



# CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

## CIAC COACHES UPDATE



VOLUME II, ISSUE III *Dr. Bob Lehr,*

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### CONNECTICUT'S FINEST - COOKIE BROMAGE

Greetings from the CIAC. The March issue of "Updates" is the start of a four part series that will highlight the coaching careers of several of Connecticut's most successful coaches.

This issue will feature one of Connecticut's finest – Cookie Bromage.

It is hard to imagine a coach that has been on the sidelines for 44 years and is still of sound mind and body. I think of the experience and wisdom Cookie gained from more than four decades of coaching adolescents, and I also think - how fortunate her athletes were to benefit from that experience and wisdom. Certainly there were many challenges that Cookie faced during her lengthy tenure, but the positives of working with and influencing hundreds of student-athletes surely have been personally and professionally rewarding.



#### COOKIE BROMAGE'S COACHING BIOGRAPHY



Coached Field Hockey–Basketball–Cheerleading

362 VICTORIES (No records were available for a 5 years)

⇒ 9 Conference titles

⇒ 5 State Championships

⇒ 2 #1 team in State Awards

⇒ 36 All State Players



⇒ 40 Athletes played on Intercollegiate Level

⇒ 14 Athletic Scholarships

⇒ 2 High School Americans

⇒ 1 Collegiate All American

A second article this month is about how coaches can benefit from the insights of coaches of Olympic medal winning teams and individuals. Both articles should provide some "good stuff" for Connecticut's high school coaches.

Spring sports starts this month. **GOOD LUCK** to all coaches and we hope that all your contests are blessed with perfect weather!

# Profiles of Excellence



## Kathleen ‘Cookie’ Blodgett Bromage

Field Hockey, Basketball, Cheerleading, Coach

**Q: What were the things that you did that made you so successful?**

**For example, outstanding organizational skills, keeping up-to-date with coaching methodology, understanding the mind-set of your athletes, or other items.**

*A: Establishing a positive relationship with players. Letting them know that I really care for them. Attention to detail, continuing education, asking questions, hard work and enthusiasm. Letting kids know that I give 100% to the program- never expecting more from players than I would give myself.*

**Q: What do you think is the key to being a successful coach?**

*A: Preparation – meaningful practices. Recognizing that each player is different – build on their strength. Give each player a chance to be successful. Don’t be afraid to use talented players in demonstrating skills or running drills. Creating ways to challenge and motivate players to want to do their best.*

**Q: What separated your outstanding teams from teams that were not as successful?**

*A: Highly talented athletes who were motivated and demonstrated exceptional skills.*

**Q: What were the qualities that your outstanding athletes possessed that separated them from other team members?**

*A: Demonstrating their passion for the sport and a desire to win. Showing a curiosity to learn more and improve skills in practice each day. Demonstrating a team first attitude and doing the “little extras” to become a better player by their individual work in the off season.*

**Q: How were you able to handle all of the factors that detracted from your coaching efforts? For example, unreasonable parents, athletes who lost interest in your sport, family responsibilities, etc.**

*A: Letting players know that my door is always open to listen to any problem or concern – and deal directly with it. Excellent cooperation and support from my administrators and athletic director. Maintaining a good rapport with parents. My best resource for advice is my husband – he is also a high school coach.*

**Q: How has coaching changed from the time you began to the present?**

*A: Tremendously! I began coaching in 1967 – the “Play Day” Era. I considered coaching as an extension of my job as a physical education teacher. I coached field hockey, basketball + cheerleading all varsity + J.V teams - \$150 a year. Created my own schedules and worked around finding gym space or field space for practices. Title IX changed everything. Today with league schedules, tournaments, salary increases, assistant coaches, etc – comes greater accountability, paperwork, emphasis on liability, parental involvement, recruiting, and dealing with the demand other coaches put on kids to play one sport.*

**Q: What advice would you have for individuals starting their coaching careers?**

*A: Be prepared each day – set an example of hard work and enthusiasm. Keep current with your sport, never stop learning – attend clinics, conventions. Be a good role model and listener. Be involved in your players’ activities. Create a positive environment for your players to have the opportunity to be successful and have fun. Communicate with parents. Join professional organizations, your State Coaches Association, and become an active member.*



**WHAT COACHES CAN LEARN  
FROM MEDAL WINNING COACHES**

By Catherine Sellers, USOC Manager of Coaching

We saw the television footage of the Athens Olympic Games. We watched in awe as we witnessed the medal winning performances of Michael Phelps (six gold medals and two bronze) the men’s gymnastics team astounding silver medal performance, the dominance of the women’s softball gold medal performance (51-1 run ratio against all competitors), the surprise medal by Lauryn Williams in the 100 meters, and we read about the women’s volleyball team capturing a bronze medal. What you may not know about is the coach that worked with these athletes and teams everyday and shared that desire for success on the podium.

