



NJSIAA TRAILBLAZER

Bonnie Bernstein is one of the most accomplished female sports journalists in the field, and she's broadened her career path into success in entrepreneurship and executive leadership, while also becoming heavily involved in philanthropy.

She's achieved her success through hard work, perseverance and paying her dues. And they are admirable traits which were developed in part going back to her days as a student-athlete at Howell High School.

Bernstein, who was salutatorian in her graduating class at Howell in 1988 and was later a magna cum laude graduate at University of Maryland, gained fame for her work as a reporter at ESPN and CBS Sports, where among other duties she was lead reporter for NFL games and the NCAA men's basketball tournament, as well as a feature reporter for NFL Today and anchor for various studio shows.

She's now trailblazing as the founder and CEO of Walk Swiftly Productions, a multi-media production company.

Before all of that, she paid her dues following her graduation from Maryland, first as the news and sports director at a small radio station in Delaware, then anchoring weekend news at a TV station Maryland, followed by time as a sports anchor in Reno, Nev., where she had the distinction of being the first female to have that role in the city.

She grew up in Howell with an early ambition of becoming a writer for Sports Illustrated, which she gained from a family trip to a Mets game. While roaming Shea Stadium, she found her way into the press box, and was captivated. Bernstein also grew up as a very talented gymnast, and additionally ran track. But progressing through high school, she also learned the importance of harnessing her skills and ambition.

"One of the most impactful insights I gleaned from high school gymnastics is the importance of staying in the moment, in work and life," she said. "My senior year at Howell, we were at Shore Conference Championships and I got wayyy ahead of myself about potentially winning the meet, after just three events. Rather than visualizing my routines, I was visualizing standing on the gold medal podium. Not surprisingly, I fell three times on the beam and finished fifth in the all-around. While soul-crushing at the time, it was such a valuable lesson about staying singularly focused on what's in front of you."

While that day provided a life lesson, there were plenty of other memorable achievements at Howell, where she was later inducted into the school Hall of Fame. She placed as a top ten finisher at the NJSIAA state championships as a junior and senior, and was also a team captain. She also found success, in more ways than one, as a track athlete.





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"In gymnastics, we were undefeated my last two seasons, and finally beat Red Bank Catholic my senior year," she said. "In track, I remember the exhilaration of three-stepping hurdles the first time for 110s as a freshman, and the joy of javelin. That was unexpected, because our field coach, Harry Neill, recruited me to throw jav and shot put, after I had only planned on running hurdles and 4x4."

That willingness to take on new challenges carried into her days at Maryland, where on the academic side, she expanded her journalistic interest from writing to the broadcast side. As a gymnast, she overcame three knee surgeries to become an Academic All-American and recipient of the school's Thomas M. Fields Award for excellence in academics and athletics.

She's preserved in other areas as well. While reporting at the Oklahoma-Texas football game in 2006, she experienced severe leg pain and shortness of breath. Upon flying home, the situation quickly worsened, and a trip to the emergency room revealed a dangerous diagnosis: a massive blood clot in her left leg, of which parts had broken off and had moved to her lungs. Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) was the cause, and it could easily have been fatal.

Aside from dealing with DVT, which can be brought on by air travel, among other factors, she also became an advocate for DVT awareness. She is Co-National Spokesperson for the Coalition to Prevent Deep Vein Thrombosis. She has traveled the country promoting DVT education awareness and helped influence federal DVT legislation and a "call to action" issued by the U.S. Surgeon General. She is also involved with several organizations which are focused on youth health and wellness.

And as someone whose upbringing and career was strongly influenced by her participation in sports, she's well aware of how those early opportunities were helped along by the passage of Title IX, the federal act from 1972 that afforded unprecedented educational and athletic opportunities for women such as herself.

"Few things prepare us for adulthood as powerfully and profoundly as what we learn as competitive athletes: accountability, sportsmanship, work ethic, intestinal fortitude, being a good teammate, overcoming adversity, goal-setting, time management. I could go on and on," she said.

"You ask any female athlete if her approach to life or her profession was influenced by her time on the fields of play, and the answer will be a resounding, 'Yes!' Always. The increased opportunities, the scholarships, the professional leagues, the expanding roles for women working in all facets of sports, the growing movement toward gender and pay equity. It's all a byproduct of Title IX. So, suffice it to say, Gratitude. Lots of it!"

