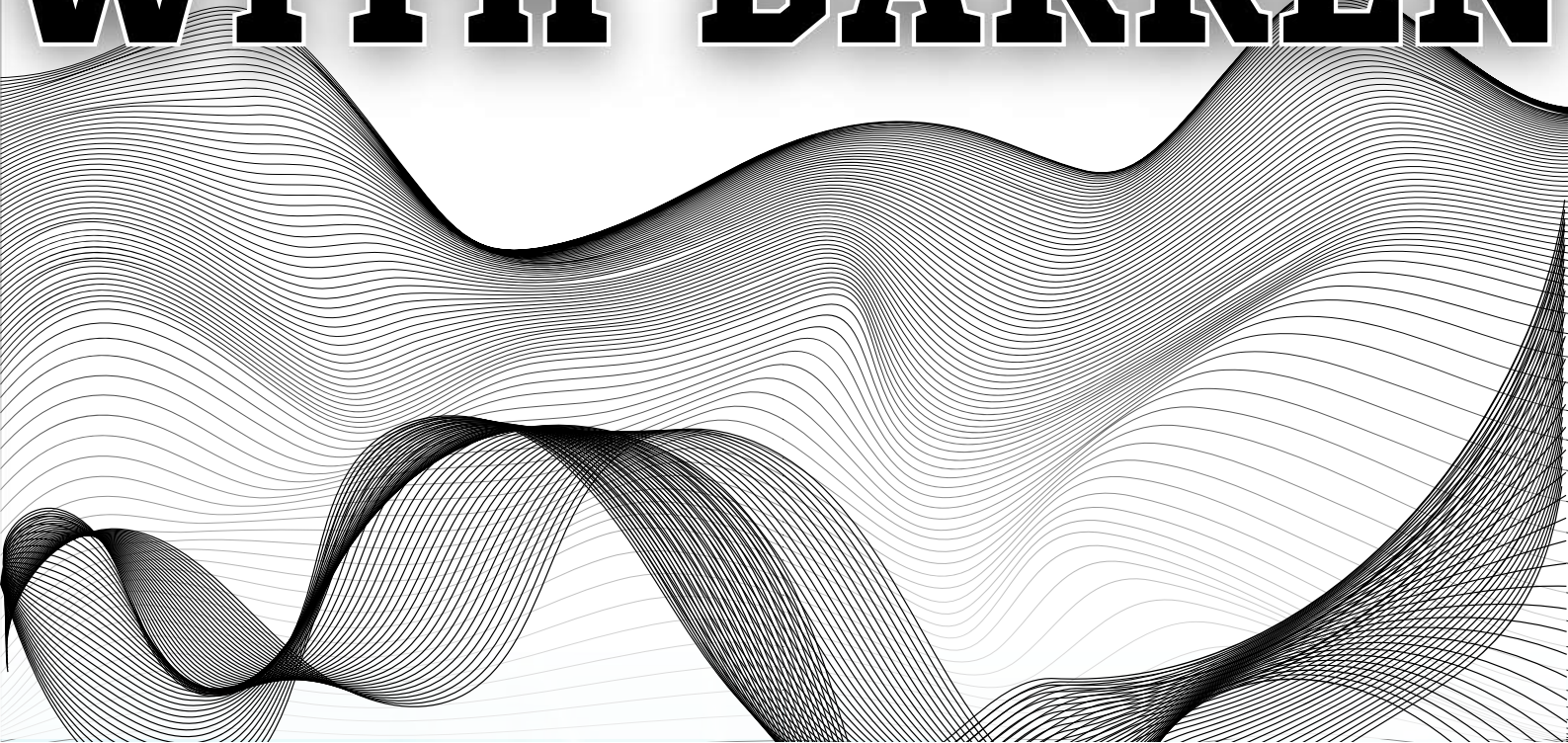




A COACHING CATCH UP WITH DARREN



What is your track and field background?

