, it was filled with practice, trips, competition, growing up, and life lessons with my sisters. Overall, my experiences on the team have instilled a strong sense of morals and determination to be my best self in every aspect of my life. They play a big role in my mentality, who I've become, and the things I've been able to accomplish. I'll be grateful for them forever. This has given me a long-standing passion to be a coach and mentor myself. I have huge hopes to change the reality for so many kids both in and out of the sport. Where one is from should never have to determine who they become, sky's the limit.



**Overall, my experiences on the team have instilled a strong sense of morals and determination to be my best self in every aspect of my life.**



**Gabrielle:** My name is Gabrielle Johnson, I'm 16, just recently turned 16, and I run track. I also do other sports like volleyball and basketball.

**Chanda:** Happy belated birthday girl. Cool. I remember when I was 16. It was a fun time, but I also couldn't wait to become an adult. So tell me a little bit how you got into track?

**Gabrielle:** To be honest, as a little girl, I was really fast. I enjoyed running. I remember back in like sixth grade, fifth grade, we played tag on the playground, and they could not catch me. Plus my older siblings ran track and that's what really got me connected to it. So I started running my seventh grade year. I went to states that year too. And unfortunately, because of COVID, our track season got cut short during eighth grade.

**Chanda:** So when you started running, what did you immediately notice was the difference from running on the playground and running track?

**Gabrielle:** Running on the playground, it was less stressful. I want to be honest, when you go to the meets, it's like, you got other people there that are faster than you. You're like, "Oh, I have competition now," and there's anxiety. But there's moments where I have to stop and tell myself I'm okay. Like "God helped me," I pray like, "Oh, Jesus help me because I gotta get this. I gotta praise you and do what I have to do." On the playground we were little kids, and we're just having fun. And we're just doing it just to do it. Now on the track, there's more of a purpose with it now, too. I'm not just running, I'm fasting. I'm reading because God gifted me with his talent to be able to do it. And so now I'm doing it to glorify Him in a way as well. And also to honor my family in a way because they've done a lot for me as well.

**Chanda:** I want to ask you, how do you deal with people who are faster than you? How do you deal with that intimidation? What do you tell yourself? I know you said you pray, which is really good. What else do you feel like you need to do to calm yourself down?

**Gabrielle:** One thing that helps me is that I had a humbling experience my eighth grade year when our season got cut short, and I gained a bunch of weight. And so in my ninth grade year, I was no longer the fastest on the track. I was not really slow.

# INTERVIEW WITH GABRIELLE

## TRACK RUNNER

But I was like, probably like the sixth fastest. And that did affect my mentality a lot. But then my purpose for running track switched. I wasn't running track because I'm the best at it. I am running track now because I have the ability to do something. I don't do it for praise or because I'm the best and I want to be the best. My goal is to be the best that I can be and if somebody is better than me, kudos to them. I actually like competition. I'm not against it. For me, it really wasn't dealing with other people being faster than me. It was changing my mentality of it all. My mentality had to do a dramatic switch and it was really a humbling experience to come to know I'm not going to be the fastest every time. But I'm going to give it the best I got, and again it comes back to God, doing what God has given me to be able to do it to the best of my ability.

**Chanda:** Has track helped you remain disciplined on and off the track?

**Gabrielle:** Whoo! The getting in shape process was dramatic. I'm gonna be honest. But the summer when I got out of shape, I was waking up at seven o'clock in the morning to go to the track. Then I went to the weight room at 11. Then off seasons I was constantly doing something to get myself in shape. And it was discipline. It really was because I had to push myself and get this weight off. I have to better myself. Track does discipline me. You have to manage your time very wisely alongside schoolwork and be able to manage sports as well. But then when you're trying to also get back in shape, you have to not just go to practice, exercise outside of practice. Even telling myself sometimes, "I can't eat that right now. I can't eat that candy even though it looks good."