Bob Bowman (Michael Phelps), Ron Brant (Men’s Gymnastics) Mike Candrea ( Head Coach of the Women’s Softball team), Amy Deem (Lauryn Williams) and Denise Van De Walle ( Assistant Coach for the Paralympics Women’s Volleyball team) agreed to be interviewed for a series of questions about their coaching background, their personal motivation and their advice to young coaches.

**SELLERS: WHAT WAS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT CONCEPT THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED THAT HAS MADE YOU A BETTER COACH?**

**BOWMAN:** No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.

**VAN DE WALLE:** I agree, wholeheartedly. I also try to coach with the understanding that it takes a long time to get really good at something. Patience is the key. I learned quickly that players on the team can be pushed hard physically and mentally. There was no “feeling sorry” for these athletes. They were there as elite athletes that wanted to win a medal in the Paralympics.

Their amputation was not a hindrance.

**CANDREA:** Preparation, Preparation, Preparation! Preparation is the foundation for success. Over the years, I have found that paying attention to the process will give you the best chance for success. Preparation of that process, continued evaluation of the process, and paying attention to details have made me a more efficient and effective coach. I desire to be over-prepared vs. under-prepared any day!

**BRANT:** At the highest level of competition the smallest of details is the difference between a medal and no medal. I feel this is critical to success and no stone must be left unturned. Next, communication, which includes listening, information is only valuable when it is delivered in a timely and precise manner.



BOB BOWMAN



DENISE VAN DE WALLE

**DEEM:** I do not believe that you ever stop learning. If we as coaches think we know everything there is to know, then it’s time to find a new profession. I find it is more important to coach the athlete than the event. While possessing an understanding of particular events is vitally important, it is perhaps more important to possess an understanding of the athlete and how to promote improvements considering their level of understanding.

**SELLERS: YOU TALK ABOUT LEARNING. HOW DO YOU EDUCATE YOURSELF? YOU ARE AT THE TOP OF THE GAME IN YOUR SPORT, HOW AND WHERE DO YOU GO TO STAY CURRENT?**

**VAN DE WALLE:** When I was given the opportunity to coach the USA Women’s team, I had to learn on the job. I had no prior experience of working with amputees’ and especially amputees sitting on the floor playing volleyball. Some of my best knowledge has come from trial and error, and in talking with the captain and Head Coach of the Netherlands Women’s team.

**BRANT:** I am constantly talking to other elite coaches and not necessarily just coaches in gymnastics. I spend time every week in the USOC Sport Sciences departments discussing my ideas and looking for new ways to evaluate and maximize performance for the USA Men’s Gymnastics team.

**BOWMAN:** I seek out the most knowledgeable and experienced international coaches and pick their brains. When you are fortunate enough to have a special athlete like Michael Phelps you can learn a lot by just watching what they do and by trying to understand how they operate.

**DEEM:** I also maintain a working relationship with a small

network of highly experienced coaches, which not only provides opportunities to learn from successful coaches but also provides opportunities to share ideas and concerns about all aspects of training. I study relevant books, articles and research pertaining to training methodology and athlete development.

**CANDREA:** Education should be a continuing process that never stops. It is my responsibility through conversation, conferences and reading to enhance my knowledge base and confirm my methodology. Nothing stays the same it gets better or it gets worse!

**SELLERS: SO YOU ARE ALL CONTINUALLY LEARNING ABOUT SPORT. HOW DO YOU REFLECT YOUR LEARNING AND PERSONALITY INTO YOUR COACHING PHILOSOPHY?**

**CANDREA:** My coaching philosophy definitely reflects my personality. To sum it up, I use three C’s. The first “C” stands for competence. You must stay on top of the game and continue to be active in the education process. This keeps your motivation and enthusiasm at the highest levels. The second “C” stands for consistent. Being consistent with your approach to the process and your management of people creates a quality environment for developing your athletes and team concept. The third “C” stands for caring. I have had the pleasure of coaching both men and women. Men have to play good to feel good, while women have to feel good to play good. Caring about the athlete as an individual is very important to building trust.



MIKE CANDREA



AMY DEEM

**BRANT:** My philosophy has changed as I have developed as a coach. It is important to grow and adapt to stay on top of your sport. My goal is to develop individuals who win, which in my case, means both coaches and athletes. I work on leaving my ego at home and developing strong working relationships, which is based on honesty and integrity.

**DEEM:** My philosophy revolves around assisting athletes to grow in all aspects of their lives, not just athletically. I feel personally responsible for providing an environment that will foster the overall growth and development of each athlete. Hopefully, they will be better prepared for life than when they first stepped on our campus.