In true Darren fashion, he cuts to the chase and tears the bells and whistles off. “When I was a kid, I liked running fast” - he reminisced about sprinting from the front yard to the back in self-motivated wind sprints (something I, as a thrower, can only imagine being the strangest kind of torture) and how that naturally lead his parents to sign him up for track.

The Alberni Valley Track & Field Club was his home for many seasons and allowed Darren to pursue the sport at the collegiate level. It was during his time at Santa Barbara City College that he was first introduced to coaching. His coach asked a few of his athletes to come assist with a high school relay practice. Darren remarked that “I remember having fun, but I never thought more about it.”

After graduation, Darren returned home to Port Alberni. While he was away, his childhood coach Bob Dailey passed away and they built a new stadium in his name. With a newly rubberized surface, Darren couldn't wait to get back to training. He mentioned that coming back to the small community with such a great venue made it feel more “home” than it ever had before. It was on one of those inconsequential days when he and an old teammate from high school were going through a sprint workout on the track that his coaching story really begins. A member of the Port Alberni Track & Field Club went over to ask if Darren would consider helping out with the club - to which his teammate replied “don't do it - you'll get sucked in and you'll never get out”. Turns out, he was right!

Throughout his journey, his mindset around coaching has changed. “Initially you think “I can help, hopefully I’ve learned enough over my years at college” but then you get interested in the kids. They’re each like a puzzle and, if you like puzzles, it's kind of cool” Darren explained.

Always ready to go above and beyond, Darren soon became the head coach and took on many roles under that umbrella. When asked how he got involved in throws, his answer was simple: desperation. Darren threw growing up, but it seemed as though the implements grew faster than he did so he soon decided the “full thanksgiving dinner plate” of a disc would be a part of his past. Despite this, during his time at Santa Barbara College he held the school javelin throw record for the new weighting for a whole year (admittedly, until they recruited an “actual” javelin thrower)!

Up until he had an athlete that wanted to learn hammer, he was able to rely on Anna Jack to take care of the throws so he could focus on the other needs within the club. However, being the dedicated coach he is, he remarked that he “had to learn how to teach so I wasn’t the block in her path”. Apparently, the materials he consumed were from trusted sources as he was able to watch his athlete win a national title in the hammer throw after all her hard work.

What is the most rewarding part of your role as a coach?

Without missing a beat, Darren replies “well, it’s not financial!” After a moment of contemplation, he notes that there are many instances where he feels fulfilled during coaching - the most notable of which is seeing improvement. Moreover, the ability to meaningfully impact an athlete’s life by making sport and being around their friends an enjoyable experience keeps him involved in the coaching role.

Darren then shared a few examples from this past week's Island Championships where he had the opportunity to coach the men’s 4x400m champions - the first time the school claimed that title since his own team dominated the track during his high school career. There were a few club athletes on that team so he was sentimentally reflecting on how far those athletes had come over the years.

The Island Championships also brought another aspect of coaching to life for Darren - the concept of opportunity and how important it is that each athlete has a chance to taste success. Unfortunately, the junior girls relay team was unable to make it in totality, so a few lionhearted grade 8's stepped up to the plate to fill out the roster. Against all odds, the team managed to secure their place at provincials with a 5th place finish. After the ribbons were handed out, Darren recalls one of the young athletes clutching her small token of recognition and crying because it meant so much to her, which in turn affected him as well. Darren remarked that Anna was beside herself - she couldn't believe she was surrounded by criers!



What inspired you to become the Chair of the Board of Directors?

From athlete, to part time coach, to being swindled into taking on the whole club - you'd think that would be enough on one's plate! Darren's need to help and support others obviously knows no bounds as he has also recently taken on the role of the Chair of BC Athletics' Board of Directors!

While it was a self-proclaimed "surprise" that he went for the position, he reflects on Greg's time in the role - explaining Greg had enjoyed and loved the role but had to step away and with the position open there were big shoes to fill. Darren had some experience in development and governance in his other career so he thought this would be a great opportunity for him to contribute further to our sport here in BC.