**Chanda:** Do you have something that you really love about track?

**Gabrielle:** My sisters and I have this saying, or like the whole track team, really, we say: "track is a love-hate relationship." The love part is really that we enjoy doing it because we have the ability to do it. I like seeing myself being able to grow and to push myself beyond myself. And there's like, there's almost a sisterhood with track, because there's girls there who are at your level, and there's girls everywhere higher than your level. But we all uplift each other. And that's the good thing about track. I have a competitive mindset. To be honest, getting back in shape, I really had nothing to do with that. Looking back at it, I don't know

how I got up that early to get in shape. When it came to pushing myself and getting back to where I was now, I'm like, "Oh, God, you really helped me in that process," because I don't know how I did that. So I think the love part about it all is really that I get to honor and glorify God, I get to uplift other girls and show them the love of God, and also be able to help their confidence in a way and be like, "Girl, you got this, it's all you!" It's really about being around people and being a leader, having the opportunity to be a leader and set an example and push myself again and continue to grow in that sport.

**Chanda:** If you could talk to all girls who are in track or play a sport, what would you say to keep them encouraged?

**Chanda:** I know for me as an athlete, sometimes we look to the coach for validation. And sometimes we don't always get that because most coaches give their attention to the top tier athletes. And what I learned from when I got out of shape was like, "Oh, the coaches don't give me attention anymore. I have to do this on my own." But what I would say is know that it's not about how far are you willing to push yourself? It's not about the other people around you. How can you better yourself? Are you setting an example for the lower or even higher classmates? How are you going to use this in your life to develop you as a person? And so I think when we play sports, it's not just an athleticism thing, but it's also a character thing. Because sports do take a different mentality if you want to be great at a sport. And so I would say for those young ladies who are looking for advice, keep pushing yourself. Even when it gets hard. You still got it. Even if the standard is somewhere way up high, it's about you setting your own standard. How far are you willing to push yourself again? And you know, God's got you. God loves you. He's there for you. Even when you feel like the sport is taking a mental toll on you. God loves you, and He's there. He can give you peace. And so it's very important that we do look to God in such a way when we feel like "I'm not gonna get there." You got this girl! It's all you! Keep trusting God! He's got you!

**Chanda:** Do you have a favorite person in sports that runs track? Do you have somebody you look up to that may have gone to the Olympics or anything like that?

**Gabrielle:** You know what? To be honest, surprisingly, I don't. I don't have people on track that I look up to in that sense. I just look at their form. Am I okay? Their form is really good. Let me look at them. Oh! Now I think about it, my sisters! They're really great examples. Even my little sister a little bit. My older sisters push themselves a lot. And they're not afraid to get in the gym. They're not afraid to work hard. They really helped me with my mentality when it comes to sports.

**Chanda:** Do you plan on pursuing sports in college? And if so, are you going to mainly focus on sports? Or did you want to major in something else?

**Gabrielle:** My dream wasn't necessarily to go into the Olympics. I know a lot of athletes want to go to the NBA, NFL, or the Olympics. That's not really me. College-wise, to be honest, wherever the money is at! [Laughs] I actually did want to run track in college. That was my goal. If I don't get there, I mean, that's cool. Wherever God takes me, wherever He leads me, I'll go. But no, I didn't really plan to pursue track as an actual career. I wanted to go into the medical field. Specifically, I want to become a surgeon. I'm all over the place when it comes to medicine, but I really do want to go into the

medical field. That's something that I really find intriguing.

**Chanda:** Do you feel your grades are important or sports or both?

**Gabrielle:** I don't want to sound like I'm being cocky or flexing or anything like that but for me, I always strive to get all A's. Like I said, I'm very competitive. So like all A's, that's what I aim for. And I have gotten there. If I get an A minus, I want to legitimately find out what I need to do to get the A. I would say grades are more important because you need to be eligible in order to play sports, of course. But like, even if that weren't the case, I would say both for me because sports, it's like a stress reliever for me as well. It helps me mentally in a way. I do actually enjoy school. I know that sounds weird. But I enjoy both sports and school. I do believe they're both important for people because I know for other athletes, I've noticed, especially in my school, a lot of athletes depend on sports, because it gives them a sense of family around them. And so, sports are very important for some people.

**Chanda:** What would you say is the hardest part about running track for you?

**Gabrielle:** I'm out of track right now because I had knee surgery. It's really like a bittersweet moment because I can't run, and I really want to get better, I'm trying to get better. You know, there's times when I'm still in the weight room, trying to stay in shape. But there's also a sweet moment because it's like, I get a break from that anxious feeling Monday workouts or wake up early for a track meet.



