

# Thursday Is 50th Anniversary: Title IX Was Felt At First Macoupin County Girls' Track and Field Meet

by Tom Emery  
June 22 2022 4:56 PM



CARLINVILLE - Thursday marks the 50th anniversary of the passage of Title IX. The winds of change were quickly felt in Central Illinois.

Just eleven months later, the first Macoupin County Girls Track Meet was held. Within a few years, girls' track in the county, and across the state, would be joined by volleyball, basketball, and cross country, among others.

It would be years before the girls' meet reached equal footing with the boys' meet. But at least, Macoupin County girls had a chance in athletics in 1973.

That inaugural meet was held on May 9 at Carlinville and not surprisingly, it came and went with little fanfare. In Carlinville, the local *Macoupin County Enquirer* devoted a mere four paragraphs to the meet.

The smallest school in the field, Palmyra Northwestern, took top honors with consistency in every discipline. Though the Wildcats captured only three individual crowns, they finished in the top-five in every event to finish with 55 points, ahead of Girard with 43.36. Carlinville was third at 33.93.

Like the *Enquirer*, the *Girard Gazette* offered scant coverage, and apparently expected little from the home team. "Surprising as it seems," wrote the *Gazette*, "the girls from the Girard track team pulled second place out of seven" at the meet.

Northwestern, meanwhile, reveled in the win. Due partly to its size, Northwestern teams traditionally struggled against larger county rivals in most sports before the controversial decision to co-op across the board with Greenfield in 2011.

The 1973 girls' track title is the only county championship in any sport for Northwestern, which was established in 1948.

The Wildcats were led by Delores Darley, a Massachusetts native who had been a teacher in the Northwestern district since 1968. Her husband, Bob, was also a teacher and coach at Northwestern.

Like many others, Darley was just learning the sport of track. "I played basketball in college, and had run the hurdles before," she said. "But nothing prepared me to teach the throws."

She was also shocked at the primitive nature of girls' sports in Illinois. "Back in Massachusetts, sports for girls were already there," said Darley. "Illinois was so far behind that I couldn't believe it."

Not surprisingly, there was little experience at the meet in 1973. Staunton had no seniors on its roster, and girls at many schools had never competed in track at any level.

Participation numbers, however, were high. Tiny Northwestern boasted one of the largest rosters, with twenty-two girls out for track that first year. Girard was nearly as large, with twenty-one.

Training methods were also still in their infancy and accordingly, the running events at the county meet produced some of the slowest times ever, while the field participants did not throw as far. Still, the competitive spirit was evident.

“I had such great kids at Northwestern,” recalled Darley. “We had some really good talent, and some of our kids went on to the state meet, right from the start. That’s why we were so successful.

“Northwestern was just a good place to be at,” continued Darley. “The people in that area were great, and we really enjoyed our time there.” She went on to coach volleyball at Northwestern and eventually taught and coached at Jacksonville before moving to upstate New York as part of a forty-year career in education.

A half-century later, the 1973 county girls’ track meet is largely forgotten, mainly because so few people cared at the time. The Carlinville coach, longtime math teacher Linda Stuckey, had few words for the first county meet.

“I don’t remember much about it,” she laughed. “It wasn’t a big deal, by any means.”

At victorious Northwestern, it was a different story. “Winning that meet was a *big* deal to our girls and the school,” said Darley. “That was the first county meet, and the first time they had won it. So that was really important to them.”

Weeks later, the first-ever IHSA Girls Track and Field meet was held, and Carlinville’s Nan Steinmeyer became the first state medalist from the county, finishing second in the shot put.

In a time when girls’ sports were in their infancy, Darley remembered the impact of that first Macoupin County meet in the area.

“I think it showed that girls could play sports, too,” remarked Darley. “Once they were given the opportunity, they showed what they could do.”

*Tom Emery is a freelance writer and historical researcher from Carlinville. He may be reached at 217-710-8392 or [ilcivilwar@yahoo.com](mailto:ilcivilwar@yahoo.com).*