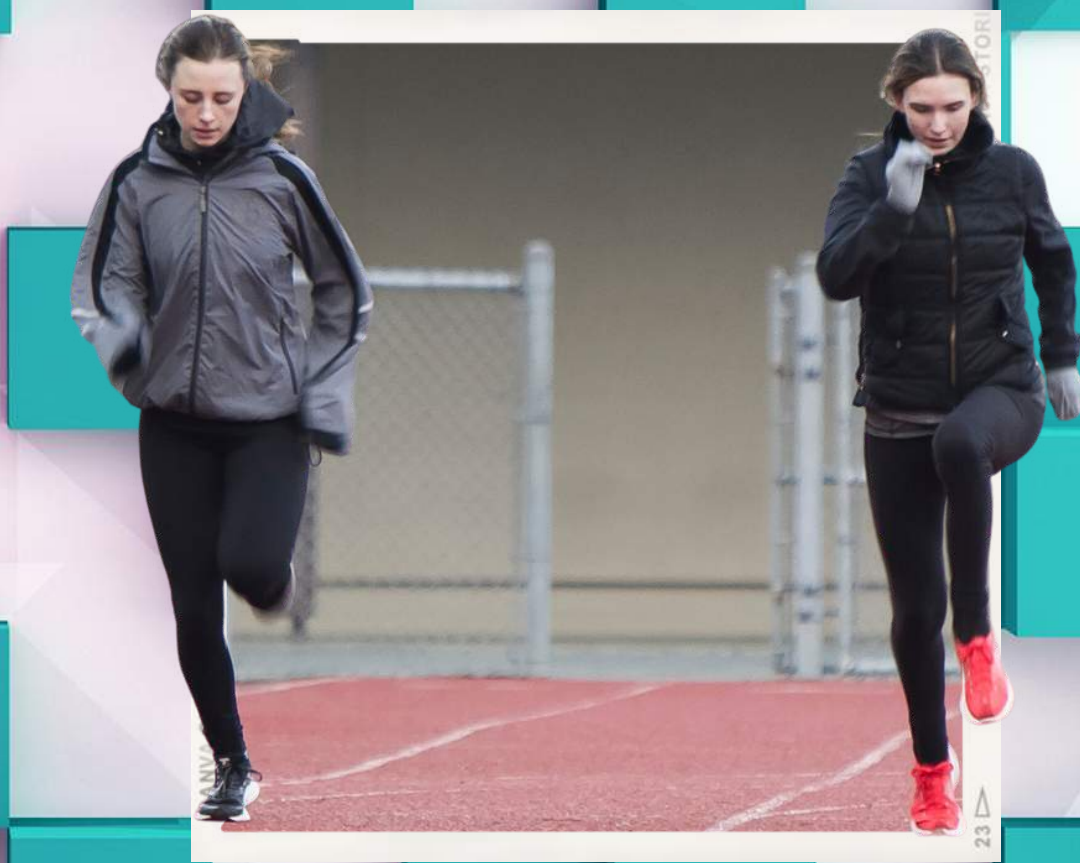
His main motivation for applying for the Chair position was to hopefully provide more education and support to directors so they can find being a part of BC Athletics rewarding in the same way coaches are rewarded when seeing their athletes succeed. In Darren's eyes, everyone involved in this sport can get as much out as they put in and he's prepared to be the catalyst for that to occur in his role.

Beyond the politics, Darren mentions that the board and athletics as a whole should be a place where "we feel like we can grow and gather around our passions and bring our wide variety of skills together to see if we can continue to improve and carry on the sport".

Who do you look up to most in track and field?

Finally! A question I was able to stump him on! Darren paused for a few moments, then said “huh, I’ve never really considered that concept”. Within track and field, mentors were few and far between as he grew up in such a small community. He mentioned “it was easy to feel alone, especially at the beginning.”

