



How a local teacher's aide and track official became a world champion



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Lisa Edwards spends a lot of her weekday hours on the run as a teacher's aide at Murray Avenue (Elementary) School in Larchmont.

Her assignments include working with second-graders in the classroom and helping to oversee fourth- and fifth-graders at lunch and recess.

But if anyone seems equipped to keep up with energetic, young kids it's the 44-year-old Bronx resident, who was already running and winning races before she was the age of her youngest students.

And that running and winning hasn't stopped.

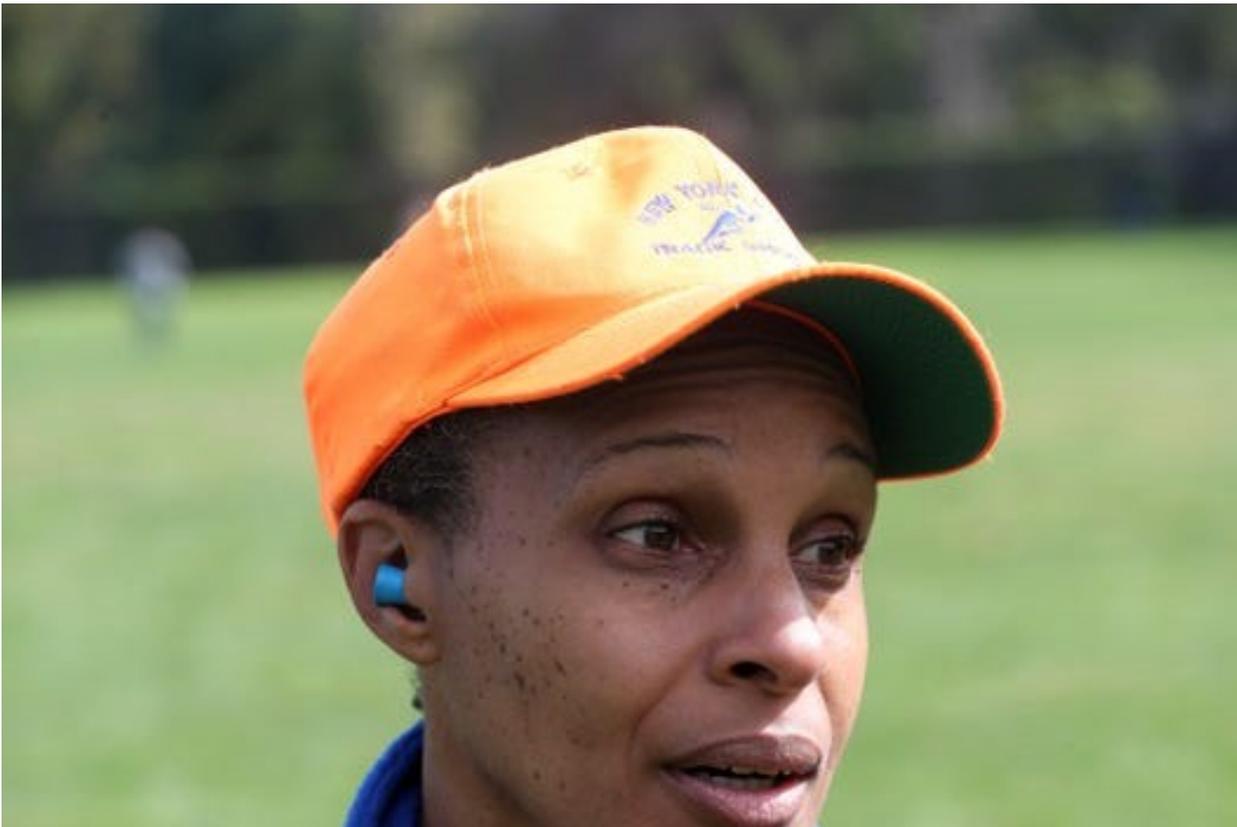
Edwards, a 400-meter hurdles state champion for St. John's Prep in Queens, where her time remains a Catholic High School Athletic Association girls record, also still holds Manhattan College's women's record in the event,.

But in July, her athletic accolades expanded.

Competing in her fourth masters world championship, this one in Finland, Edwards won gold, taking her signature event in the women's 40-44 age group.

The race was a bit of a stunner since the next finisher in the six-athlete race was an unheard of eight seconds behind her.

it was also surprising since Edwards was not only slowed by a lingering knee injury, but also lost time clipping the final hurdle.



