

SISTERS
ON TRACK

A NETFLIX ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY



COACH JEAN'S

GUIDE TO MENTORING

Q&A with Coach Jean Bell from the Netflix original film Sisters on Track. She shares her thoughts, experiences, and best practices for mentoring, coaching and inspiring the next generation!

COACH JEAN E. BELL

Jean E. Bell was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York (Bedford-Stuyvesant), the fourth of six children. She attended Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn and City College of New York (CUNY), in Harlem. She began running track, and also competed in high school and college. During that time she also joined the Atoms Track Club of Brooklyn, and began running more competitive meets both locally and nationally. At the same time, she also coached a track team for girls through a neighborhood Catholic Church where she previously attended school, and began her running career, under the auspices of the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO).

She subsequently attended Brooklyn Law School and graduated with a Juris Doctorate degree in 1983. After passing the New York State bar exam that same year, she began working as a practicing attorney. She continued coaching the CYO team for approximately 10 years until she began her own club in 1985.

She founded Jeuness Track Club in 1985 using her own money to register the team, enter the team in meets, and buy uniforms and sweats. She modeled the team after her own track club. As the team grew, she was able to take on additional help and team members. Since 1993, she has worked as an Administrative Law Judge with the New York State Department of Labor. She continues to serve as the head coach of Jeuness Track Club of Brooklyn, New York.



■ Check out interviews with Coach Jean here:
<https://www.sistersontrack.com/news-press/>

ABOUT JEUNESS TRACK CLUB

The **Jeuness Track Club Inc.** (pronounced joo-ness), headquartered in the Bedford-Stuyvesant/Crown Heights areas of Brooklyn is a grassroots community-based not for profit track club for girls ages 5-17, founded in 1985 to afford young girls an opportunity to grow in the sport of Track and Field while excelling in academic achievement and life experiences.





MENTORSHIP

What does Mentorship mean to Coach Jean?

“Mentorship” means to guide someone. They can be younger than you or just in your same field, it doesn’t have to be a child, it can be an adult. Anyone that can learn from you, you can mentor. And it’s the act of guiding someone towards a certain goal or in a certain field or in a certain lifestyle. It’s the act of guiding someone in a positive way.

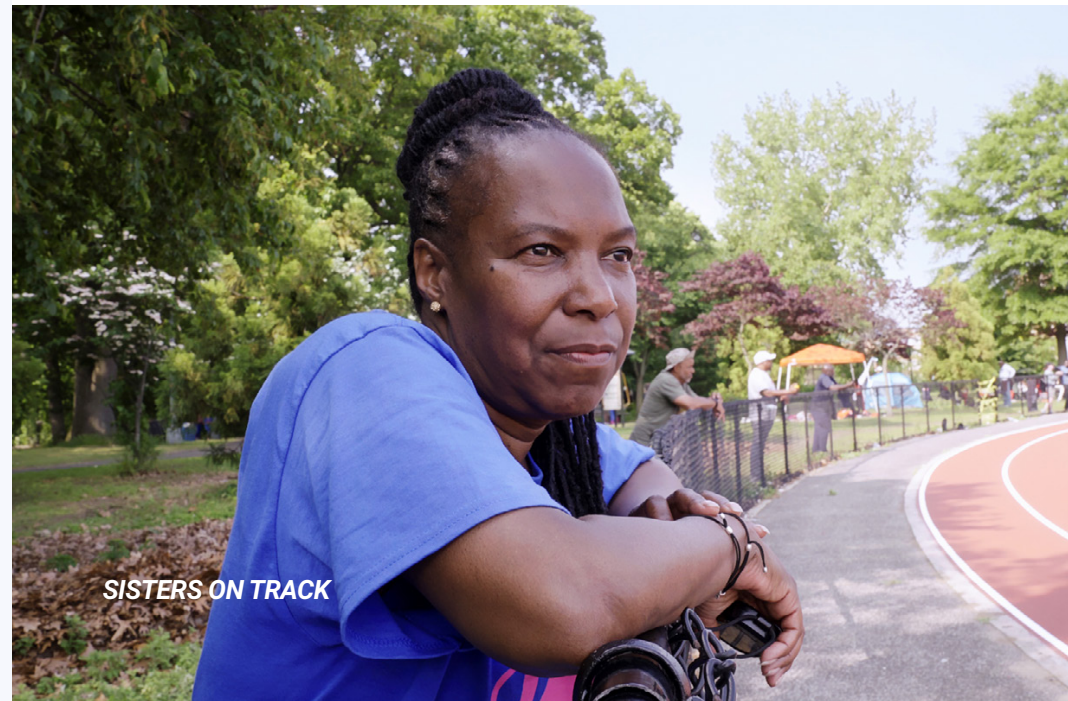
Who has been an integral mentor in your life?

As far as track and field, it would be my club coach Fred Thompson. When I met him, I think I was 14 or 15, and started running for a club team. I had run before that for school teams, but I started running more seriously with a club team when I was 15 or 16. He was a very serious person. He started the Colgate Women’s Games, and he was a big leader in empowering women in track and field. He started his team way back in the 60s. By the time I came around, he had been well into it with Olympic athletes, and just encouraging young women to do something with their lives, and young women out of the same areas of Brooklyn that I’m coaching in now, where I grew up in Brooklyn, Bed-Stuy, Brownsville, East New York. To get them out of the circumstances that they’re in and moving them on to something better. It was like Cheryl Toussaint. He found her on the streets of Brooklyn and made her an Olympic star.

