

INDUCTEE PROFILE

Chip off the old block

Family foundation sprung Gehret to track success at Louisville

By Josh Langenbacher

Growing up in the Gehret household, whether the stakes were getting into the car first or pickup basketball games in the family's driveway, a competition could sprout from anything.

"We would just compete for hours," said Rachel Gehret, one of the chief participants. "We could never get enough."

Among Rachel's competitors were her sister, Lauren, and two brothers, Matthew and Brady. Left to officiate were two former Division I athletes and the parents, Lisa and Cory.

"Brady, he's four years younger," Rachel lamented recently, "but he freaking beat me a lot. And it was very frustrating. I felt like I was beating him for the longest time, and then he entered ninth grade when I was a senior, and this kid was quick, could jump and was fast."

The family's competitive disposition, along with the pedigree, laid the groundwork for Rachel to jump into an athletic career that became accomplished enough to be inducted into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame.

A three-sport athlete at Altoona Area High School who excelled in track and field and became an All-American at the University of Louisville, Rachel will join her mother as the Hall's only mother-daughter duo. Lisa was inducted in 1998 for her exploits on the basketball court at Altoona and the University of Pittsburgh.

Cory, meanwhile, played football at the University of Connecticut.

"I kept a journal for my kids, and if I go back and read it when she was 2 or 3, it will say 'Rachel is very competitive,'" Lisa said. "Or 'Rachel appears to be very athletic. She is very balanced and fast.' From the time she was little, she could catch a ball, throw a ball or run. We took it for granted in our household."

That competitive fire burned bright. Lisa recalled Rachel – whose outgoing personality and inquisitive nature endeared her to her coaches and teammates at both AAHS and Louisville – becoming so despondent if her goals were not met



Rachel used her sprinting ability to star in the long jump and triple jump.

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Rachel won six Big East championships while earning All-American honors at Louisville.

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during a competition that she would not speak for the rest of the evening.

“This is going to sound terrible,” Lisa Gehret said, “but she was mean. She had that mean streak in her, and that mean streak gave her the edge.”

Gehret’s edge helped leave a legacy at both Altoona and Louisville. At Altoona, four of her individual records (in the high jump, long jump, triple jump, 200-meter dash) and one of her team records (4x400 meter relay) still sit atop the school’s record board at Mansion Park. The 2006 graduate won 10 District 6 gold medals, and one of the eight PIAA medals she won was a gold medal in her sophomore year.

Gehret also won the Penn Relays high jump her junior year at Altoona.

“We always did a track yearbook for the kids,” her head coach at AAHS, Steve Rhodes, recalled. “I dug out the 2004-05-06 scrapbooks, and the more I read it, it was amazing what she accomplished in those three years and how dominant she was. It just went on.”

Her success went on at Louisville, too. Gehret earned first-team All-American

honors in 2011 after finishing fifth in the NCAA outdoor championship at Louisville with a 6-foot leap in the high jump, still good for second-best in Louisville history.

That All-American distinction, which Gehret called the athletic feat she is proudest of, came after serious self-doubt that Gehret said she overcame through her faith and the support of her track and field coach at Louisville, Ron Mann.

“I was at a point where I didn’t believe in myself,” Gehret said. “I remember talking to coach Mann and said ‘If you let me redshirt, I will be an All-American next year. I swear up and down. All I’m going to do is focus on the mental game.’ So that’s what I did, and it worked. I was stuck, but it wasn’t due to talent. It was the mental game.”

Gehret won

six Big East individual titles in the high jump, long jump and triple jump and was the conference’s outstanding female field performer for her efforts in the 2010 indoor championships, where she was first in the long jump and triple jump and second in the high jump.

“She was integral to the success of our program and the success of all our programs at Louisville,” said Mann, who brought in Gehret as one of his first recruiting classes and won the Big East outdoor team championship in each of



Gehret bio

Sport: Track & Field

High school: Altoona Area

College: Louisville

Hall of Fame achievement: Earned first-team All-America honors by finishing fifth in the 2011 NCAA Outdoor Championships in the high jump at Louisville. During her career, she won six Big East individual titles in the high jump (three), long jump (two) and triple jump (one).

her four seasons. “That was the heyday of University of Louisville athletics. We were playing for Big East titles in football and track and field; women’s basketball was rolling; men’s basketball was a powerhouse. Everything was on fire at the time, and she was integral.”

Beyond the athletic exploits was a teammate coaches admired. Mann said “her persona became so infectious to the entire team.”

Her jumps coach, Jake Jacoby, was no less effusive.

“Oh yeah, for sure, she was Louisville track and field,” Jacoby said. “I mean, that was her team her senior year. Everybody looked up to her and respected her and did everything they could possibly do. Some of the athletes there when she started at Louisville weren’t as talented,

but every day they came to practice and saw the effort she put into trying to get better and they loved it. They followed it. They did it.”

“She was integral to the success of our program and the success of all our programs at Louisville.”

— Ron Mann, Louisville track and field coach

Gehret, who chose Louisville over Georgia Tech, North Carolina State, Virginia and Connecticut because the Cardinals offered a full scholarship and the chance to go south, said she regards Louisville as her second home.

But it was her first home where the success began.

Gehret credited AAHS volleyball coach Karan Price and basketball coach Craig Long along with Rhodes and the late assistant track and field coach Bill Reimer with providing the support and encouragement that fostered her success.

“I just felt like our coaches always saw

potential and believed,” Gehret said. “They knew how to support us and put their belief in you.”

Gehret is currently a physical education teacher at Myers Elementary in the Bellwood-Antis School District and lives in Hollidaysburg with her partner, Sergio Ceballos, and their three children Ximena, Sergio and Penelope.

For Gehret, the capstone of her athletic achievements culminating with induction into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame was an emotional moment that brought some reminiscing.

“I bawled my eyes out,” she said of her reaction. “I get emotional talking about it. I just called my mom and started crying immediately. When you become a parent, I feel like everything before that is kind of forgotten. ... It was nice though, looking back I was never happy with my accomplishments because I was always wanting more. I always felt it wasn’t good enough because I wanted to get to the next goal. But looking back at my accomplishments, I was like, ‘This is pretty good.’”



Rachel stood out in three sports (track, basketball, volleyball) at AAHS ...



... and she was often recognized for her exploits at Louisville.