



## Celebrating 50 Years of Title IX

### **50 For 50:**

**Amy Mortimer**

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**Amy Mortimer - Riley County**

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By Joanna Chadwick

Growing up on a small farm between Riley and Manhattan, Amy (Mortimer) Garman tried a variety of sports - and struggled.

“My dad was really into sports, and my mom said he couldn't wait to teach me how to play baseball,” she said. “On my first day of T-ball practice, I was playing catch and got hit in the head twice.

“I wasn't very coordinated no matter what sport I tried.... I was more likely to be reading a book. I'd get in trouble for reading in class.”

But when she was 10 years old and running the mile for P.E. class for the Presidential Physical Fitness test, Mortimer found her calling. She ran a 7:35 mile, beating all but one male in her class.

That was Mortimer's turning point, and the start of a phenomenal career.

[Check out the Mortimer dominance of Amy and her sister Erin](#)

"I just really loved doing it. I felt really good running," she said.

While at Riley County High School, Mortimer won 13 state titles. She was a four-time Class 3A cross country champion and a four-time 3A track champion in the 3,200 meters. She also won the 1,600 meters three times from 1997-1999 and won the 800 twice. She set state meet records in each event during her senior track season.

Mortimer still holds the 3A record in the 3,200 and the 800. Her younger sister, Erin, holds the 1,600 record.

Mortimer was also named a National Foot Locker cross country All-American in 1998 and was ninth at the 1998 Junior Nationals in the 3,000 meters.

"I recruited Amy out of Riley County High School," said Randy Cole, then the Kansas State cross country coach. "She had a lot of standout performances. She was one of the top milers in the country, so not only was she good, she was really good nationally.

"And she was right here in our backyard."

While at Kansas State, Mortimer was a 12-time NCAA All-American -- four times in cross country, three times in outdoor at the 1,500 and the 5,000, as well as five times indoor in the 3,000 and the distance medley relay. She helped lead the Wildcats to two Big 12 team titles.

Mortimer signed a contract with Brooks after college and was ninth in the 1,500 at the 2004 U.S. Olympic Trials. She ran professionally for nearly 10 years.

Her dad, Bob, was by her side through much of her training in middle school and high school. A physical therapist, he had noticed one day how naturally good her form was while she ran up their half-mile long driveway.

"Anybody who has ever watched runners on TV, they have a certain gait, a certain cadence - that's her," Bob Mortimer said. "So we tried jogging a little bit with her."

But once his daughter got too fast for him, he drove his Toyota truck down the country roads next to her while she ran.

"As soon as it was dark, we'd go out after supper with the car stereo speaker hanging out the window," he said. "We'd go out two, three, four times a week at the most. People in the neighborhood knew if someone was driving slow and music was blaring that Amy was out running.

"It's not safe being out at night alone when you're in the sixth grade. We'd talk about anything going on in the day, sometimes she'd tell jokes. I found out a lot about her life from running."

The goal through high school was to push but not burn out, so Mortimer and her dad only trained together in the offseason.

"She had a natural endurance, and she really wanted to be good," Bob Mortimer said. "I

didn't have to give her any pep talks about, 'you could be good if you worked harder.'

"If you had a horse and it wanted to run, sometimes it's better to pull back on the reins and not let them go all out. She would have run herself into the ground if we'd given her full rein to do it. I thought she needed time off to grow and develop and have another part of her life."



Unlike many other athletes, Mortimer didn't do two-a-day workouts with her team or add another workout after practice.

"Young female runners get burned out," Mortimer said. "Both (my dad) and my high school coach were big fans of low-mileage training. I'd work out really hard, but I wasn't doing a lot of volume.

"In May of my eighth grade year as I was going into high school, I broke my foot playing tag in the dark. I couldn't train that much, so I was fired up for the cross country season."

While she found success immediately with cross country, track was always her favorite.

"There's a symmetry to it," said Mortimer, who is a year from earning her PhD in accounting. "For a five-minute mile, every quarter has to be under 75 seconds. And track is a little more organized."

After running in 100-degree weather and 40-mile per hour winds as a junior, the weather was perfect her senior season. She ran all three races in the same day and set state meet

records in each one.

"The weather was amazing. I felt so fit, everything," she said. "I'm gushing about it. I haven't thought about this in a while. Everything came together.

"Three state meet records that day -- it all clicked."

Such success had to be fun to watch, right?

"Watching the tapes was better," Bob Mortimer said. "Watching in person was somewhat stressful. We knew how much she wanted to do well. There's a lot of peril in running - every step, you could take a fall.

"So it was a lot of fun to have her succeed, but I liked watching the tape after she would run because I knew the outcome. Sometimes it wasn't easy watching the tape when it got really tight.

"But she's always been highly motivated. That's not my fault. That's who she is."

The intensity naturally increased in college, but she didn't pay any attention to her opponents her freshman season. She just ran.

"Being as determined as she was, she stuck her nose in the competition in the Big 12, the region and nationally," Cole said. "Right off the bat, she was obviously not afraid to compete."



[Amy Mortimer was inducted into the KSHSAA Hall of Fame in 2007.](#)

She got second in the 3K at the indoor nationals and was third in the outdoors 5K. Cole recounts Mortimer's freshman year running the 5k at the Drake Relays.

"There's a huge field of runners, so it's pretty crowded," he said. "They had to restart because someone fell in the first 100 meters. Bob and I laughed, 'it's probably Amy.'

"It was Amy! But then she goes out and wins the race."

By her senior year, Mortimer was running extremely well.

"My senior year was crazy at nationals," Mortimer said. "I ran a huge PR. I had to run a huge PR to get into the finals. Everyone all of a sudden ran out of their minds.

"I ran a school record and I didn't finish as high as I usually did. I would have won the meet most years with that time. It was the start of a time with a lot of strong women distance runners."

Mortimer was disappointed she retired after nearly 10 years as a professional without ever being an Olympian, which had been a longtime goal.

**“It was weird after I was done,” she said. “... I was used to having such a disciplined lifestyle. It was an adjustment. I definitely saw a therapist. Running had been such a big part of my life for a while, and it was like someone close to me had died.**

**“I don’t think I could have made it through that without outside perspective. Everyone was pretty supportive. My husband, he understood because he had done sports in college and he understood how painful that was to stop. But it was nice to have someone completely objective about my life.”**

**Mortimer had support from the start of her running career, including at Riley County High School, where girls sports were celebrated along with the boys.**

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**Mortimer's grandmother played basketball, golf and tennis in Indiana, but her mom only had cheerleading or gymnastics to choose from.**

**“Now that I have a daughter, I think it’s so cool that she’ll have so many opportunities,” Mortimer said. “It made such a difference in my life. I can’t imagine not having had it in my life.”**

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