Throw in the fact the loves-to-cook, cheesecake and chicken parm fan was making a mini comeback of a sort after dropping 35 COVID-gained pounds to go from 155 pounds back to her lanky 120.

Edwards also won the race from lane eight, an unenviable position that meant running from the outside, starting in front of the other five runners.

Running from there is, in a sense, like running in the great unknown.

"It was crazy. Lane eight you don't see anybody," Edwards explained.

Edwards, who, pre-race for inspiration, watched video of Sydney McLaughlin's world record-breaking 400 hurdles performance at last year's Tokyo Olympics, relied on the track announcer to know who was leading.

At the seventh of 10 hurdles, she heard her name.

"In my head, I keep replaying this. I've never run so hard in my life," Edwards said of the final stretch.

After hitting the finish, she looked around and found herself completely alone.

She didn't approach her 1:01.25 best, nor her top age-group time of 1:04.85, which is less than a second off fellow Manhattan College alum Lisa Daley's American women's record. But, considering her bad knee and hitting a hurdle, she was happy with winning in 1:09.45.



She also captured two silvers as part of the American 4x100 and 4x400 relays in her age group.

Her gold medal and silvers follow a world's bronze earned in Australia in 2016, also in the 400 hurdles, a sixth-place finish in the event at world's in Spain in 2018 and sixth-place and seventh-place finishes in the open 400 and 200 at indoor world's in Poland in 2019.

And Edwards also won two world masters relay golds as part of the American record-setting 4x100 relay in Spain and American record-setting 4x200 in Poland.

Return to racing

Edwards didn't envision any of this when she put away her track spikes for five years after graduating from Manhattan in 2000.

But she never left the sport.

She coached at the Division I University of Texas and for the U.S. at the Pan-American Games in 2001 before coaching at Wagner College for a couple of years.

In 2005, she joined her mother, Sandra, working as a track official at The Armory and myriad other local venues. (Both worked Saturday's cross-country meet, the Gressler Memorial Run, in White Plains.)

Sandra, who went to Andrew Jackson High School in Queens (now called Campus Magnet) before Title IX's enactment and before that school offered girls track, had to be content running out of the 103rd police precinct in Queens in Police Athletic League races. (With no girls sports, Sandra, who graduated in 1965, only received a school athletic letter, she noted, because she got 100 in gym.)

While there were vastly more opportunities for girls when Lisa went to school, Sandra didn't push her into sports.

In fact, Lisa wasn't even in school yet when, with a view of a track from their Bronx apartment, 4-year-old Lisa told her mom she wanted to race.

She joined the local track team at age 5 and won her first medal at 6.

It was while officiating high school and college track that Lisa got the bug to compete again. She ran races like the 5th Avenue Mile and half marathons before returning to the track in 2013 for masters competitions.

"It was very satisfying. ... Even though not at the level I was in high school and college, I realized I could compete at the international level and do well," she said.

And, in the past five years, her mother has also competed. Now a shot put and discus thrower, she has been to two world championships.

Lisa Edwards regularly trains, doing everything from cycling, to treadmill miles, to rail trail runs, to running before or after or, if there's a long enough break, between meets she officiates on a given day. She'll also just find an area to put on her resistance athletic parachute for sprinting or to set up some hurdles. Her dedication is obvious since both parachute and hurdles are kept handy in the back seat of her car.

Edwards' and her mother's calendars are now both marked for March to compete in indoor worlds in Poland.

Sandra, who has won medals on the national level but noted she's still working on getting that first worlds medal, will throw the shot.

Her daughter will compete in the open 400 and 200 with the goal of making the 200 final and medaling in the 400.

She'll move up later next year to the 45-49 age category. But, in the 400 hurdles, anyway, that won't be much of an advantage since her good friend, Latricia Dendy, has clocked 1:05.92 for the American women's record in that age group.

"She's a beast," Edwards joked.

Edwards may not be quite that but there's no denying she's very good.

"I knew she had the potential," her mom said of Lisa winning gold. "She puts her head in it. She does really well. She makes me proud."

And that has been true for a very long time.

Nancy Haggerty covers cross-country, track & field, field hockey, skiing, ice hockey, girls lacrosse and other sporting events for The Journal News/lohud. Follow her on Twitter at both @HaggertyNancy and at @LoHudHockey.