

WOMEN IN COACHING SPOTLIGHT



ROWING
IRELAND

#WomenInSportIRE

SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND

WOMEN IN COACHING INTERVIEW

Name: Jen Cunningham

Role: Captain of Grainne Mhaol,
NUIG Rowing Development Officer



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With Jen Cunningham

Club/Crew you are currently coaching: As Captain of Gráinne Mhaol RC (NUIG Alumni Boat Club), I manage the Alumni Programme made up of Adult Novices/Staff and Alumni. This entails weekly programme setting and managing a team of University student athletes who take responsibility for coaching the weekly sessions on offer to our alumni members. These student coaches are, for the most part, active competitive NUIGBC student athletes and some local TY students who are taking time away from competitive rowing.

Your coaching highlight: An unlikely highlight perhaps, as it has nothing to do with Pots or Pennants per se, but undoubtedly has to be the pleasure of being a part of a dynamic learning environment and witnessing the joy that most of our members experience when learning a new sport. It has also been very rewarding seeing the new-found pleasure that the NUIG athletes experience from coaching this particular cohort, and can often give them a different perspective of their own sport.



No of Years Coaching:

I set up the Alumni Recreational Programme 7 years ago and took on the Get Going Get Rowing Programme in Connacht from 2014 for 3 years where I actively engaged with key local secondary schools on a weekly basis, coaching indoors and progressing hundreds of students to water sessions every month. Both of these experiences provided me with great insight into how best to gear coaching towards total beginners, ranging from the ages of 13 up to 70 years old. I moved away from active coaching to currently manage the different alumni programmes and the NUIGBC athlete coaches ensuring they deliver a progressive and safe coaching session to all of our Alumni members. I also happen to be in the unique position of being the NUIG Development Officer for Rowing which allow access to a wider sports mentoring group with other NUI Coaches and Development Officers and under the guidance of Feargal O'Callaghan, NUI Galway, High Performance Sports Lead. This dual role of mine helps to strengthen the synergy between the University Club and the Alumni Club in terms of programme setting, sharing equipment and skill-sets as well as running joint fundraising efforts to fund the purchase of new equipment or sponsor an NUIG athlete to compete at specific events. This cooperative relationship continually strives towards garnering financial and alumni support for the University Club whilst offering alternative inclusive rowing programmes to the wider community and to former competitive members.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN COACHING:

I came to the sport a bit later in life whilst studying as a Mature Student in NUI Galway and ended up competing with the student club for several racing seasons, interrupted briefly by the arrival of my third child. Given that I was an unlikely newcomer to university rowing, I was extremely lucky to have been encouraged and supported from the very start by all our coaches in the club at that time and, luckily, ever since. I feel strongly that had that support not been there from the off, I would certainly never have considered developing a new programme and running with it after I finished competing with NUI Galway. I also had a really great bunch of club people who volunteered their time and invaluable knowledge to the programme for years to ensure the programme succeeded. I also found great support and encouragement from our neighbouring club, Tribesmen Rowing Club, who had their own Recreational Programme up and running at that stage and had lots of invaluable advice to give, even going so far as to lend us their equipment every now and again to kick start it all as we literally had nothing. So, something that started out of nothing other than an urgent need to build a community and support the University Club has resulted in a vibrant rowing community that has brought much needed support and funding to the student club over the years and managed to help purchase two touring quads and a coastal quad ever since its inception. Our next initiative is now fully underway with frequent coastal tours on offer of the upper Lough Corrib.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE POSITIVES FEMALES BRING TO COACHING?

I think it is always a great thing to have diversity in any environment and anyone who can bring creativity, integrity, good organisation and strong communication skills to any club should be actively encouraged and supported to do so within the club itself.



WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A NEW COACH OR SOMEONE CONSIDERING GETTING INVOLVED?

Sign up for an Introductory or Level 1 Coaching course to start with, try and get a powerboat licence under your belt, seek out a supportive club mentor and just go for it. Surround yourself with a positive team to bounce ideas around. No one person has all the skill sets. You won't always get it right, no one does, but just keep reviewing what you do and keep listening to your peers and members for feedback.

Best of luck!



**PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY:
ROWING IRELAND, WOMEN IN SPORT**

If you would like to highlight any of your female coaches as a role model for this interview series, contact Claire at claire.lambe@rowingireland.ie