



# NJSIAA TRAILBLAZER

It's one thing to grow up playing two sports, and to be a high school contributor in both.

It's quite another to be not just a multi-sport player, but also recognized as one state's best-ever in each.

That describes Christine McGinley, who graduated from Shawnee High School in 1990 as a multi-year All-State selection in field hockey and lacrosse, and in 2000 was selected by the Star-Ledger to the All-Century teams in both sports, in addition to being named Player of the Century in lacrosse.

Her field hockey teams at Shawnee were NJSIAA Group 4 state champions during her junior and senior years, and Shawnee's lacrosse team was state champion her junior season and runner-up her senior year.

She moved on to Penn State, where she played both sports, but especially excelled in field hockey, where she was a two-time All-America and graduated as the school's second-leading goal scorer (with 86 in 86 games) and second in career points with 180.

Her success was fostered through a positive attitude toward sports that prevailed in her hometown of Medford.

"I grew up in Medford, and sports were primarily rooted in backyard play with my peers," she said. "This experience of having to organize amongst ourselves, competing for ourselves and combining our play with freedom to roam and explore was the opportunity that we were given. This dynamic I believe offered healthy levels of humility, social and emotional development and an opportunity to play and compete for no other reason than for fun."

In the case of McGinley, those times as a young girl gave her a chance to feel equal to her male peers, both as an athlete and student.

"In Medford, we had great leaders like Dick Brown, Betsy Irwin and Kathy Gehris who all worked incredibly hard to build a youth sports program for kids at an affordable cost," she said. "One of the greatest experiences I had as a youth was when I was introduced to the sport of field hockey by Bonnie Brown, my neighbor and role model. Kathy Gehris and Betsy Irwin built the youth programs for field hockey where the varsity players from Shawnee coached the youth programs. I couldn't get enough being around these older female role models. We all worked so hard to learn from them and dream that some day, we would play at Shawnee, too. This was all reinforced by coaches like Bobbie Schultz and Susan Rudderow Murphy, who instilled so many great values for girls at the high school level."

Another aspect of growing up in that 1980s period was how parents weren't as immersed as they are today, so the young athletes in town were able to learn important lessons on their own.

"Parents were not that involved in our sports play, and it gave us the freedom to build within ourselves our own values of hard work, respect, teamwork and how to have fun," she said. "This was reinforced from our social environment and teammates versus adults and parents. In fact, most parents didn't even come to games back then, and as children, the expectations and pressure to perform came from each other and we relied on our teammates and ourselves to push our limits. It was truly our own thing and that was valuable when progressing to a higher level, because we learned the importance of accountability and how our teammates can support us."

"When Shawnee captured the lacrosse state title in the spring of '89, McGinley scored 80 goals. That fall, she led the nation by scoring 40 goals for her state championship-winning field hockey team. She ended her senior lacrosse season by scoring 114 goals and finished her All-American career with 231 goals.

"It was a dream to play at Shawnee and compete alongside with some incredible athletes," McGinley said. "Coaches Bobbie Schulz and Susan Rudderow Murphy truly were the most incredible women I have met in my life. They taught us crucial life values through sports that I have taken with me in family life, career and relationships. I may not remember particular games or outcomes, but I remember the people who helped me learn about myself, and I had the freedom to navigate who I was and what I could become as a woman."

Her time at Penn State created a different set of lessons. That includes some based on an unfortunate reality that even though the passage of Title IX in 1972 created unprecedented opportunities for female athletes, large schools with wildly successful football programs were slow to recognize and support women's sports.





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“Football set a theme that unless your sport brought in money, you deserved less,” she said. “I am an advocate for the Equal Rights Amendment and believe that women should not be denied equal rights under the law. We were grateful to play, but our culture taught us to be quiet in demanding equality.”

Another hard lesson came in the form of a knee injury that would ultimately end her career.

“I was injured after my senior season at Penn State as an Olympic hopeful for the ‘96 Olympics,” she said. “I was hit by a field hockey ball directly in the knee in a pickup game by one of my own teammates and I eventually lost my ability to run. At 26 years old, after four unsuccessful surgeries, my knee had to be replaced. In 2020, I had my 11th surgery on that knee and third full replacement, but I have been fortunate to have incredible surgeons. This injury taught me great lessons of resilience and my need for radical acceptance.

“Often when we play sports at a competitive level, our identities are surrounded by being an athlete,” she said. “When it is taken away, either by your career ending or by injury, the transition can be difficult. My teammates were a great support in helping me transition to different experiences and I had a willingness to grow in different ways. Today, I do not play recreation sports. At this point, I am just happy to be relatively pain free and go for walks and play with my son.”

Her athletic experiences have also help forge her path as an adult. She has worked in the financial industry and earned a MBA, but has found a true passion serving as an advocate for women and children who leave abuse and end up in the family court system.

“The gift for me from playing sports was not the achievements or championships, but the relationships I gained over the years,” she said. “Sports taught me how to be a good teammate and friend. I learned the value of relationships, with the ability to hold myself accountable and self-reflect. I learned to value trust, validation and communicating my needs. I value honesty and compassion.

“These lessons came from great coaches and teammates, because as a team, we overcame adversity together, giving us the support and confidence to face similar challenges alone. Playing sports with my teammates has given me this deep belief in myself that I can overcome incredible adversity and trauma. As a mom, I am hopeful that I am not only modeling the strength and resilience for my son, but also a healthy set of morals and values that can help him develop into who he wants to be in a very complicated world.”



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