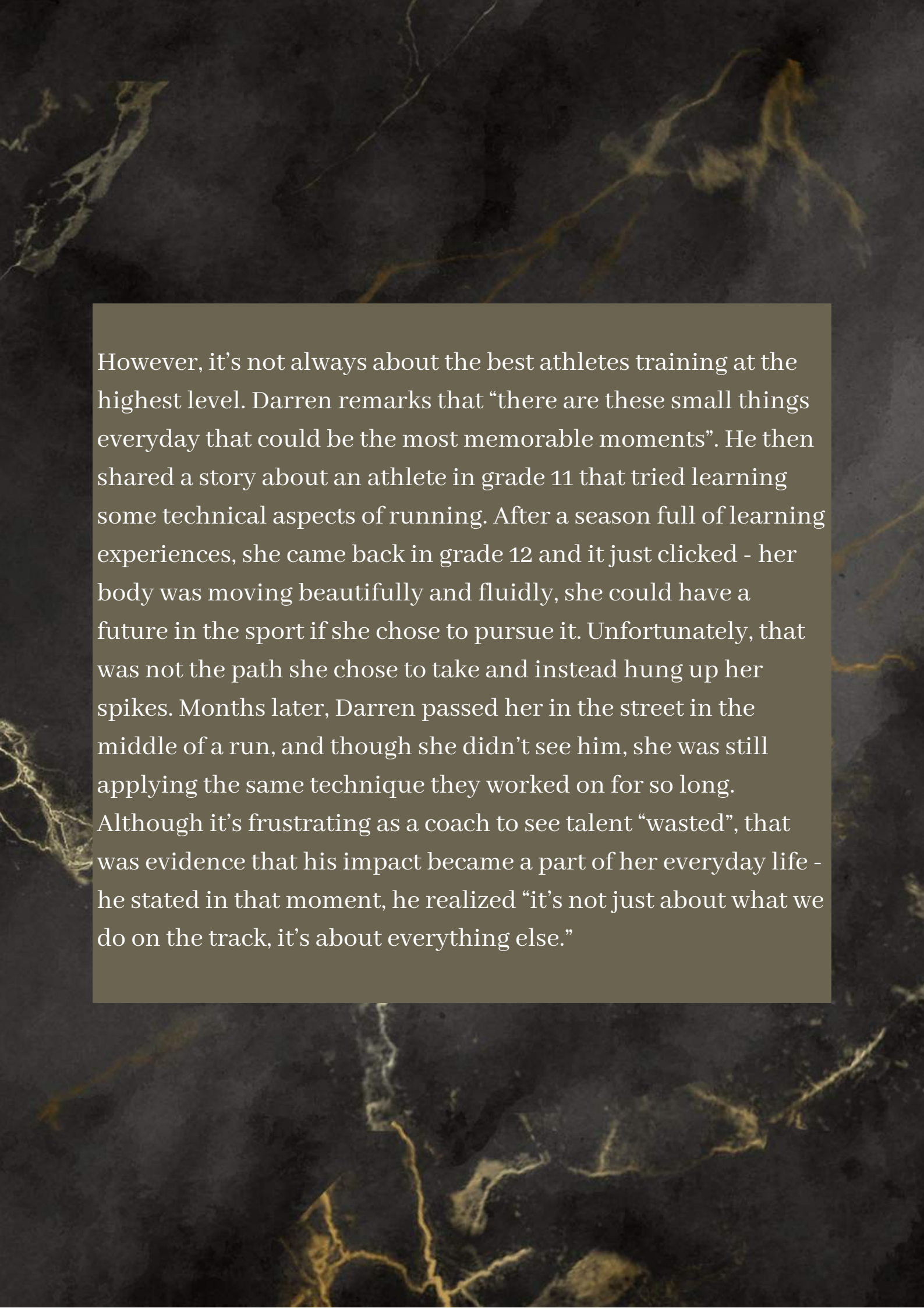
While he had his “fan-boy” moments growing up with elite athletes on the world stage, no role-models came to mind. However he did add that some of the people he looks up to most are outside of the sport. We can get sucked into the microcosm of track and field very easily, and it’s important to look at great people doing great things from a variety of backgrounds to come out with a well rounded approach.



What is your most memorable coaching moment to date?

