

Lessons and Reflections

With the closing ceremonies of Tokyo Summer Games taking place last August, and the Beijing Winter Games starting just six months later, the past year has been a big one for Olympics fans. Doesn't that include everyone at one time or another? In truth, how many of us spent one or two childhood cycles of the Olympic Games imagining ourselves as elite athletes waving to admiring fans from the podium? For a few members of the Castilleja community, after lots and lots and lots of hard work, those fantasies became a reality. Two of them competed in the Olympics in sports they started after graduating from Castilleja, so maybe it's not too late! They have shared their reflections, memories, and lessons with the rest of us—as we still patiently contemplate which sport really will be our true calling. And as it turns out, these lessons apply to all aspects of life.

Nancy Ditz '72 EVENT TRACK AND FIELD / GAMES SEOUL 1988

Nancy Ditz '72 attended Castilleja during what she calls “the pre-Title IX era.” In fact, she graduated just days before Title IX was passed, changing athletics for girls and women in America for the better. Of course, there were athletics at Castilleja when Nancy was a student. She remembers playing on the basketball team in the old gym, but to pursue diving seriously, she was given permission to ride her bike to the Stanford pool during lunch to train with her coach. Incidentally, he only worked at what was then the old men's pool, so she had to change in a storage closet. As she remembers it, she ran her first road race in 1979 or 1980. Following an impressive trajectory, by 1984—when the women's marathon was first included in the Olympic Games—she was fast enough to compete in the trials. By 1988, she made the team and competed in Seoul. In addition to her achievements as an athlete, Nancy was the first recipient of the Castilleja Award.

Castilleja experiences that prepared you for high-level competition:

Castilleja gave me confidence in my capacity to learn and grow.

The biggest lesson learned through athletics:

There are no shortcuts. Some days just showing up is a win. Doing the daily work creates success.

Favorite Olympic memory:

I come from a family of Olympics buffs. My dad was a spectator in '32 in Los Angeles, '36 in Berlin, '60 in Tahoe, and '68 Mexico (and Ms. Espinosa did not excuse me from classes so I could go along). We attended '72 in Munich, '76 in Montreal, the U.S. boycotted in '80, and we watched '84 in Los Angeles. My favorite memory is of the opening ceremonies. The stadium held about 100,000 people, and the seats were not assigned so I didn't know where to look for my family. I positioned myself on the outside of our delegation so that they could see me. About halfway around the stadium, it was as if my dad had levitated out of his seat, and I saw him through the crowd. You could make a movie out of it; the memory still brings me to tears.

Something for young athletes to keep in mind:

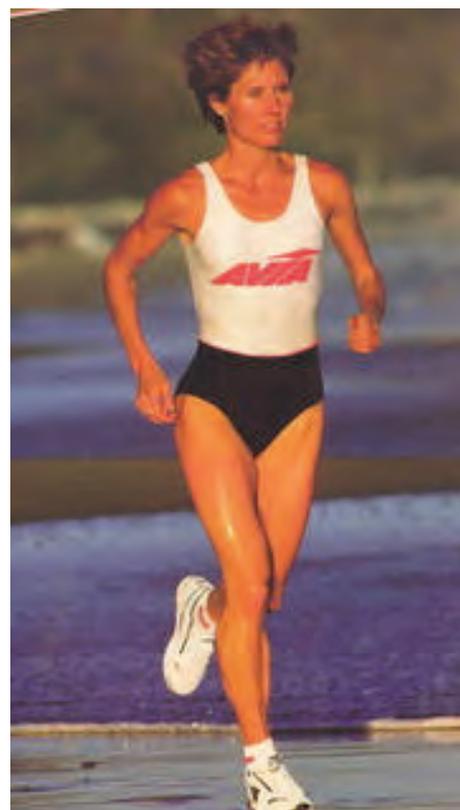
This is for everyone, not just athletes. Find the fun; choose the fun. It doesn't mean that every day will be easy, but find your joy. In running, even in my most competitive days, I could appreciate the wildflowers, or a beautiful sunset. It's also really important to acknowledge the progress made by Simone Biles and others in opening the conversation about the role of mental health in our overall health.

Which of the 5Cs do you most integrate into your daily life:

Courtesy. I simply believe people should be kind.



Nancy with Barb Byrnes '72



USA Olympic Women's Marathon, Seoul 1988