**It's not about the people around you. It's about what you're going to do and how you're going to do it. How far are you willing to push yourself? It's about you and your journey.**

Sometimes you get exhausted from track because you're doing so much constantly. You are pressured to do something. I think that's really almost the hate part of it all. The stress and anxiousness that comes with track. We love working out, but let's be honest, working out will take you out sometime! [Laughs] Monday workouts I'm like, "Coach, are you sure you want to do that? Like that seems a little bit hard." But even in moments like that, even though it's hard, I'm going to get through it. I got this, and you just push through it.

**Chanda:** Do you think being a black girl plays a hand in your running track?

**Gabrielle:** I will say being my race does. As a younger kid, I didn't see it. Like, I was like, "Oh, I'm just going to do this." When I got to high school, there were moments where I'd be writing against these, these little Caucasian girls, and they would be in front of me and if I can be honest, that would push me to get in front of them! I'd be like "No, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. No, we can't have that." But there's also moments where it does actually humble me when I do see them in front of me. I'm like, "Oh, girl who actually did that, I got to give it to you, you killed that!" But also, as in my life, in general, it pushes me because I want to be a representative of black women. My school is majority black. So we do see a lot of black girls everywhere. But when it comes to like, honors programs, or like, like NHS or things that are top tier, even with education and stuff like that, I am surprised that I don't see a lot of us. That does actually push me in a way. I think, "I want to be the first! I'm going to be one of them. I'm going to make that minority the majority." I don't want the white people to be at the bottom but it's more so about more black women coming to the top and joining them you know?

**Chanda:** Again, happy belated birthday. Have you learned anything since turning 16? What would you share with other 16-year-old girls?

**Gabrielle:** Know your worth. When I look at high school I see a lot of girls in relationships prematurely or they get themselves into something or they do things to make themselves feel of worth or significance, and you have to know that you are worthy. You are a daughter of God. That's a must. You're a princess! You have a crown on your head. Know that you are the prize and not to go chase these guys. Know your worth not from a relationship standpoint, but like a life thing. Walk in the fact that you are the only person who can be you. Understand that you have so much potential. You have the potential to be great. It doesn't matter if it's in education or in sports. So fulfill that potential. Don't waste your potential and doing something meaningless like just having sex or doing drugs. Know your worth, hold yourself, respect yourself. Don't degrade yourself by sleeping around with a bunch of people. Don't degrade yourself by doing a bunch of drugs. I understand that with some women, it's because it's a form of coping, but know that God is there for you. Know that if you do have fear, if you do have insecurities, God is there to hold you in His loving arms. He can show you that you are worth more. And so I would say really seek after God's face, know that you are worth something. And know that you have potential to be great and walk in that.



Colgate Journal Entry

# ERICA STANLEY-DOTTIN

I am Erica Stanley-Dottin, Impact Producer in charge of Marketing, PR, Events, Partnerships for the *Sisters on Track* Social Impact Campaign.

When I first saw *Sisters on Track*, there were so many moments that made me tear up. I saw myself in both the Sheppard Girls and of course Coach Jean. I ran track under the legendary Fred Thompson of the Atoms TC just like Coach Jean, and there was so much of him in the film - the workouts, Jean's tough love, and of course the Colgate Women's Games, which, when I ran, was the first time I'd ever raced on an indoor track.

At the Atoms TC, Freddie would take care of all the girls just like Coach Jean does. I remember him coming out of his pocket to buy us food even if we didn't need him to. He was such a kind man and with a huge heart but also tough - very deliberate, and there wasn't a lot of grey area with Freddie. Strong sense of right and wrong that he passed on to all of us just like Coach Jean. The Sheppard sisters are so lucky to have the support from so many adults (coaches) AND peers at Jeuness. Both on and off the track, there is a family dynamic with Jeuness, and they'll likely have these friendships for the rest of their lives. I also appreciated all of the Track & Field content in *Sisters on Track*, and that a light is finally shining on the Colgate Women's Games. I remember my first Colgate, it was the first time that I ever saw so many girls in one place that looked like me! AND could run so fast. It was inspiring (still is) and I felt special just to be there and to have the ability to compete. The grit and the determination that you had to have in order to excel at Colgate not only set me up for college track but also life. I am forever grateful.



The grit and the determination that you had to have in order to excel at Colgate not only set me up for college track but also life. I am forever grateful.

**#anybodyseethedream**



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