When asked this question, Darren had two very contrasting answers - both equally as impactful, but show the range of impact that sport can have on an individual's life. From a purely performance based point of view, Darren describes coaching Bella up through the ranks to win a national title as being a "once in a lifetime opportunity". He reminisced about their training and "watching how much work she put in and seeing it result in the gold when along the way there were many points where we didn't think that was going to be possible... it was a cool thing to see".





However, it's not always about the best athletes training at the highest level. Darren remarks that "there are these small things everyday that could be the most memorable moments". He then shared a story about an athlete in grade 11 that tried learning some technical aspects of running. After a season full of learning experiences, she came back in grade 12 and it just clicked - her body was moving beautifully and fluidly, she could have a future in the sport if she chose to pursue it. Unfortunately, that was not the path she chose to take and instead hung up her spikes. Months later, Darren passed her in the street in the middle of a run, and though she didn't see him, she was still applying the same technique they worked on for so long. Although it's frustrating as a coach to see talent "wasted", that was evidence that his impact became a part of her everyday life - he stated in that moment, he realized "it's not just about what we do on the track, it's about everything else."

What are your goals as a coach? How will you measure the success of these goals?

Echoing what he finds rewarding, ensuring the kids enjoy being at practice is a large part of his value system. If young athletes are able to feel a sense of community in track and field and build a love for the sport at the same time, he will know he's done his job.

Moreover, when it comes to the technical aspect, he hopes to be prepared to help the athletes meet their own goals with both the resources and coaching to meet them both where they're at and where they want to be. The core value of being a life-long learner is something Darren hopes to embody throughout his coaching career. He remarked that "Coaching is about being curious. You want to do a better job with the next athlete than you did for the last one, and it continues to be a humbling process in that sense. One has a great experience then the next falls flat - figuring out what works for each athlete so they can all be successful is a large part of what I want to achieve as a coach".

As a sprint coach, Darren has a group of high quality, dedicated athletes right now and as a performance goal he hopes to make them a force to be reckoned with over the next few years - and to make sure they realize they're worthy of that along the way. As it stands, no individual will be at the top of the province but as a group they push each other to be better. Darren hopes that they can continue to compete and have those competitive experiences as a team.



Do you have any advice to share with other coaches?

Whether seasoned or new to the scene, there are a few aspects of coaching that can always be applied. Though it is easier said than done, learn to be patient and realize your goals are not your athlete's goals. You have to figure out where your athletes are and serve them at that level - not every kid is going to have your competitive drive and it may require you to look at their training from a different angle if that's the case.

Darren continues to say that "some will be more competitive and athletic - some won't be, you get who comes out. In a small community if someone wants to join your sport you have to encourage that no matter what level." Whether it's grass roots or elite sport, there's a place for everyone and they all need to feel like they have a space in our community.

If you could watch any performance in history live, what would it be?

Darren (to the best of his abilities) exclaimed “I did!” He had never been to a big international meet before, despite getting to see some incredible performances in his life- especially in California during his college years. However, Darren was lucky enough to attend the 2009 world champs in Berlin.

He goes on to say “As a sprints fan, to pick that event, to watch Usain Bolt set world records in 3 events in a stadium with that history...to see all those people cheering for him...” the passion and respect Darren has for the sport could be summed up in his retelling of that moment. If anyone deserved to be there in that moment, I’m sure we can all agree it was him.



What are your hobbies outside of track and field?

With what seems to be the only answer I've gotten for this question, Darren replied "is there anything outside of track and field?"

He goes on to say "I used to have hobbies..." in his (very limited) free time, Darren enjoys surfing in Tofino - wetsuits are mandatory, of course. He also fills the day with photography and writing but as a true athlete his passion is keeping active.



As the track and field nerds always do, we spent the next 20 minutes discussing various javelin techniques, comparing videos, and coming up with ways to help my athletes address some of their problem areas. Even though you were somewhat forced to be in office, thank you for spending that time with me Darren! It was lovely as always - to all those reading, I highly recommend picking his brain if you have the opportunity (though, I might wait until after his junior girls compete at provincials or you may be battling tears yourself)!