That was not really my goal, but I enjoyed running, and the fact that he was an attorney gave me some direction in my life as to where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do. He was a mentor to me. My mother was also a great mentor to me. She always encouraged us to get higher education and to do what we thought we could do. A lot of times, women of color especially, aren’t encouraged to take big steps. I was just always a big stepper from birth, so I didn’t need a lot of encouraging, but it was good that I had my mother’s support. She was the one who thought of the name “Jeunesse” for me.

What do you think are the qualities of a good mentor, a coach?

As a coach, I thought I had to do more because more was needed, and in some of the girls’ situations, they didn’t have anyone else to do it for them. Like the book club and the health class. The health class I had been doing for a long time. I just feel like I have a responsibility to help wherever I can. Of course, I can’t do everything because I’m not their parent, but where I can, I’ll step in and help. A lot of people talk about the health class and say, “Oh I wish I’d had somebody to tell me those things.”



BUILDING TRUST

How do you build that trust and that relationship as a coach and mentor?

One thing I do to build trust is to always, always, always keep my word. Always be consistent. Always. Whether I'm punishing you or I'm giving you something, always be consistent with children. I feel like that's the most important thing and what kids look for that they don't always get out of adults, because adults will just dismiss them, or they'll say, "Oh yeah I'm gonna do this with you next week," and then they're like, "Aah, I don't have time." Kids need consistency.

They need someone that they can count on. No matter what, even if it's inconvenient for me, I'm going to do what I said I'm going to do. Always. I was like that with my sons, and I'm like what with the girls because I feel like a lot of times, adults don't realize that that's important to a kid, and when you dismiss them or break your promise, or even if it's not a promise, if you just mention that you're going to do something and then don't, and then go back on it, that's not good. Kids won't trust you.

Why do you think it's so important to have someone outside of your parent or your guardian in a kid's life? Outside of your parents, your guardian, your teacher?

Even if you have the greatest parent, they can't fulfill all that you need, even if you have the greatest teacher, they can't give you everything that you need. So, you get a piece from your parents, a piece from your teacher, a piece from your coach, and that closes up all the gaps.

**Show up. Be consistent.
Be their friend and listen, but always
hold them accountable.
Tough love is constructive criticism.**

What are some ideas that you can share with, like, other coaches and mentors that you think would be good for them to do with their students, or with their mentees? Their athletes?

Pre-Covid, we used to find things to do, especially in New York, since there are always things going on. I used to find exhibits, or things of interest that the girls would like, but also get something educational from. We'd take them on the weekends when we didn't have a track meet. Take them to see a Tutenkahnna exhibit or take them to the museum or take them to something that, it might be fun for them, and then we go to McDonald's and have lunch and along the way, on the train, on the walk, in the exhibit, at lunch, I'm talking to them, and they're talking to me about what's going on in their lives and what they're thinking about. That's important because the girls on my team get very, they're very close to each other. They build bonds with them, with each other and with me. Because we do extra with them, where I'm always talking to them, trying to do things. So, that builds bonds. And that builds a stronger team, because you have kids who know each other well outside of track, and know their coach well outside of track. The girls always want to come to my house. They always want to have a sleepover at my house - like several!



SISTERS ON TRACK



ACCOUNTABILITY

What is Coach Jean's idea of tough love?

I don't think of it as tough love. I think of it as constructive criticism.

What are some rules that you have as a mentor/coach for yourself first, and then for your team? For your athletes?

To show up. Show up and be there and be accessible to the girls and to their parents. Treat them like young adults. You have to learn to be responsible for yourself and for your actions. Then you basically learn to be responsible. It's not going to come overnight. It's something that accumulates over your lifetime...from the time you are able to walk.

Why do you, why do you think that's so important to make them accountable?

These days, kids just aren't held accountable. Whether you're white, Black or indifferent. It's important because you're going out into the world, and you have to be responsible for your actions. You have to take responsibility for what you do. If you're grown enough to do it, then stand up and say yes, I did it and I was wrong, or whatever. But stand up and be accountable for it. That's part of learning how to be an adult.

How do you, is that something that you intentionally try and, like, operationalize amongst your athletes, or do they just naturally, do you plant the seed, or do you basically tell them to do it?

I basically tell them to learn from each other and teach each other. I'll say, "Go get ..., grab her hand, show her how to do this, help her tie her shoes," because a lot of times, kids get on the team and they're so young that they don't know how to tie their shoes. I tell them to, "Teach her how to do the drills."

**It gets hard. It's hard work.
But we do what we have to do.**

How do you keep yourself centered when it becomes too much?

I don't know. It gets hard. It's hard work. Keeping the personalities together, keeping the team running smoothly, keeping coaches coming and doing what we have to do... it's a lot of hard work. But you get enjoyment out of it too. Especially when you get new kids on the team, and they're all excited, and you see them develop into athletes. I tell parents all the time, when the kid first gets on the team, and the parents are amazed that the kid can do the work. I say, this time next year, your 8-year-old will be assisting a 6 or 7-year-old that just came on the team, because that's how much they will have learned over the course of this year. They'll go from being a little kid on the team to an athlete on the team. And they'll develop so much. The changes that take place... it's crazy.

Any last words of advice?

Be their friend, and listen, but always hold them accountable. Show up. Be consistent. Tough love is constructive criticism.



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