**BOWMAN:** I believe that hard work eventually leads to success. There are many more talented coaches than me out there, but nobody can out work me.

**VAN DE WALLE:** I want to add passion to this discussion on philosophy. I believe you should have a passion for your sport. With team sports, creating a great team chemistry is as critical as training their skills.

**SELLERS: HAVE YOU HAD IMPORTANT MENTORS IN YOUR COACHING CAREER?**

**DEEM:** The USA Track & Field Program has provided my most significant mentoring influence. The coaching relationships and coaching knowledge that I have gained through the program has been an invaluable resource.

**CANDREA:** My family was probably my most important mentor because they taught me that winning championships is not the most important part of the process. They made me aware of how important balance is to the longevity of your career and happiness in life. Balance between your family, profession, and the importance of spirituality. Once I realized balance, I became a better parent, coach and husband.

**BOWMAN:** My most influential mentor has been Paul Bergen. He developed great swimmers like Tracy Caulkins, who was the female equivalent to Michael Phelps. I was very lucky to be his assistant and his guidance has been invaluable.

**SELLERS: HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH THE EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER OF ELITE LEVEL COMPETITION?**

**BOWMAN:** I think my job at the major meets is to be the picture of confidence and composure. That's when the athletes need a source of stability. I tend to get nervous during training—that's when I can get intense. At the meets, you need to keep your cool and go with the flow.

**BRANT:** This is a difficult task and maybe the hardest. However, the better prepared the team is and the ability to cover all details lowers the emotional stress. Therefore, planning is crucial and that it is accomplished by planning early and reviewed at the end of the year.



RON BRANT

**CANDREA:** I find that much like Ron, being process oriented helps in handling the ups and downs you face in the game. I have found that being totally dedicated to preparation and the process keeps me in the present moment. I do not live in the past and do not look too far ahead. I also stress not to get too excited when things are going well and not to get to down when things are going bad!

**VAN DE WALLE:** Coaching is not where I get my significance. I have an active prayer life. After our first loss, I took time to reflect on what was really important. Stressing out and being negative was not the answer.

**SELLERS: WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CONCEPT THAT YOUR ATHLETES GET FROM YOU?**

**BRANT:** Life is difficult, deal with It! It sounds harsh, but it has deeper meaning. There are obstacles and adversities we must all be prepared to overcome in order to reach the dreams we each have. Once you have committed to your dreams go after them and don't be setback by the adversities of life, they are just opportunities to learn to get better.

**CANDREA:** Hard work pays off and everyone must do their part to achieve success for the team. It is not about me, it's about USA! Prepare for success!

**DEEM:** There are no shortcuts to lasting success. I encourage my athletes to take ownership of their success by investing the time and energy and efforts necessary to accomplish their goals.

**BOWMAN:** I teach my athletes to think big. Don't be afraid to use your imagination.

**SELLERS: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A COACH JUST STARTING OUT IN THE PROFESSION?**

**BRANT:** First, be honest and maintain a high level of integrity, it will take you a long way in your life. Secondly, when a coach stops learning, he will be beaten in a short period of time.

**CANDREA:** If you do not have passion for what you do, it will be a difficult journey. You must be able to adapt to constant change, be flexible and use every resource you have available to you. When dealing with your administration or outside groups, communicate often, be direct and you never can go wrong with honesty.

**VAN DE WALLE:** I would want that person to spend a lot of time with the sitting team. It would be important to see the game played and to see the training. We don't have the resources of books or videos, so watching and lots of dialogue about the game is important.

**BOWMAN:** My advice to young coaches is to be patient. Take your time and learn from other good coaches before you strike out on your own. Very few coaches truly excel at preparing athletes for international competition. Seek them out, observe what they do and how they do it and don't be afraid to ask questions.

**DEEM:** I think it is vitally important that coaches learn to conduct themselves as professionals. I believe, as coaches, we do not always portray ourselves in a professional manner. Coaches are executives managing resources and personnel on a large scale. Some larger than others, but if we expect to be treated as professionals, this involves embracing the professional culture and evaluating everything from our office attire to our office demeanor.

*Bob Bowman served as the Men's Swimming Assistant Coach at 2004 Olympic Games and is the Head Swimming Coach at the University of Michigan.*

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*Mike Candrea has been the National team coach for Softball at the 2000 and 2004 Olympic Games and is the Head Coach at the University of Arizona.*

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*Denise Van De Walle is the Head Volleyball coach at Bowling Green State University and served as the Assistant Coach for 2004 Paralympics Women's Volleyball team.*

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*Amy Deem serves as the Head Track & Field Coach at University of Miami.*

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*Ron Brant is the USA Gymnastics Senior Men's National Team Coordinator.*

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